68th IFLA Council and General Conference
August 18-24, 2002

The experience of practical activities of national and other professional library associations in Russia

Vladimir N. Zaitsev
President
Russian Library Association
St. Petersburg, Russian Federation

Boris I. Marshak
Managing Director
International Association of Users and Developers of Electronic Libraries and New Information Technologies (Association ELNIT)
Moscow, Russian Federation

Abstract:

The paper describes the structure, the tasks and various activities of the main professional library association in Russia – the Russian Library Association. The paper also deals with the history of creation and activities of International Association of Users and Developers of Electronic Libraries and New Information Technologies (Association ELNIT). It describes the main trends of Association ELNIT professional and humanitarian programs and prospects of their development.

1. Practical experience of National Association in Russia, Russian Library Association (RLA)

At present, there are several social professional associations in Russia, which manage to realise their functions. Russian Library Association is the largest of them.

More than seven years have come from the day of foundation of Russian Library Association. Now, it is the major coordinating centre of the library community of Russia, the main purpose of which is to join efforts, to support the activities of its members for the sake of maintenance and development of librarianship, to enhance the status of Russian libraries and librarian's profession in the society. RLA grows stronger and gains its authority with confidence.

Being based on these tasks, RLA lately develops its activity in the following directions:

1. Enhancing the social prestige of libraries and library profession in the society; the social protection of libraries and library workers;
2. Consolidation of library community;
3. Participation in the creation of standard-legal basis of library activities;
4. Development of professional programs; carrying out professional actions and participation in them;
5. Extension of international cooperation;
6. Organisational activities:
    Creation of professional structure of RLA;
    Attraction of new members;
    Financial activity;
7. Information-publishing activities.

On May 1, 2002, RLA includes 367 collective members (it unites over 25 thousand library workers.) During last year 70 collective members joined RLA, i.e., RLA membership grew by 20%. Among them are the following:

– Library social unions	16
– Federal libraries and institutions	22
– Central region libraries	64
– Children's and junior region libraries	31
– Blind regional libraries	28
– Libraries of the institutions of higher education	58
– Agricultural libraries (from No.339)	16
– Public libraries (Centralised Library Systems and Central Libraries)	53
– Art and music libraries	18
– Medical libraries	15
– Libraries of other specialities	23
– Institutions of higher education of culture and art	6
– Other organisations and institutions	19

At present, RLA activity covers the territory of 76 subjects of Russian Federation.

RLA plays an important role in the realisation of all-Russian library projects. One of the major directions of RLA activity is the work on development and realisation of projects in the most urgent problems of

librarianship; it actively participates in the development of inter-branch federal programs.

For example, the project of "Creation of the National Format of Bibliographical Machine-Readable Registration for Russian Libraries" was realised (RUSMARC). The second important problem was to develop the National Program of Book Collection Preservation Ensuring. Participating in the work of various consortiums, RLA promotes the informational access of Russian libraries to electronic resources. At present, work on creation of the Program for Retrospective National Information is carried out with the assistance of RLA.

The most widespread form of such a work is the organisation (or participation in the organisation) of conferences, seminars, round tables, and organisation of professional competitions. Consolidated plan of RLA work for 2002 totals more than 40 actions.

An important direction of RLA activity is work on the development of new techniques and making library standards. Seminars devoted to the problems of machine-readable cataloguing, making and use of authoritative files, problems of subject cataloguing and so on are carried out yearly.

RLA gives much of its attention to the problems of library and association management. For some years, RLA participates in the work of Round Table for the Management of Library Associations (RTMLA) of IFLA, being a member of the Executive Committee. RLA carried out a number of conferences on that theme. In particular, one can mention All-Russian practical-scientific conference of "Role of Professional Unions in Modern Library Face Formation."

At present, sections and round tables which consolidate RLA members for professional interests work in RLA:

Sections for library type and specialisation:

1. Section of territory and regional universal research/public libraries
2. Section of art libraries
3. Section of invalid servicing libraries
4. Section of libraries of the institutions of higher education
5. Section of medical and hospital libraries
6. Section of public libraries
7. Section of musical libraries
8. Section of children's libraries (Association of Children's Librarians of Russia)
9. Section of national libraries of the subjects of Russian Federation
10. Section of school libraries
11. Section of agricultural libraries
12. Section of rural libraries
13. Section of junior libraries

Sections and Round Tables for library activity directions:

14. Section of library policy and legislation
15. Section of preservation of library collections
16. Section of library history
17. Section of automation, formats and cataloguing
18. Section of library profession, personnel and continuous education

19. Round Table: "Communication and Professional Librarian's Ethics"
20. Section of collection formation and inter-library exchange system
21. Round Table of library society and association management
22. Section "Regional Studies in modern libraries"
23. Section "Electronic Resources and Information-Library Service"
24. Inter-regional committee for cataloguing (IRCC)
25. Section of bibliography
26. Round Table "Youth in Librarianship"
27. Section of international contacts
28. Section of publishing and book spreading activity
29. Round Table of reading
30. Section of research work
31. Section of library management and marketing

Recently, RLA gives much of its attention to the investigation of problems of reading, establishing centres of reading, and development of rural and school libraries.

