



# Fare network briefing: Racism, xenophobia, homophobia in football in Russia

## Introduction

This paper is a contribution to increasing understanding within the football industry – administrators, supporters, policy makers, commercial sponsors and others – of the social, political and football issues in relation to racism, homophobia and xenophobia in football in Russia.

There are many reasons why Russia makes news – it's rich social and cultural history, challenge to the dominance of western political powers, a fascination with the growing presence of its citizens living abroad – but news from the country is often presented through a series of stereotypes, and with such broad sweeps, important detail is ignored or overlooked.

The impact of global mega events on a society may be a debatable but through the spotlight provided they offer an opportunity to focus attention and analysis on social developments. Russia was awarded the 2018 FIFA World Cup Finals in December 2010 and with just over three years to go it's hosting will become the focus of global attention.

Our analysis has been produced by looking at developments in both Russian football and society, it should be read in conjunction with a monitoring report on incidents in Russia published in conjunction with the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis.

## The internal diversity of Russia

Visitors to Russia under the Soviet era often recall how foreigners and visible ethnic minorities were revered, they were seen as representatives of partners in the struggle against western colonialism and dominance. That era has passed and many of the same people see Russia as a less tolerant place, one that has a growing reputation for hostility to outsiders. The reality lies somewhere in between. It is not often appreciated that alongside the large multi-ethnic cities that reflect its geo-global positioning, the Russian Federation has high levels of internal ethnic diversity.

Russia is defined in its constitution as a multinational state, this administrative composition means that around 20 per cent of its population, or more than 30 million people, can be defined as being from an ethnic minority background<sup>1</sup>. These citizens of the Federation, constitute a majority in their own republics – such as Tatarstan, Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia – but are a minority of the overall population.

So they do not easily fit the western definition of ethnic minority but have a more complex classification, only referring to themselves as minorities when outside of their own region. Tatars form the largest group in Russia under this description of ethnic minority.

Whilst these ethnic groups do not face significant levels of discrimination in their own republics they are frequently targets of xenophobic attacks in other regions of Russia. These attacks are most common in large cities, in particular the Moscow and St. Petersburg regions where because of uneven economic development and other factors, there are high levels of internal migration.

In addition to those mentioned above there are also people from the former Soviet republics living in Russia, such as Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Georgians or Ukrainians, who also can be classified as having ethnic and national minority status. Due to the long period of residence in Russia they are in the majority well integrated and do not face

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Statistics Service, 2010: Russian Census of 2010 results (Всероссийская перепись населения 2010, Федеральная служба государственной статистики).

# Fare network briefing:

## Racism, xenophobia, homophobia in football in Russia



significant levels of discrimination in most spheres of social life. However, they are often the targets of xenophobic abuse and hate crimes when Russia is involved in increased tensions and military conflicts in their home region.

Along with those from Central Asia and the North Caucasus those most vulnerable to exclusion and hate crimes are new visible migrants, including peoples from Africa and south Asia. It is also worth noting that as in the rest of Europe, the Roma population face centuries old levels of social exclusion and marginalisation and stereotypes about the Jewish community are also commonplace in Russia and often reproduced in the media and by public figures.

### The situation of the LGBT community

The LGBT community in Russia is facing both legal exclusion and discrimination, and periodic outbursts of homophobic violence. The Russian federal law 'for the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating for a Denial of Traditional Family Values', commonly referred to as the 'LGBT propaganda law' prohibits distribution of information 'raising the interest of non-traditional sexual relationships' to minors.

Despite the reference to protecting minors, the law effectively sets a framework for the prosecution of any public actions of the LGBT community. In practice, all public events organised by the LGBT community face obstacles from law enforcement bodies, an example of this in the sporting field being the Russian Open Games in 2014 where events were cancelled due to pressure on organisers by the police.

These legal obstacles complement rising intolerance and homophobia amongst the general population. Recent opinion polls in Russia show that 67% of the population welcomed the adoption of the 'LGBT propaganda law' with another 60% afraid their children could be victims of 'homosexual propaganda'. Even more alarming is that 21% of respondents stated that gay people should be 'isolated' (15%) or 'physically exterminated' (5%).<sup>2</sup>

Organisations such as Human Rights Watch point to the increased number of physical attacks and harassment of LGBT people following the launch of the state-led campaign against 'homosexual propaganda'.<sup>3</sup> The issue of homophobia has become closely tied to political narrative of the Russian leadership where 'traditional values' are set in opposition with 'western values' which are considered a sign of 'moral decay'. Thus homophobia has become entrenched within mainstream political narratives making it difficult to address simply as a problem of ignorance or a lack of education.

