



Putin Orders Up a National AI Strategy

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Russian President Vladimir Putin has instructed his government to create a national strategy for research into and development of artificial intelligence, according to state media. The order follows a year of various efforts to better coordinate Russian government, academic, and private-sector work on AI.

Delivered Thursday in a list of instructions approved by Putin following a Jan. 15 meeting of the supervisory board of the Agency for Strategic Initiatives, the order sets a delivery deadline of Feb. 25, TASS reported.

“The Government of the Russian Federation, with the participation of Sberbank of Russia and other interested organizations, should develop approaches to the national strategy for the development of artificial intelligence and submit appropriate proposals,” the instruction says.

This official call for the national AI strategy follows several initiatives launched in 2018 to unify national efforts in the private and public sectors towards the development of artificial intelligence in the country. While the private sector in Russia has achieved success in image and speech recognition, the military has been pursuing its own AI development for a variety of weapons such as aircraft, missiles, electronic warfare, radars and unmanned systems.

Last March, the Russian Ministry of Defense hosted a conference with the Russian Academy of Sciences aimed at gauging the state of domestic AI development. It gathered representatives from the private and public sectors, as well as international participants. Its chief result was a draft roadmap that proposed steps towards national AI development, including creating a National AI Center, improving education, using AI in wargames and establishing AI standards. This “roadmap” was not an official document — rather, it served as a set of guiding principles for participants to better engage on artificial intelligence.

In October, Russian private sector groups announced that they would publish an AI roadmap that “provides for the creation of a list of projects that will help identify and remove barriers to the development of end-to-end technologies, as well as predict the market demand for artificial intelligence in the country,” as state media put it.

A cornerstone of the larger Digital Technologies national program, the roadmap is slated for publication by mid-2019.

Yet the nation lacks a unifying official document approved by the President to spell out where domestic efforts should go and what resources they should be given. Putin’s January 15 directive changes that, though it’s unclear at this point how much the Russian government will draw upon the March 2018 roadmap and other previous efforts. It’s likely that Putin’s national strategy will become the overarching document spelling out public-private cooperation, and a major step by Russia towards domestic AI.

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