

<http://www.marketprofile.ru>

119049 Russia, Moscow, Kaluzhskaya square 1
+7 495 826 72 00

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Overview of Public Holidays Celebrated in Russia

2017

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Background of Current Public Holidays Celebrated in Russia



Background of Current Public Holidays Celebrated in Russia (1/2)

- Key factors which have impact on holidays currently celebrated in Russia are based on the history of the Russian state and are as follows:
 - **A few decades of the Soviet state (since 1917 and up to 1991)**
 - One of the elements of the Soviet state policy was suppression of Orthodox Christianity and attempts to switch people's attention from religious traditions and celebrations to secular ones
 - E.g. Orthodox Christian holidays (like Christmas, Easter) were not official days off during Soviet times, their celebration was not encouraged and new holidays (like 8th of March, 1st of May) were established
 - **Disintegration of the Soviet Union, collapse of the Soviet state in 1991 which resulted in rebirth of Orthodox Christianity**
 - As a result, traditions of celebrating religious holidays (Orthodox Christian and Muslim) have been revived
 - Yet, only Orthodox Christmas (January 7th) is a religious holiday which is an official day off all over Russia, and there are no Easter vacations in Russia

Background of Current Public Holidays Celebrated in Russia (2/2)

- Key factors which have impact on holidays currently celebrated in Russia are based on the history of the Russian state and are as follows:
 - **Difference in calendars used by Roman Catholic Church and Orthodox Christian Church (Russia, Georgia, Serbia and people professing Orthodox Christianity in different countries):**
 - In 1572 Pope Gregory XIII established Gregorian calendar (switching from Julian calendar), so citizens of the Western countries had to switch to Gregorian calendar
 - Gregorian calendar was accepted in Russia in 1918 (by the Soviet state) but Orthodox Church has been always using and still uses Julian calendar
 - There is 14 days difference in the calendars, so Roman Catholic Christmas is celebrated on December 25th and Orthodox Christmas is celebrated on January 7th

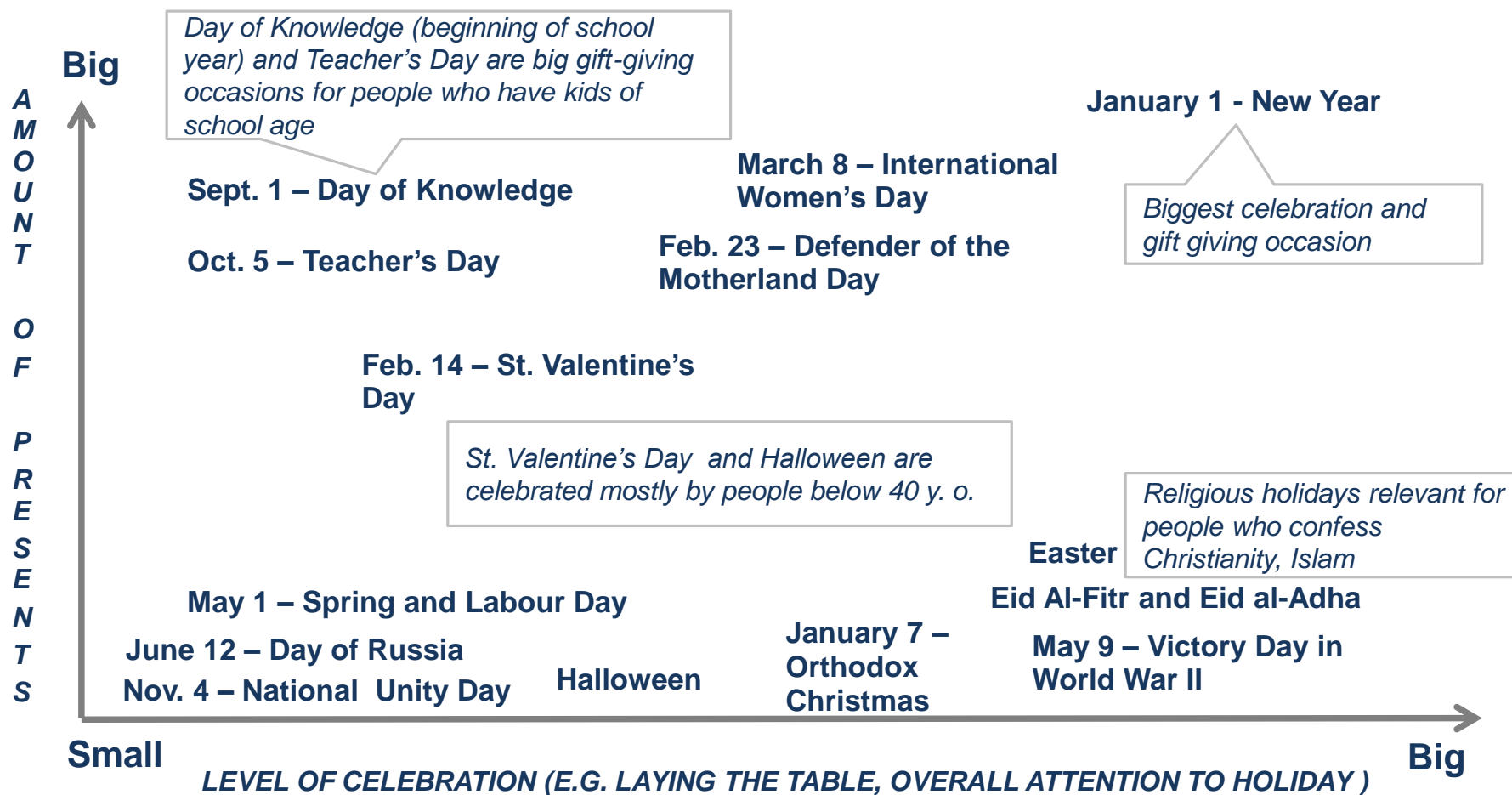
Overall, currently most popular public holidays which are official days off all over Russia are heritage of the 70 years of Soviet history

