

## Russia Digitizing the Military Commissariat

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OE Watch Commentary

The autumn 2021 conscription campaign begins on 1 October, and for many young Russian males, visiting their local military commissariat (VK) will be their first experience with the military. These commissariats serve as both the focal point for processing new conscripts as well as representing the Ministry of Defense (MoD). Many of these local VKs are poorly staffed and lack a modern digital infrastructure. Earlier this summer, as the first excerpt from the pro-Kremlin source *Izvestiya* points out, Defense Minister Shoigu visited a Moscow VK, where he “expressed dissatisfaction with the organization of work,” bemoaning the fact that the office had “no computers to contact another military registration and enlistment office by e-mail.”

The second excerpt from the mostly independent source *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* describes the MoD response to the above incident and its plans to launch “a large-scale process of reforming the country’s military commissariats.” The article points out that the MoD, “interacting with the regions, will draw up a program for the transfer of VK to digital technologies by the end of the year.” The article

also asserts that a digitized VK will help with managing reservists “necessary for the resupply of troops and in crisis situations.”

The author of the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* article goes on to describe some of the challenges involved in this modernization effort. The most pressing will likely revolve around funding. Since local VKs are partially funded by regional authorities, it is not altogether clear who will pay for this modernization effort, which, “according to the plans of the Ministry of Defense, must be completed in 2023.” The scope of the task is equally daunting. The article points out that “the armed forces include 83 military commissariats of the constituent entities of

the Russian Federation and 1382 military commissariats of municipalities.” Finally, there is a question of VK staffing. As the article

stresses, “all positions of military personnel [within the VK] were eliminated through reform, and today they are staffed by poorly paid ‘elderly women.’” Merely providing new digital support may prove insufficient in modernizing Russia’s military registration and enlistment offices.

“Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu launched a large-scale process of reforming the country’s military commissariats (VK).”

**Source:** “Шойгу раскритиковал московский военкомат во время проверки, (Shoigu criticized the Moscow military registration and enlistment office (VK) during an inspection),” *Izvestiya (pro-Kremlin source)*, 8 June 2021. <https://iz.ru/1175765/2021-06-08/shoigu-otchital-sotrudnikov-voenkomata-v-moskve>

*As it became known to Kommersant, the Ministry of Defense has identified the culprit in “creating the prerequisites” for the triple murder cRussian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu suddenly appeared at the military registration and enlistment office of the Cheryomushkinsky district of Moscow with a check.... As can be seen in the footage, Shoigu enters one of the offices and expresses dissatisfaction with the organization of work in the military registration and enlistment office.*

*“You have a microwave oven, a refrigerator, but there are no computers to contact another military registration and enlistment office by e-mail.... What kind of work is this?” - he said*

**Source:** Vladimir Mukhin, “Бороться с уклонистами поможет цифровизация военкоматов (Digitalization of military registration and enlistment offices will help fight against draft evaders),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta (mostly independent source)*, 22 August 2021. [https://www.ng.ru/armies/2021-08-22/2\\_8231\\_internet.html](https://www.ng.ru/armies/2021-08-22/2_8231_internet.html)

*...Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu launched a large-scale process of reforming the country’s military commissariats (VK). Their modernization will make it possible to more effectively use the data sets of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation “for solving problems of preparing citizens for military service and their conscription, military registration of the population, and work with a mobilization reserve.”*

*The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation reported that the General Staff, interacting with the regions, should draw up a program for the transfer of VK to digital technologies by the end of the year. ... The modernization, according to the plans of the Ministry of Defense, must be completed in 2023....*

*As in the days of the USSR, now VKs are bodies of local military administration, which, together with the heads of regions and municipalities, are responsible for military mobilization and registration and conscription work in the country. According to the General Staff, “the armed forces include 83 military commissariats of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and 1382 military commissariats of municipalities.”*

*...Meanwhile, as retired colonel Anatoly Mosolov, who at one time headed one of the military enlistment offices of the Moscow region, told NG, the problem of the effectiveness of VK must be solved taking into account the fact that their employees are now poorly motivated: “Basically, elderly women are working in VK now. who receive salaries, often low. When officers worked in VK, there was no such problem, but then all positions of military personnel were eliminated through reform. And now the task is to increase the material motivation of the military enlistment offices employees for their work.”*

*...But the question is: will the regions find appropriate financial resources for these purposes? Indeed, according to the General Staff, about 70% of VK institutions are not yet equipped with modern automated systems for mobilization deployment, and 30% of military enlistment offices do not have access to the Internet through the confidential channels of the Ministry of Defense.*