



HELSINKI COMMISSION REPORT

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2018 WORLD CUP The Beautiful Game and an Ugly Regime

Corruption, Discrimination, and Forced Labor Threaten to Overshadow the World's Premier Sporting Event

The 2018 World Cup hosted by Russia has created an unprecedented opportunity for the country's kleptocrats to enrich themselves. Just as he did with the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, President Vladimir Putin has hijacked a world sporting event in an attempt to burnish his own image and enrich the Kremlin elite, rather than to celebrate sport and sportsmanship in Russia.

However, unlike the 2014 Winter Olympics, the World Cup has required multiple infrastructure projects in not just one, but eleven, host cities. Oligarchs, as well as regional and national officials, have worked together to embezzle assets from the tournament stadium construction and refurbishment to side projects of accommodation and transport.

Mistreated and forced laborers have completed this work. Contractors have used and manipulated Russian and migrant workers to erect the stadiums and other structures that are essential to hosting a World Cup. For example, Russia has continued its unscrupulous use of North Korean forced labor to

build St. Petersburg Zenit Arena, opened by President Putin himself in March 2017.

Russia presented the World Cup to the FIFA voters in 2010 as a wholesome tournament, bringing the world together for a festival of sport. Instead, President Putin will give the world a corrupt tournament, built on the backs of forced and mistreated labor, and expose fans to a real risk of soccer violence and hatred. Although troubling trends in each of these areas can be seen in countries throughout the OSCE region, the offenses of the Kremlin are particularly egregious.

The United States has repeatedly warned FIFA of the danger of allowing Russia to host such an international sporting event. The current Director of National Intelligence, then-Senator Dan Coats, and Senator Mike Kirk wrote to FIFA President, Sepp Blatter, urging him to consider "a more deserving World Cup 2018 bid."¹ Current Helsinki Commission Chairman Senator Roger Wicker co-sponsored Senator Coats' S.Res.370, which called on FIFA to strip the Russian Federation of its right to

FIFA, Fédération Internationale de Football Association, and UEFA, Union of European Football Associations, declined to take a proactive part in this report. Representatives from FIFA failed to comply with requests for documents, including the original Russian bid proposal book handed by the Russian Football Union to FIFA in December 2010. FIFA initially claimed that such a request could be fulfilled only if a member of the U.S. Congress issued a request for the bid proposal book in writing. However, upon further requests by senior commission staff, FIFA then claimed that it could only share such materials following the joint agreement of FIFA and the Russian Football Union. UEFA refused to provide any further details about incidents of racism and discrimination in Russian soccer upon request.



host the World Cup following its illegal invasion and occupation of Crimea in 2014.²

In the wake of the poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter, several nations have taken concrete action against Russia and the 2018 World Cup. Both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Iceland have announced “state boycotts” of the event.³ These boycotts will allow soccer teams to attend the event, but no government officials (including English Football Association President Prince William) will participate in any World Cup events in Russia.⁴ To date, other nations considering a “state boycott” include Australia, Denmark, Japan, Poland, and Sweden.⁵

FIFA’s guiding principles for the 2018 Russia World Cup are responsibility,⁶ inclusivity,⁷ transparency,⁸ integrity,⁹ and respect.¹⁰ Vladimir Putin and his Kremlin elite have violated each of these principles in a desperate attempt to secure their legacy. Both Russia and FIFA have international obligations and it is important to ensure that they are held to account.

Corruption

Without the rule of law, international sporting events can be easy pickings for corrupt businessmen and politicians alike. Host cities must either construct brand new athletic facilities, or restore and remodel existing venues. In addition, such

events can demand numerous extra infrastructure projects, ranging from the creation and improvement of transportation links between host cities to the construction of hospitality venues and facilities to host traveling fans and visiting national teams.