At the same time there are other occasions which are not official days off but are relevant for specific segments of people in terms of celebration (E.g. Orthodox Christian Easter for Orthodox Christians or Eid al-Fitr (Uraza-Bayram) for Muslims) or gift-giving (E.g. 1st of September, Teacher's Day – October 5 – for people who have kids)

General Overview of Holidays Celebration



General Overview of Holidays Celebration (1/2)



General Overview of Holidays Celebration (2/2)

| | Public holidays - official days off | Other holidays – not official days off but celebration and gift giving occasions |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Religious | January 7 – Orthodox Christmas | Orthodox Christian Easter Eid al-Fitr (Uraza-Bayram) and Eid al-Adha (Kurban-Bayram) – Muslim holidays – days off in certain regions of Russia with the majority of Muslim population (E.g. Bashkortostan, Chechnya etc.) |
| Not religious | January 1 – New Year February 23 – Defender of the Motherland Day March 8 – International Women’s Day May 1 - Spring and Labour Day May 9 – Victory Day in World War II June 12 – Day of Russia November 4 – National Unity Day | February 14 - St. Valentine’s Day <i>(although the background of the holiday has certain religious connotation, it is not perceived as a religious holiday)</i> September 1 – Day of Knowledge (beginning of school year) October 5 – Teacher’s Day Halloween <i>(although the background of the holiday has certain religious connotation, it is not perceived as a religious holiday)</i> |

There are 2 periods during the year when people can enjoy long public holidays and can make them even longer if they take additional days off:

- January 1- 9/10 (which part of people can prolong up to January 14/15)
- May 1-10: although official days off are only May 1 and 9, part of people can take additional days off if work permits to enjoy longer vacation

Public Holidays – Official Days OFF



January 1 – New Year (1/2)

