

Russia Crossed Rubicon: Removal of GPS and Earth Remote Sensing Data Limitations Came About

Comments following the news on GPS and remote sensing limitations removal vary among Russian GIS community: from very cautious to rave. Below is a brief citation of Russian Defense Minister words published on the official website of Russian President.

(http://president.kremlin.ru/appears/2006/12/18/1735_type63378type63381_115536.shtml):

“In addition, I would like to report that the Ministry of Defense has already taken the final decision and published all required documentation regarding removal of several limitations on acquisition and usage of geospatial information. This is the follow-up to what the government economic bloc has been requesting from the military bloc for several years. As of today the positioning accuracy limitations – we had a no more than 30 meters accuracy constraint – has now been removed. As for the linear resolution of the data acquired using Earth remote sensing aerospace equipment, before it was not allowed to display linear resolution of less than two meters. Now it is possible. So what is a benefit of it after all? This already allows us to create open large-scale topographic and navigation maps, this now allows the users to lawfully use consumer hardware of space navigation systems. And finally, it allows citizens and our economy to receive and use data from aerospace equipment regardless of their resolution, which is really important for the cadastre, for various civil purposes including those of car owners.”

Interesting fact is that those limitations “we used to have” were imposed by documentation closed for public, which only the military were aware of to the full extent.

This led to the situation where GIS and cartographic industry was clandestine. The limitations set by the military were absolutely impossible to follow – this meant past century for geo-information science, technologywise. Taking into account the level of Internet development the Russian private business could not have competitive power even on the Russian market, not to mention the international one. Therefore they sold in the past and keep on selling now maps, space imagery and GPS-receivers in Russia. However, in these conditions serious investments in the industry were indeed unlikely to be made.

Now the limitations have been fully removed. The situation where “secret” limitations were imposed by secret documentation and their removal was officially announced on the website of Russian President we deem as revolutionary. In the past specialists bandied information on 30-meter positioning accuracy limitations and on secret 2-meter resolution, but no-one ever saw any official documents. Now it was officially made public: “And as of today the positioning accuracy limitations – we had a no more than 30 meters accuracy constraint – has now been removed. Before it was not allowed to display linear resolution of less than two meters. Now it is possible”.

As for the documents I believe we won’t see them this time either. And someone certainly may say that Defense Minister is a master of his words: “just as he gives the word he may take it back”. However this is not true.

From the legal standpoint the entire situation may be presented in the following way. We pointed out on numerous occasions that secrecy requirements are not defined by the law. In accordance with Article 15 of Constitution of the Russian Federation “any

regulatory documents affecting the rights, freedoms and obligations of a man and a citizen shall not be applied unless they are officially published for public awareness.

Based on Item 10 of The Rules for Preparation of Regulatory Documents of the Federal Executive Authorities and their State Registration (approved by the Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation as of 13 August 1997, # 1009), state registration shall be applicable to the regulatory documents affecting the rights, freedoms and obligations of a man and a citizen, setting legal status of organizations and being of inter-departmental character regardless of their validity term, including documents containing information, which constitutes state secret or confidential information.

Earlier limitations were imposed by documentation, which was not duly published, did not pass state registration, could not limit activities of citizens and legal entities and should not have been taken into account by any of us. However, in Russia legislation and practice sometimes exist in two different galaxies and therefore it was difficult to adjust and believe that there was no secrecy as such. Now this is supported by the direct evidence.

There is no secrecy. This was officially stated by Defense Ministry of the Russian Federation. There are no official documents stating to the contrary.

I extend my congratulations on this fact to us all!

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