### Racial hate crimes in Russia

According to a preliminary summary report<sup>4</sup> on hate crimes for 2014 from the SOVA Information Analytical Center, 19 people were murdered and 109 seriously injured after racial hate crimes in Russia.

Moscow and St. Petersburg account for half of the cases. The main victims of far-right violence were natives of Central Asia (10 dead, 17 wounded), the Caucasus (3 and 13), and unidentified people of 'non-Slavic appearance' (3 and 17). Also among the victims of physical attacks that lead to serious injuries were black people (10 wounded), representatives of religious groups (15), members of youth and informal groups (12), the LGBT community (7), Roma (3), Jewish (1).

The same patterns of discriminatory abuse are reflected in Russian football. According to a monitoring report commissioned by the Fare network, 99 incidents of discrimination were registered including displays of neo-Nazi

2 Levada Center, 'Fear of the Other. The Problem of homophobia in Russia', 2013

3 Human Rights Watch, 'Russia: Impunity for Anti-LGBT violence', 2014

4 SOVA Information-Analytical Centre, 2014: Racism and xenophobia in 2014, preliminary summary.

## Fare network briefing: Racism, xenophobia, homophobia in football in Russia

symbols (77 cases), anti-Caucasus displays (22) and anti-black discriminatory abuse (5). Available data for the first half of 2014/15 season suggests that incidents targeting black players are on the rise.

The media representation and public opinion on racism and discrimination in Russian football, although generally condemning such behaviour, often features victim blaming and suggestions that the problem is exaggerated by the international media as a way of damaging the image of Russian football and the state.

There is little public discourse in Russia of the social aspects and role of football. It is rarely covered by the Russian media and there are few social responsibility initiatives by clubs or the Russian Football Union. With dropping attendance at matches, organised and radical far-right groups have been gaining more influence and prominence among supporters in recent years.

### The role of the far-right

Recent monitoring of the Russian fan scene suggests that far-right ideas are deeply rooted and have become part of the identity of the majority of organised fan groups. Incidents of discrimination and displays of neo-Nazi symbolism are not limited to stadiums but are widely accepted within online fan forums, social media outlets and are accompanied by the production of fan merchandise which celebrates discriminatory slogans and far-right symbols.

The organised nature of far-right groups and the place of football in their identity is well illustrated by the activity of many of these groups outside stadiums and on the web. Money is often collected on supporter forums to support fans brought to justice for violent offences, including racist murders or attempted murders, they are often referred to as 'white heroes'.

Organised far-right groups engage in violent hate crimes outside stadiums before and after matches. Cases are reported when fans participate in 'white wagons' – commuter train raids during which people with a 'non-Slavic' appearance are physically attacked. These far-right political groups actively try to mobilize members of organised fan groups to their activities on the streets.

The most prominent example features events on Manezhnaya Square in Moscow on 11 December 2010, when after a far-right Spartak fan Egor Sviridov was killed in a street fight, football fans came together with neo-Nazi groups to a political rally on the square organized by radical right wing groups that rapidly escalated to attacks on 'aliens' and police special forces. More than 5,000 far-right football fans were reported to have participated in the attacks.<sup>5</sup>

### Action taken by football authorities

A number of steps have been taken by the Russian football authorities during the last season including the so called 'Spectator Law'<sup>6</sup> which came into force in January 2014 regulating fan behaviour inside the stadiums and prohibiting displays of neo-Nazi paraphernalia and symbols. The law addresses individual offences committed inside stadiums but given the organised nature of far-right groups it is unlikely that it could challenge the overall direction of travel of the Russian fan scene.

A new approach to sanctioning the discriminatory behaviour of fans has been adopted by the Russian Football Union following the recommendations set out in FIFA and UEFA anti-racism resolutions. Several clubs have been

5 The Moscow Times, 13.12.2010: 'Race riots on Manezhnaya' by Anna Arutunyan, Lidia Okorokova

6 Spectators' Conduct Rules during official sports competitions (approved by the Government of the Russian Federation dated December 16, 2013, N 1156).

## Fare network briefing: Racism, xenophobia, homophobia in football in Russia

sanctioned for chanting against black players this season including Torpedo and Spartak Moscow. However issues regarding consistency and the independence of the disciplinary are being raised both in Russia and abroad.

In December 2014 during the Russian Premier League fixture between Rostov and Spartak Moscow, Rostov player Guelor Kanga was racially abused by Spartak fans. The player reacted by making offensive finger gestures to the offenders and was subsequently banned by the RFU for two games. The offenders from Spartak avoided sanction for racism because of a lack of evidence.