- In the 19th century January 1 was a day off (there was a relevant law of 1897)
- In the 20th century the status of January 1 as a day off changed a few times until it was finalized as an official day off in 1947
- Currently official New Year holidays in Russia are January 1 – 8
- **Currently New Year is the most important family celebration for the majority of population in Russia** (which is the result of Soviet times policy which had distracted attention from Christmas to New Year)
- **Typical celebration routines:**
 - Decorating the New Year tree and home overall
 - Getting together with the family, close friends on the night of December 31st - January 01
 - Laying the table (with dishes preferred by the family members), staying awake till midnight and later (up to 1, 2, 3 a.m. and longer – depending on individual preferences)
 - Visiting relatives, friends, hosting guests during New Year holidays – E.g. January 1, 2, 3 etc.
 - Champagne is the most popular drink

January 1 – New Year (2/2)

| For whom presents are prepared | Types of presents |
|---|--|
| Family members (husband, wife, kids, parents of husband, wife) | Depending on family traditions and financial possibilities family members can get more and less expensive presents (E.g. mobile phone, perfume, durables, electric appliances etc.) |
| Other relatives (sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles etc.) | Depending on family traditions, individual needs and financial possibilities more expensive and less expensive gifts can be prepared for other family members (E.g. toys for kids like nephews, chocolates) |
| Friends | Types of presents can be different. Usually not very expensive presents (E.g. chocolates, symbols of the coming year) are prepared for friends. However a few close friends can get more expensive presents too |
| Colleagues | Usually small presents are prepared for colleagues (E.g. chocolates, symbols of the coming year) Boss usually also gets presents – especially if the company is not very big. A few employees can prepare a joint present for the boss |
| Teachers, sport coaches of kids etc. | It is typical for most Russian families to give New Year presents to school teachers and sport/ music/ dancing coaches of kids The number of teachers/ coaches who get presents depend on individual relationship with them Chocolates, champagne, wine are typical presents |

January 7 – Orthodox Christmas

- After reinstatement of Orthodox Christianity in Russia January 7 – Orthodox Christmas – became an official public holiday in Russia in 1991
- Today its celebration in Russia depends on family confession, traditions and habits:
 - For the part of population that professes Orthodox Christianity and follows religious rituals Christmas is one of the most important holidays
 - For another part of the population Christmas is one more occasion during long (almost 10 days) New Year public holidays to host guests or visit relatives and friends
- Typical celebration routines:
 - Attending services in the church – including night service (which starts around midnight) – part of the population who are Orthodox Christians and follow religious rituals
 - Getting together with the family, friends on Jan. 7 – to have lunch, dinner together: people can host guests or see one's relatives, friends at their place
- Presents:
 - Usually small presents are given to kids (E.g. chocolates, books etc.)
 - Also if people visit their friends, relatives to celebrate Christmas together they can bring presents for the family hosting the celebration (E.g. chocolates, cake, wine etc.)

February 23 – Defender of the Motherland Day (1/2)

- The Day of the Defender of the Motherland dates back to 1919 when it was announced as Red Army Day – in honor of the victory of Red Army over German troops near Pskov and Narva
- Later it was renamed a few times: it became the Day of Soviet Army and Navy and finally it became the Day of the Defender of the Motherland
- February 23 has been public holiday since 2002
- **Although formally it is a holiday of military men, it is typical to congratulate all males on this day**
- **Typical celebration routines:**
 - Usually at work females congratulate their male colleagues and/ or boss by preparing small presents for them and/ or by laying the table on the eve of the holiday
 - Getting together with relatives, friends to celebrate the holiday depends on family history, traditions and preferences

February 23 – Defender of the Motherland Day (2/2)

| For whom presents are prepared | Types of presents |
|---|--|
| Family members (husband/ male partner, son, father, father-in-law) | Big presents are usually prepared for one's husband/ male partner, son, father. Type of present depends on individual preferences and financial possibilities: E.g. perfume, shirt, sweater etc. |
| Other relatives (brother, nephew, uncle etc.) | Depending on family traditions and financial possibilities bigger, smaller or no presents can be given to other relatives |
| Male friends | Depending on individual traditions and habits small presents or no presents can be given to male friends |
| Colleagues | Depending on decision of the female team at work small presents can be given to male colleagues In certain companies the company also prepares presents to all male employees |
| Male teachers, sport coaches of kids etc. | It is typical to congratulate male teachers, coaches on February 23 (E.g. boxes of chocolates, tea, coffee etc.) |

