

Sovintel lining up own lines

By **VLADIMIR KITOV**
 The Russia Journal

ST. PETERSBURG — Russian telecommunications provider Sovintel announced it will install its own telephone-exchange equipment in St. Petersburg, expanding the company's operational capacity in the city and throughout north-west Russia.

The new EWSD-type station, purchased from Siemens AG for about \$1 million, is expected to be in operation by the end of the year. With an expected capacity of 10,000 new lines, the telecommunications complex will serve ground-line users as well as cellular telephone users, the company said.

Customers using Sovintel's new lines in St. Petersburg and surrounding regions are allocated the company's 501 access-number prefix, which does not depend on the geographic location of the subscriber and can be assigned to users in other parts of Russia. This, officials said, will simplify the dialing process between distant offices of companies using the system. Callers will also be able to reach the new numbers through the regular 812 prefix.

"The system works like intra-office systems in big companies," Sovintel marketing manager Polina Kondakova said. "In the same way you can dial from one cubicle of your Moscow office to another, you can dial people working in your St. Petersburg office." She added that the use of the 501 code also improves the quality of long-distance connections.

According to the ComNews online agency, prior to installation of its own telephone station, Sovintel was forced to buy some 3,000 lines for its St. Petersburg clients from the city's dominant telephone operator, Petersburg Telephone Network (PTN), for about \$1,000 each. With the new equipment, it will receive 1 million lines for its exclusive use, Alexander Maligaev, deputy director of Sovintel's St. Petersburg office, said.

Maligaev said customers will be charged \$150-\$200 to have a line installed, a procedure that will take between 10 and 30 days, depending on the number of lines purchased.

Sovintel's station will be the third Siemens EWSD station installed in St. Petersburg. The other two were bought by PTN and the Metrocom phone operator in 1995 and 1998, respectively. Two similar stations, purchased by the Leningrad Oblast's major operator, Lensvyaz, have been installed in the cities of Vsevolozhsk and Sosnovy Bor.

According to the newly issued Telecommunication Encyclopedia, over the past 10 years, Siemens EWSD telephone stations were installed in more than 40 Russian regions.

GlobalTel aims for new heights

Firm unveils satellite telephony

By **PATRICK GILL**
 The Russia Journal

GlobalTel announced the arrival of advanced telephony services in Russia with the launch of a mobile satellite service — and confidently asserted that the unsuccessful experience of a previous Russian satellite service provider that went bankrupt, Iridium Evrazia, would not be repeated.

GlobalTel — formed by international satellite consortium Globalstar and Rostelecom, the majority owner and long-distance Russian operator — has spent \$95 million on introducing satellite services to Russia. It says its new system will be useful for consumers, from the emergency services to foreign business people visiting far-flung parts of the country.

The satellite system allows subscribers to use the handset anywhere within the coverage zone,



SUBSCRIBERS' CALLS will be transmitted through a Globalstar satellite.

which spans almost the entire globe. GlobalTel hopes that Russia's vast expanses of remote areas, outside the roaming capacity of cellular networks, will turn to satellite communication as the way forward.

The higher cost of owning a satellite telephone will not dissuade consumers in Russia from using GlobalTel's services, company executives said. They name high-quality speech transmis-

sion, defense against unauthorized access and greater coverage as reasons to switch to satellite communication.

The handsets offered by GlobalTel, produced by Ericsson, Telit and Qualcomm, will be sold for around \$1,000, with calls costing from \$1.19 to \$1.79 a minute within Russia.

Users will be able to switch between satellite and conventional systems as required from their

handsets and will have access to the GSM standard.

Subscribers' calls will travel through a Globalstar satellite and three ground stations — in Moscow, Novosibirsk and Khabarovsk — before entering the Russian telecommunications network. Each of the three Russian gateways cost \$25 million to build.

Company representatives say they aim to have 3,000 subscribers in Russia before the end of this year.

"Our main task at present is to provide services to the widest possible network — so far 60 [of 89] federal constituent entities are within the network," said Gennady Gichkin, general director of GlobalTel. "Later, services will be expanded to fax and voicemail."

He said Globalstar would succeed where Iridium failed due to a different approach based upon a simpler system aimed at a wider target audience. Iridium Evrazia, a former satellite operator in Russia, went bankrupt after its system proved too costly and its business plan failed, he added.

"Iridium built its system around costly, complicated services. Our system, however, is

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Economics battles the environment over Russian fuel

By **VYACHESLAV KUZMIN**
 The Russia Journal

A small but nevertheless controversial batch of Russian weapons-grade plutonium is likely to be flown to Canada this fall to determine its usefulness in powering the North American country's nuclear reactors, Russian officials said.

The plutonium will be flown to an undisclosed military base in Ontario or Quebec, then taken by helicopter to Chalk River Labs, Ontario, 190 km northwest of Ottawa, according to Canadian and Russian officials. An earlier scheme to ship the fuel up the St. Lawrence Seaway was dropped following protests from Canadian environmental groups.

The plutonium, about 32 pounds, will be brought from Russia in the form of mixed oxide (MOX) and not as pure plutonium. In Canada, the MOX will be tested for possible use in Canada's nuclear reactors, according to Yury Babelashvili, director of the All-Russian Research Institute of Inorganic Materials (VNIINM).

The Canadians — and other nations that use similar reactors — are hoping the MOX will be suitable because, while more expensive than the current uranium-based fuel, it allows reactors to run longer before having to be refueled. The initial

tests will last about two years.

"This is the first Russian quantity of MOX that Canada is going to examine at Chalk River as a possible fuel for its nuclear power needs," Babelashvili said.

According to Babelashvili, the MOX will come in a container that satisfies Atomic Energy of Canada Limited (AECL) security requirements. "The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and Canada's AECL inspectors have checked every stage of this operation," said Babelashvili. He added that "foreign experts have praised the work of Russian nuclear specialists."

Several Western nations, including the United States, Germany, France and Japan, have indicated they would help Canada pay for

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PROTESTERS MARCH in Lansing, Michigan, late last year opposing a planned shipment of U.S. nuclear material to Canada. A shipment of Russian weapons-grade plutonium is due to be flown to Canada later this year.

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