Promoting the enhancement of librarians' prestige, RLA issued an initiative to develop "Ethical Librarian's Code." Today, the collection devoted to the problem is prepared, the experience of 25 countries of the world being summarised in it.

RLA devotes great care to cooperation with the authorities. RLA representatives constantly take part in the work of the Council of Culture at the President of Russian Federation. This enables RLA to settle the matters connected with library activities on the highest level. From the date of the Council establishing, E.Yu.Genieva and V.N.Zaitsev were its members, and now V.V.Fedorov, Director of the Russian State Library, joined to them, too.

Creative cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, which supported RLA in all of its important initiatives, takes place. RLA representatives work in close contact with the Committee for Culture of the State Duma of Russian Federation. The contacts are especially intensive in the period of the preparation of legislative acts.

RLA attaches much importance to the work for the social protection of libraries and library workers. Work for the social protection is of great importance for libraries and library workers, as we belong to the category of budgetary institutions, being the least paid its part.

For this purpose we use direct contacts and work meetings with the representatives of the personnel of President and Government of Russian Federation, leaders of State Duma of Russian Federation and Deputies, the Council of Federation of Russian Federation, Ministry of Culture of Russian Federation, and others.

Proposals regarding the betterment of wages of library workers, increase of minimum wages rate up to the living wage level, and so on are elaborated and put forward the government bodies.

RLA directs considerable efforts at the development of international cooperation. Last years, Russian libraries got the opportunity to become a part of the world library and information space. Their capabilities of cooperation with foreign libraries on a new information level have broadened. RLA has got into contacts with the library associations of USA, England, France, cooperates with the Round Table for Management of Library Associations of IFLA (RTMLA).

RLA organises the collective participation of Russian libraries in the bookfairs, in particular, International Bookfair in Moscow, International Bookfair in Frankfurt am Main, International Bookfair in Leipzig, and others.

2. Professional and Humanitarian Programs of Association ELNIT

In 1993 the initiative group of users of CDS/ISIS application package (CDS/ISIS is a free software developed and distributed by UNESCO) decided to establish the Association of the package users. It is worth mentioning that at that time CDS/ISIS was widely spread on the territory of the former republics of the Soviet Union, and it was of great popularity among libraries and other organizations engaged in information activities.

The propaganda of the CDS/ISIS package and integration of developers' efforts on creation of different applications on the CDS/ISIS basis were within the domain of Association activities at that stage.

At the same time in Russian National Public Library for Science and Technology the Integrated Library and Information System – IRBIS was actively worked out.

The first version of IRBIS System was finalized by 1995, and by that time it became clear that the Association had already assembled enough members and accumulated enough experience to be treated as an independent organization with its own juridical address and budget. During the 4th Association Conference it was decided to apply for the Association official registration. Thus noncommercial organization "International Non-governmental Association of Users of the CDS-ISIS System" appeared. Institute of Program Systems of Academy of Science of Ukraine and Russian National Public Library for Science and Technology became its founders as official UNESCO representatives distributing the CDS/ISIS package.

Gradually acquiring power and involving into its activities different organizations, mainly libraries, the Association began to exceed the bounds of CDS/ISIS. Therefore in 1996, according to the Association Conference resolution, the Statute was changed and the Association was renamed to "International Association of Users and Developers of CDS/ISIS Systems and New Information Technologies". The same organizations remained the Association founders.

Simultaneously some Association members joined the development of IRBIS System, and the authorities of Association ELNIT and Russian National Public Library for Science and Technology came to the agreement that this system equally belongs to both organizations (later they received the certificate in Russian agency on patents and logotypes "Rospatent"). Due to these circumstances the Association drew the libraries' attention. Questions of automation of traditional library technologies as well as questions of creation and maintenance of electronic libraries became very important for the Association in professional respect, so at the Association Conference in 1999 the resolution on changes of the Statute and renaming the Association to "International Association of Users and Developers of Electronic Libraries and New Information Technologies" was suggested. Russian National Public Library for Science and Technology (Moscow, Russia), V.I. Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine (Kyiv, Ukraine), Republican Library for Science and Technology (Almaty, Kazakhstan) became the founders of this formally new Association that actually had well worked out and time proved traditions and programs.