March 8 – International Women's Day (1/2)

- It became an official public holiday in Russia in 1966
- Although originally it was meant as a holiday emphasizing equal rights of working females and emancipation, over time it turned into a day praising femininity, beauty and spring
- Today it is typical to congratulate all females on March 8 – relatives, friends, colleagues, teachers etc.
- **Typical celebration routines:**
 - Usually at work males congratulate their female colleagues and/ or boss by preparing small presents for them and/ or by laying the table on the eve of the holiday
 - Getting together with relatives, friends to celebrate the holiday depends on family traditions and preferences

March 8 – International Women’s Day (2/2)

| For whom presents are prepared | Types of presents |
|---|---|
| Family members (wife/ female partner, daughter, mother, mother-in-law) | Big presents are usually prepared for one’s wife/ female partner, daughter, mother. Type of present depends on individual preferences and financial possibilities: E.g. perfume, jewelry and/ or flowers etc. |
| Other relatives (sister, niece, aunt etc.) | Depending on family traditions and financial possibilities bigger, smaller or no presents can be given to other relatives |
| Female friends | Depending on individual traditions and habits small presents or no presents can be given to female friends Preparing small for female friends is more typical for people above 35 y. o. |
| Colleagues | Depending on decision of the male team at work small presents can be given to female colleagues In many companies the company also prepares presents to all female employees |
| Female teachers, sport coaches of kids etc. | It is typical to congratulate female teachers, coaches on March 8 (E.g. boxes of chocolates, flowers) |

May 1 – Spring and Labour Day

- During Soviet period May 1 was celebrated as the Day of International Solidarity of Working People
 - At the time it was typical to hold demonstrations/ processions of working people in Moscow and big cities of Russia
 - These demonstrations were targeted at showing unity of working people, satisfaction with their current position and not at protesting against something
- In 1992 it was renamed and became Spring and Labour Day and still remained a public holiday
- **Typical celebration routines:**
 - Today different political parties can organize processions, actions, rallies to express their political views
 - For the majority of people today May 1 is a day off which they spend the way they like – E.g. working at their datcha (summer cottage with a garden in the country) and/ or enjoying barbeques with their family, friends or traveling within Russia or abroad
- **Presents:**
 - It is not typical to give any special presents on this day
 - If people see relatives/ friends on this day to have lunch/ dinner together they can bring chocolates, cakes, alcohol with them

May 9 – Victory Day in World War II (1/2)

- Overall May 9 – Victory Day in World War II – has been celebrated in Russia since 1945 – end of World War II
- But the first big official celebration of the holiday happened only in 1965. It was the same year (1965) when May 9 was made official day off
- **Typical celebration routines:**
 - Military parades, open air concerts are conducted on May 9 in Moscow and in big cities of Russia
 - Depending on family traditions and habits people can watch parades, visit open air concerts together with kids to take part in the celebrations, congratulate veterans of World War II, commemorate those who died in World War II by laying flowers to monuments dedicated to soldiers of World War II
 - Since 2010 (2012) “Immortal Regiment” procession has been conducted in Russia, since 2015 the action has become really big, spread abroad and is supported by many people:
 - Anyone can take part in the action by processing along central streets of the city and carrying photos of their relatives who fought in World War II/ contributed to the Victory (E.g. in 2015 over 500 000 people took part in the action in Moscow)
 - Family celebration of the holiday (E.g. having lunch, dinner together) depends on family traditions. Usually such celebrations are always organized in families who have relatives who are veterans of World War II

May 9 – Victory Day in World War II (2/2)

- **Presents:**

- Usually presents are not prepared/ given
- Relatives of veterans of World War II can prepare presents for them – depending on individual preferences and financial possibilities
- If people are visiting friends/ relatives on May 9 to have lunch, dinner together they can bring chocolates, cake, alcohol with them
- In parks and other public places there can be arranged meetings with veterans, small gifts and flowers (especially carnation) are given to them

