

# **Russia And Belarus : New Business Culture**

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# Preface

Many books and articles have been written about business cultures as a subject of scientific research. The Western world is trying to understand, study, and accommodate Eastern cultures, especially after the liberalization of the Chinese market; as well as Islamic culture and traditions, after the discovery of the richest oilfields on the Arabian peninsula. The Eastern world (Japan, Hong-Kong, Singapore, Korea) would like to understand and accommodate the Western world with its values and wider markets. Russia and Belarus have been attracting the attention of business circles since the time of Perestroika at the end of the 1980's.

Unfortunately, the beginning of the new century is darkened by the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and Flight 93 in Pennsylvania. A new spark of interest toward the Islamic world and cultures is caused by all of the mental phenomena of Islamic subcultures. Growing numbers of extremists are all ready to give their own lives to destroy thousands of lives of innocent people.

A culture, especially the part which is connected to art, became a subject of my interest and hobby at the beginning of the 1980's. During those years I worked in Minsk in one of the research institutions that specialized in the field of corporate management. All of my spare time, however, was devoted to reading books on art.

On the 175th anniversary of the birthday of the French impressionist Edouard Manet (1832-1883), the USSR released a beautiful stamp of Manet's self-portrait. I decided to write my first cultural article about Manet for a Soviet philatelist magazine. I spent a number of evenings in the scientific library studying Manet's biography and pictures of his art issued in the USSR. I was delighted when the article was published soon after that.

Many years passed, but I could still remember the feeling that I experienced when describing one of Manet's works, *The Bar at the Folies Bergere*. In 1999, I went to England to the Chartered Institute of Marketing. In my hotel room, I found an advertising booklet on sightseeing in London and discovered, much to my delight, that *The Bar at the Folies Bergere* was nearby in the Courtauld Institute in London. The painting is still displayed at that location. The next day I traveled to London by train, found the gallery, ran to the fourth floor, and there I saw the actual painting live. I had been anticipating that moment for sixteen years! It was a date with my youth.

Years have passed since I wrote the original article and then was able to see the actual painting. I wrote my dissertation on management, wrote two books, dozens of scientific articles, lectured in Minsk at the Belarusian Economic University, and later at the Institute for Privatization and Management. I never thought I would be able to write about culture or art again because culture as a topic of scientific work demands, in my opinion, a language quite different from the strict academic language I use in my professional life. When I started to write this book, I felt much the same way I did when

working on that article in the philatelist magazine. That is why the style of this book is special: scientific and casual at the same time.

This book is about a new and booming business culture in Russia and Belarus. People in these countries were separated from the rest of the world by an "iron curtain" for eighty years. Perestroika broke the "iron curtain", allowing conditions for free exchange of people and ideas. The concept of the "iron curtain" remains important as it continues to influence the behavior and ideology of many.

At the same time, cultural tendencies which accumulated over several centuries of Russian merchantry continue to influence the behavior of Russian and Belarusian businessmen as well. Many researchers have noted the strength of tradition in Russian culture. Russian professor Andreeva notes that the "code of behavior" for merchantry which emphasized a "low value of an individual" greatly influenced the ideology of Russian merchantry. (I. Andreeva, 1999)

This very thought about the low value of an individual encouraged me to research the concept of the value of an individual in different cultures. I believe that the value of an individual in different cultures of various peoples could explain the reasoning behind the tragic events of September 11, 2001 in New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania.

I used to ask myself whether it is possible for the West to understand the new business atmosphere and attitude of Russia and Belarus using existing knowledge. I believe that to some extent it is. Two chapters of this book cover the research of the Russian lifestyle, which was conducted by Geert Hofstede and Richard Lewis.

However, there is something special about the culture of Belarus and Russia, which other countries might not understand. In his book *How to Do Business in Europe* (which was written specifically for Russian readers) V. Hoyer states that Russia is known to the world for its richest contributions of literature, painting, and music. Nevertheless, a character sketch of a Russian individual and Slavs in general, was a caricature based on long-felt beliefs. Slavs were shown as lazy and stupid, preferring to spend their winter laying on a bear rug in front of the fireplace with a pot over fire.

As for Belarusians as a nation, they are not known to the people in West Europe and the United States. Hoyer, who is a European, confesses that even educated people in the West confuse Belarusians (which are often referred to as White Russians) with the so-called Whites who fought against the newly established communist regime during the Civil War of 1918-1920. (V. Hoyer, 1990).

This book is an overview of business cultures in Belarus and Russia, as seen by an insider.

Why Belarus and Russia? Are the cultures of Belarus and Russia similar in many ways? Is it possible to combine these cultures in one research? I believe it is. Belarusian and Russian people have been coexisting for more than 300 years. Belarus was a part of the

Russian Empire for several centuries prior to becoming a part of the Soviet Union. The majority of Belarusian people speak the Russian language. School children study Russian literature and history. Belarusians know more of Russian history than of their own Belarusian history. Tens of thousands of Belarusians have relatives in Russia, and many Belarusian people consider themselves ethnic Russians.

It is common knowledge that beginning in 1991, Russia and Belarus became independent states. However, both countries have open borders. More than 70 percent of Belarusian exports go to Russia, while Russian goods enter Belarus. Russian goods can be bought in Belarus and Belarusian goods are available in Russia. In my mind, Belarusian businessmen are half Russian because the majority of them work in the Russian market.

There are indeed differences in the business cultures of Belarus and Russia, and I discuss those in my book. Business in Moscow and Petersburg differs from one in Belarus, but it also differs from Russian business as a whole.

This book is about the attitudes of the people who are engaged in business in Belarus and Russia. What determines their behavior? How do they see ways to move toward success? What factors determine their success, and what can their partners, including those from other countries, can expect of them? These are some of the questions I discuss in my book.

I am truly grateful to my colleagues from Central Connecticut State University-Patricia Sanders, George Eisen, Anita Jackson, George Claffey, Margaret Mitchell and Mary Roxas for their support and kind attitude. It was my work with them that encouraged me to write this book.

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