This is the Association concise history in dates. Lets say a few words about its activities in the course of all these years.

Besides professional activities on propaganda and development of new information technologies, from the very beginning of its existence the Association played one of the main roles in organizing international conferences and workshops. The International Crimea Conference ranks high among these meetings. Next year the Tenth Jubilee International Conference "Crimea-2003" will be held. We expect about 2000 representatives of libraries and other information organizations from 40 countries all over the world coming to this event. Next place by significance and scale occupies International "LIBCOM" Conference ("Information Technologies, Computer Systems and Publications for Libraries") that will be held for the 6th time this year. In addition to these basic Conferences the Association annually conducts two-five workshops in different cities. They are mainly devoted to electronic libraries and automated technologies. The workshops were held in Kyiv, Kharkov, Minsk, Tashkent, Almaty, Arkhangelsk, Kazan', Omsk, London and other cities.

It should be also noted that the Association was the leader in organizing scientific and educational professional tours "Librarianship, Information Systems and Education in the USA" (USA), "On-line information" (UK) and "IFLA" (later on these activities were handed over to International Library Information and Analytical Center).

It is important to point out that since 1996 the Association has been an IFLA member; its representatives work in different federation committees.

One of the most important Association programs is the program of support and development of IRBIS Automated Library System. It does without saying that at the modern stage of library automation it is waste of time and money to work out homemade software as the basis for automated technologies. The market of automated library systems is rather wide. To my mind IRBIS System is undoubtedly among the best systems of library automation. As regards to the "price-quality" index, for IRBIS System it is very high. It is caused by the main principles of the above-mentioned developers: Russian National Public Library for Science and Technology and the Association ELNIT. The principles are as follows 1) the system creation according to the international requirements; 2) the price of the system must be moderate for all libraries. Moreover, for IRBIS installation there exists a great amount of discounts (for Association members, for corporate projects, etc.).

Two other Association programs have two distinctive aspects. First of all, the following programs are the continuation of the program of development of IRBIS System, and secondly, they are educational programs.

One of them is called "IRBIS in the Institutes of Culture". Within the framework of this program the Association provides free installation of the latest version IRBIS System in all higher educational institutions of culture in Russia and Commonwealth of Independent States, which are eager to use IRBIS in their libraries and in educational process as the base package for studying automated library and information technologies. Due to the last circumstance, higher educational institutions can provide training of modern library staff. Besides, in future we are planning to create on the basis of these institutions IRBIS Schools, constantly functioning for training of library staff.

I would like to call the second program "Animate Corner for Snow Leopard" (the word "irbis" means "snow leopard" in Russian). This program is aimed at school libraries. The Association supplies the school libraries with IRBIS System (some versions are free, the other versions are provided with 50% discount), and it has also worked out the complex type program of automation of school libraries of region, district, city, province, etc.

At its earliest convenience the Association tries to provide humanitarian support to organizations, projects and ideas. It means free IRBIS installation, organization of free training courses, frequently including the trip of Association representatives to the site of the training workshop, free tutorial help, etc. Among these activities stands publishing of books at Association expense. For example, recent publication of the book "40 Days Before Execution" written by Alexander Levin, describing the events of Yalta Holokaust. An accidental meeting in train with Vladlen Lyustin, the chairman of the Jewish community in Crimea allowed us to find ourselves at the beginning of its preparation for publishing.

The Association is considered to be an association, when all its members work for one great cause. On the other hand, the Association must take care of its members, so it has special supporting programs. As I have already mentioned, for the Association members there exist special discounts for purchase of IRBIS System. But to avoid the situations, when new members joining the Association have only this aim in mind, a special rule was introduced: discounts are available only for organizations that are Association members for more than 3 months. Furthermore, for the most active members special grants are given for participation in events organized and held by the Association.

One could inquire: who is responsible for the financing the described programs. Association ELNIT is a public non-commercial organization. Therefore all income received in selling of IRBIS System is spent by the Association according to its statute aims. Today this income is not great. After tax paying and paying fees to developers of the system, on the account there remains approximately 15% of the sale price. These resources go on realization of the Association programs.

International Association of Users and Developers of Electronic Libraries and New Information Technologies (Association ELNIT) is open for libraries all over the world. Welcome to ELNIT!