

‘Russkie i Rossiiane’ in Russian Football

Русь - Народ



A *Russkii* person, or an ‘ethnic Russian’, is defined as someone whose ancestry traces back to the Kievan Rus’ empire. This is differentiated from a ‘Rossiian’, a term simply describing a subject of the Russian Federation.

Fan Incidents

In Russian football, tension arising from the ‘national question’ is most evident between ethnic Russians and Caucasians.



Egor Sviridov, a Spartak Moscow fan and member of *Fratriia* fan group, was killed by Aslan Cherkesov from Kabardino-Balkaria. A similar incident occurred when journalist and Spartak fan Yuri Volkov was killed, reportedly by a gang of Chechen men.



Meanwhile, Nazi salutes and abuse of Caucasian fans have not been uncommon. To the right is a picture of Kuban Krasnodar fans burning the Dagestan flag. One Spartak fan stated “what can we do, if these people don’t understand the difference between russkie and rossiiane?”



Escalation



In 2010, various fans and nationalists organised a massive Moscow riot in reaction to Sviridov’s murder. Many have since then maintained an absolute boycott of games involving Caucasian teams.

Political Involvement

While Putin has publicly asked football fans to “help fight nationalism,” Russian authorities have broadly appeased anger towards ‘non-Russians.’ Just Russia deputy head Oleg Nilov, for example, proposed banning football in the North Caucasus rather than deal with fan conflict



This is a sporting issue that both affects and is affected by broader political questions. It is also affecting other sporting issues, such as racism against foreign players; most notably Africans and South Americans playing in Russia. This could be a problem for Russian football in the future, as the international community becomes reluctant to accept them and good players of the ‘wrong ethnic group’ will not want to play in Russia. That could even include Caucasian Russians. ‘The national question’ runs much deeper than sport and is not sport’s responsibility to solve. But for Russian football to move forward, Russian authorities will have to start tackling race-related fan violence directly.