

Eurofacts: enhancing the Russian – Finnish dialogue

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Eurofacts Oy is a family owned consultancy company with 20 years of working experience. Mainly based in Helsinki, Finland the company is also represented in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Eurofacts offers expertise across many areas of business and industry. The main focus of the company's activity is the communications and partnerships between Russian and Finish companies. The core of the assignments has been much focused on the big companies and corporations but nowadays the role of SME's is compelling. To establish the successful international business any company needs the proper network and knowledge – Eurofacts offers the decisive services to improve the dialogue.

Russian working culture is a very good example of how the relationships matter. In fact, there won't be anything done if not the ties of mutually beneficial dialogue. Finland might seem very different in this sense, but the reality is all the same. Moreover, smaller size of the country makes the reciprocity much easier. However, for the Finnish the question about communications with Russia has always been seen as a dark forest [11, 14]. How to create the long lasting business cooperation between close neighbors?

Eurofacts Oy has contributed a couple of decades for being a guide in the communicational matters between Russia and Finland. Established in 1989, the company has developed to the level of respectful recognition on both sides of the border. In Finland, the company represents the international communications network of Fleishman-Hillard [1]. In addition to that, an official representative is working in Moscow and a fully owned subsidiary OOO Evrofakty has been working with public affairs and communications in St. Petersburg since 1993. Interestingly, the name "Eurofacts" has nothing to do with the euro currency. Rather, it stands for the Europe as the geographical part of the world – from the Atlantic to Urals.

Eurofacts is a family owned company. Generally speaking, it acts as consultant and expert in various situations of communication and public influence to the top management of companies, authorities and organizations. The actual services range from strategic planning of interaction, to solving practical communication related issues, exercising public influence and lobbying. All the projects start through analyses of the operational environment. Well-planned and implemented interaction provides the best support to any strategic objectives of the client organization. Eurofacts acts as an outside consultant or expert, or as the actual realizer of communications. The company either works in close cooperation with the client's own organization, or by independently implementing the assignments that are given.

Eurofacts started its Russian operations in St. Petersburg in 1991. In 1996, according the initiative of Vice-Governor of St. Petersburg, V. Putin Advisory Group of Finland (GFS) of the Government of St. Petersburg was established. The coordination of GFS was entrusted to Eurofacts [2]. An overall turnover of the companies in the GFS is more than 75 billion euros. These companies are long-term players who invest in Russia. Currently GFS is the official adviser to the government in St. Petersburg, and follows the process of decision-making in Russia [10, 12-13].

The services provided by Eurofacts help organizations in evaluating their operating environment and to anticipate the changes happening in it. The aim is to help the clients succeed by better understanding Russian society, the business culture and the operating environment. Minimizing political risks means above all understanding the local political environment and maintaining the right contacts [6-9; 15-17].

From the current work it is worth mentioning some of the activities and projects:

- The coordination of the actions of the Group of Finnish Advisors (GFS). Founded in the 1997 by the initiative of V. Putin, GFS members have invested over 4 billion euros into different projects of St. Petersburg [2]. GFS include a number of big companies, such as Arctech Oy, VR group, Cargotec Oyj, Kone Oyj, STX Finland Oy, etc. Among released projects, for instance, are: production of Hlebnyi Dom; gasoline stations services of Neste Oil; electricity reform with Fortum; Russian-Finnish shipbuilding including STX Finland and OSK Russia; Sonera GSM/Megafon coverage; launching the Allegro train

between St. Petersburg and Helsinki with VR Group; construction of Sokos hotels, "Ledoviy Dvoretz", apartments; renovations and installation of KONE elevators in old housing sector.

Nowadays the GFS group understands the importance of the medium and small companies (SME) in the development of the economy in both Russia and Finland. Therefore, a number of SME companies have joined the group since 2010.

- Forming of Finnish-Russian maritime cluster. Arctic areas industries and the construction of the new shipyard in St. Petersburg are most important projects on the table these days. Eurofacts acts as a facilitator to activate the communications between STX Finland and OSK Russia [18].
- Commitments to the projects of Baltic Sea Action Group (BSAG). Baltic Sea is one of the most polluted in the world. BSAG foundation was established in 2008 to raise the awareness of the government and the society towards the common aim of saving the Baltic Sea. During the Baltic Sea Action Summit in 2010 more than five hundred participants took part – among them the representatives of corporations and the leaders of the countries from Baltic region [3]. BSAG is a non-commercial organization. The main activity is to authorize a number of commitments as in the governmental level and in corporate sector. BSAG distributes grants for scientific work, carries out informational activities and international relations, combines the best practices for practical purposes [4]. Eurofacts works together with BSAG on various issues, for instance, the organization of the next summit that will take place in St. Petersburg in 2013.
- Cooperation with the OPORA Russia. As mentioned above, the SME companies play the significant role in the development of economy. In 2012 GFS started the dialogue with Russian Non-Governmental Organization for Small and Medium Entrepreneurship "OPORA". The common projects and activities are directed to the collaboration and alliances between Russian and Finnish SME companies [19].
- Coordination of the project "Development Corridor" Stockholm - Turku - Helsinki - St. Petersburg. The project offers a partnership between municipalities, cities, regions and businesses. The main objective of the project is the creation of a competitive market around the Baltic Sea and strengthening the joint promotion of the interests of the region. During 2012 it is planned to establish a clear identity for the project and determine the role of the various participants.

Summing up, Eurofacts offers expertise across many areas of business and industry. Represented in St. Petersburg and Moscow the company is monitoring the cooperation of the Finnish major companies that work in Russia and vice versa [10]. The core of the assignments has been much focused on the big companies and corporations but nowadays the role of SME's is really compelling. To be internationally successful any company needs to establish the long-lasting partnerships and Eurofacts offers the innovative and efficient services to enhance this dialogue.

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