June 12 – Day of Russia

- The history of the holiday dates back to 1990 when Russia was declared an independent state as a result of the process of USSR disintegration
- On June 12, 1991 the first elections of the President of Russia were conducted
- Since 1994 June 12 has been public holiday
- In 2002 it got the official name of the Day of Russia

- **Typical celebration routines:**
 - Concerts, entertainment programs are organized by the authorities of different cities (E.g. in the parks, on central streets)
 - People visit the concerts, entertainment events or just enjoy a day off with their families, friends

- **Presents:**
 - Presents are not prepared/ given

November 4 – National Unity Day

- Appearance of the holiday of November 4 – National Unity Day is based on the following factors:
 - History of celebration of November 7 – Day of 1917 Revolution after which Soviet State was established
 - Need to replace November 7 with a different holiday which also has historic background and more positive connotations – emphasizing unity of the nation and not its split
- As a result, in the 1990s the holiday of November 7 was renamed a few times until in 2005 it stopped to be public holiday, and November 4 was declared an official day off and named National Unity Day
 - The history of celebrating of November 4 dates back to 1612 when Moscow was released from Polish invaders who wanted to seize power over Russia: people of different strata had united to fight with Polish invaders and succeeded to defeat them
- **Typical celebration routines:**
 - Concerts, entertainment programs are organized by the authorities of different cities (E.g. in the parks, on central streets)
 - People visit the concerts, entertainment events or just enjoy a day off with their families, friends
- **Presents:**
 - Presents are not prepared/ given

Other Holidays – not Official Days Off but Celebration and Gift Giving Occasions



February 14 – St. Valentine's Day

- Communication of the holiday started in the 1990s
- Today the holiday is celebrated by part of people – mostly below 40 y. o. and in big cities
- Perception of the holiday is controversial: while younger generation sees it as a fun occasion and a romantic tradition, older generation (above 40 y. o.) sees it as an artificial holiday
- **Typical celebration routines:**
 - Preparing presents for one's partner
 - Having romantic dinner together (at home or at a café/ restaurant)
- **Presents:**
 - Can be a bigger or smaller present – depending on individual preferences, habits and financial possibilities

July 8 is the day of Orthodox Christian saints – St. knight Peter and his wife St. Fevronia of Murom – who are considered to be the epitome of spousal love and devotion. Since 2008 July 8 has officially become the Day of Family, Love and Faithfulness. However, it is not a day off and it is not widely celebrated yet.

Orthodox Christian Easter*

- Despite suppression of Orthodox Christianity during Soviet period, Easter was celebrated by many people even during Soviet times:
 - Instead of going to the church people went to the cemetery on the day of Easter to commemorate their dead relatives
- Today Easter is celebrated by many Orthodox Christians in Russia
- **Typical celebration routines:**
 - Part of Orthodox Christians who follow religious rituals attend services in the church (E.g. night service)
 - All Orthodox Christians – have lunch, dinner together with the family members, relatives, close friends
 - Visiting cemetery on Easter day is still quite wide-spread due to the tradition which appeared during Soviet times when many churches were closed and attending services was not encouraged
- **Presents:**
 - Usually small presents are given to kids (E.g. chocolates, books), also small presents can be prepared for relatives, close friends (E.g. chocolates, icons) – depending on individual habits

** Orthodox Christian and Catholic Christian Churches use different ways of determining Easter Day. That is why the dates of Catholic Christian Easter and Orthodox Christian Easter seldom coincide. Usually the date of Orthodox Easter is a few weeks after Catholic Easter*

Eid al-Fitr (Uraza-Bayram) and Eid al-Adha (Kurban-Bayram) (1/2)