Earlier in 2014 Hulk, the Brazilian striker of FC Zenit, was subjected to racist taunts when he was playing against Spartak Moscow on the 27 September. Hulk told Russian media he heard monkey chants from 'a large group of people', which he took to be 'a personal insult'.

The Russian FA disciplinary board sanctioned Spartak with one away match without supporters despite the club being a continuous offender. Spartak fans were banned from attending the game in Yekaterinburg although few were expected to attend the match, played around 880 miles (1,100 kilometres) from Moscow.

With no alternatives from within the fan scene and little or no attention to the issue by clubs, organised far-right groups pose a threat to both ethnic minority spectators and players. Although the so called 'Spectator Law'<sup>7</sup> came into force in Russia in January 2014 regulating fan behaviour inside the stadiums, there is so far little evaluation of its practical implementation. The law addresses individual offences committed inside stadiums but given the organised nature of far-right groups it is unlikely that the law could challenge the overall direction of travel of the Russian fan scene.

### The role of politics in creating xenophobia

The complexity of the situation in regard to discrimination in Russian society and football is further enhanced by political circumstances. The high levels of xenophobia noted by social researchers is complemented by isolationist tendencies following the involvement of Russia in military conflicts in the region over the past 10 years, demonstrated in part by events in Ukraine.

Xenophobic sentiments in Russian society reached their peak in 2013 when 66% of the population supported the slogan 'Russia for Russians' as registered by the social research and polling centre Levada.<sup>8</sup> This increasing tendency was interrupted in 2014 due to the shift in public focus on events in Ukraine, experts see this as a temporary break.

The growth of nationalism and criticism of 'western values' juxtaposed against 'traditional Russian values' leads directly to rising levels of exclusion of ethnic and other minorities, especially the LGBT community. As part of this political drive a number of legislative instruments have recently been introduced by the Russian government complicating the work of the NGOs working in the field of human rights, especially those receiving funding from outside of Russia. The 'foreign agent' rule seems to be used in a way to target those NGO's with opinions and activities deemed to be unacceptable amongst the political elite.<sup>9</sup>

The overall situation in regard to discrimination and nationalism, together with the political situation leads many observers to worry about a deterioration in the next few years which might lead to rising levels of xenophobia and nationalism in Russian society and football, scapegoating of the most vulnerable minorities and the continuing rise of football as a setting for displays of inter-ethnic violence with the active participation of football fans.

7 Spectators' Conduct Rules during official sports competitions (approved by the Government of the Russian Federation dated December 16, 2013, N 1156).

8 Levada center, 2014: Nationalism, xenophobia and migration

9 Human rights watch, 2015: 'Russia: Government Against Rights Groups'

# Fare network briefing:

## Racism, xenophobia, homophobia in football in Russia

### Summary

In summary the current situation with regard to discrimination in Russia is characterised by the following:

- High levels of discrimination against people from the North Caucasus and Central Asia, especially in the Moscow and St. Petersburg regions;
- Discriminatory abuse of black and other ethnic minority players and spectators inside stadiums is on the rise;
- There is an organised nature to many of the far-right groups active among football fans, they have a dominance inside stadiums;
- High levels of intolerant attitudes towards the LGBT community and homophobia institutionalised through state legislation;
- Growing nationalism and isolationism in society

### Fare strategy

The Fare network has a strategy for the country that includes the following goals:

- To contribute to the social inclusion and empowerment of ethnic and other minorities, such as the LGBT community, in Russian society through football
- Decrease the number of discriminatory incidents manifested in Russian football
- Assist the development and implementation of effective response mechanisms to incidents of discrimination by the Russian football governing bodies and state authorities
- Fight xenophobia and promote tolerance and diversity among the general population in Russia, particularly young people

### The FARE network

**fare** n e t w o r k Discrimination in football continues to be an issue in the sport posing major challenges and attracting headlines in recent years. The Fare network has been active in tackling discrimination and using football as a means of social inclusion amongst minority groups for over a decade and is recognised as a global authority.

Fare is a network of organisations comprising civil society groups in over 35 countries who are active in the field of anti-discrimination or human rights, fan groups, migrant, ethnic and other minority groups.

The network was established in 1999 in Vienna and has active partnerships within football, we have been a UEFA CSR partner since 2001 and worked with European and global governmental bodies such as the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

Fare is registered in the UK and managed by an international board of nine people elected by a General Assembly.