- Two biggest Muslim holidays of the year: Eid al-Adha is celebrated 70 days after Eid al-Fitr
- Eid al-Fitr (Uraza-Baiyam) is dedicated to the end of the holy Ramadan month and Eid al-Adha (Kurban-Bayram) is the Day of the Sacrifice
- Dates vary every year depending on the Muslim calendar, during the next three years Uraza-Bayram is celebrated in June and Kurban-Bayram in August
- They are public holidays (day off or a few days off) in certain regions of Russia where the majority of the population is Muslim (E.g. Bashkortastan, Chechnya, Tatarstan etc.); also these holidays are widely celebrated by Muslim population from other countries living in Russia (e.g. Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan)
- **Typical celebration routines:**
 - Laying an abundant table and inviting family and friends to celebrate holiday together, enjoy the food
 - Giving out for charity – food, money and necessary items (e.g. clothes)

Eid al-Fitr (Uraza-Bayram) and Eid al-Adha (Kurban-Bayram) (2/2)

- **Presents:**

- Giving presents depends on individual traditions and habits. Typical presents can include household items for the family, sweets and toys for kids etc.
- Religious paraphernalia (e.g. prayer beads) or souvenirs with religious topics (e.g. pictures of famous mosques) are very popular
- In regions with dominant Muslim population national brands (e.g. chocolate manufacturers) offer special packages of their common products with special decorations

September 1 – Day of Knowledge (Beginning of School Year)

- Celebration of the Knowledge Day is typical mostly for school students and teachers and is much less spread among college/university students and teachers
- It was announced as a national holiday in 1984, although September 1 had been set as the official start of the school year in 1935
- **Typical celebration routines:**
 - In schools: students parades take place, special lessons (e.g. “Lesson of Peace”) are held, schools can be visited by administrative authorities who greet students or give small lectures
 - In colleges/universities: first year students are greeted by the dean and introduced to the college/university, students of the second and later years most often have regular studies
 - College/university students may have informal celebration in accordance with traditions of their groups or establishments
- **Presents:**
 - For school teachers – from students and their parents: flowers, chocolate boxes and/ or other presents
 - For school students – from their parents: school accessories, toys or other things depending on the family traditions and child’s preferences. Overall these accessories are bought anyway since they are needed for studies
 - College/university students may get a small present from their parents according to their preferences or no present at all – the majority

October 5 – Teacher's Day

- From 1965 to 1993 Teachers's Day in Russia was celebrated on the first Sunday in October
- Since 1994 it has a fixed date of October 5 together with The International Teacher's Day
- **Typical celebration routines:**
 - Schools have short working days – one or two last classes are cancelled
 - Performances and concerts can take place
 - To acknowledge teachers' work Ministry of Education organizes annual online-marathon: to post a picture of one's favourite teacher with a special hashtag (#любимыйучитель - #favouriteteacher) and to explain in a few sentences what they are respected for. All entries are featured on the Ministry's official webpage
- **Presents:**
 - For teachers: flowers and sweets, writing implements, organizers, souvenirs and memorabilia

Halloween

- Most popular among young people (but not kids: 14-35 y. o.) and in big cities
- Communication of the holiday started in the 1990s
- Ever since the perception of the holiday is very controversial:
 - Younger generation uses Halloween as an opportunity to have fun and go out
 - Older and more conservative people see Halloween as an artificial holiday
 - Orthodox Christian Church strongly discourages Halloween celebration as it is not a real religious holiday and its celebration rituals contradict Christianity. Part of the population who professes Orthodox Christianity and takes it seriously does not celebrate the holiday at all.
- **Typical celebration routines:**
 - Going out to clubs and concerts for Halloween parties
 - Hosting parties at home for friends
 - Decorating home with Halloween-themed items (cobwebs, carved pumpkins)
 - Cooking special “spooky”-looking food
 - NB: trick-or-treating is not practiced in Russia
- **Presents:**
 - If friends are invited over to a home party, they may exchange Halloween-themed gifts, alcohol and/or food

Our Contacts

119049 Moscow, Kaluzhskaya square, 1

Tel.: +7 495 926 72 00

- Marina Ponedelkova

marina.ponedelkova@marketprofile.ru

- Ekaterina Senina

katya.senina@marketprofile.ru

- Elena Radchenko

elena.radchenko@marketprofile.ru



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