The 2018 World Cup has presented an unprecedented opportunity for corruption in Russia. Reports indicate it will be the most expensive tournament in history with a 2013 Russian government act providing a minimum \$21 billion.¹¹ Despite the Local Organizing Committee Chairman Igor Shuvalov’s claim that “we have trimmed absolutely everything,” the cost of the Russian World Cup is far greater than that of any tournament before.¹²

The average cost of a stadium has already risen to \$577 million—more than twice as expensive as the average cost of a venue for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil¹³ and three and half times higher than a stadium at the 2006 German World Cup.¹⁴

The opaque bidding process and vast budget for the tournament has presented a perfect opportunity for Putin’s cronies to profit. Maxim Reznik, a St. Petersburg opposition figure and friend of the late Boris Nemtsov, stated, “Another reason [for hosting these big sports events] is of course he [Putin] and his friends can make a lot of money... as select few will become very rich because of this tournament.”¹⁵

SportEngineering, a state-owned business controlled by the Ministry of Sport and Minister of Sport Vitaly Mutko, oversees the stadium construction bidding process. Unsurprisingly, the company has won several construction bids itself, despite not offering the lowest bid, and then subcontracted out the majority of construction work.¹⁶

Besides Mutko's SportEngineering firm, other cronies have taken advantage of the wealth of government contracts created from the World Cup. Putin crony Gennady Timchenko, CEO of Volga Group and StroyTransGaz, won the contracts to construct stadiums in both Nizhny Novgorod¹⁷ and Volgograd,¹⁸ while AlfaBank, previously headed by former Deputy Prime Minister Vladislav Surkov, became the first-ever regional FIFA sponsor for the tournament.¹⁹ Other members of Putin's circle may also be involved, but the lack of financial transparency makes this difficult to discern.

The Local Organizing Committee has broadly used additional contractors and sub-contractors, which, in turn, has allowed individuals from the Kremlin elite to exploit the World Cup, to extract bribes from local businesses, and to embezzle government funds earmarked for the tournament. Contractors draft project descriptions after the fact and administrators compile budgets following expenditure.²⁰ Contracts often move from one general contractor to another, simply to favor one oligarch in particular.²¹

This corruption not only resulted in the theft of public funds, but it also encouraged the poor construction of the venues and infrastructure that will risk the safety of fans and leave communities with costly infrastructure without the proper means to create a successful soccer legacy.

St. Petersburg—Cormorants and Corruption

Experts estimate that the Zenit Arena on St. Petersburg's Krestovsky Island will be the most expensive of the tournament venues, costing approximately \$1.5 billion.²² The construction effort, which began in 2007, dragged on for more than a decade. Constant scandals have plagued the new arena, culminating in charges of corruption against the former Vice-Governor of the Federal City of St.

Petersburg, Marat Oganessian, in November 2016.²³ Prominent Russian soccer journalist Igor Rabiner concluded, "Nowhere in Russia was more money stolen than during the construction of that stadium."²⁴

The first general contractor, Avant LLC., was dropped due to the multiple large-scale budget cost projections for the stadium.²⁵ Following these increased cost predictions, the general construction contract was awarded to InzhTranStroy, and its St. Petersburg subsidiary TransStroy, in December 2008;²⁶ the new contractor subsequently revised its own cost predictions upwards to \$1.1 billion in January 2011.²⁷ In the face of spiraling costs General Board of State Expert Study intervened, reviewing the figures and approving a new total budget of 34.9 billion rubles (\$594 million)²⁸ in April 2013.²⁹

By February 2016, costs had mushroomed out of control, to the point where the Russian Audit

The trial of former Vice-Governor Marat Oganessian revealed the extent of corruption at the Zenit Arena. The Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation arrested Oganessian under suspicion of embezzling approximately \$850,000 from stadium construction funds via a false contract to supply video screens. Oganessian had used his political influence to ensure that a company called TDM was chosen as the subcontractor to supply the screens. Oganessian arranged the transfer of \$850,000 to TDM, which was then diverted to a series of shell companies.

Since the start of 2018, the Investigative Committee of Russia has begun further criminal inquiries concerning corruption during the construction of the stadium.

Sources: Andy Brown. "St. Petersburg politician arrested on suspicion of Russia 2018 stadium fraud." *Sports Integrity Initiative*. November 17, 2016. Accessed December 5, 2017. <http://www.sportsintegrityinitiative.com/st-petersburg-politician-arrested-suspicion-russia-2018-stadium-fraud/>; Горборукова, Лидия, and Дмитрий Маракулин. "Следствие заинтересовалось крышей петербургского стадиона." *Коммерсант*. March 25, 2018. Accessed March 29, 2018. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3584881>.



Zenit Arena, St. Petersburg (June 2015)

Chamber demanded a complete review, termination of non-core projects, and a reduction in the total cost of the stadium. Later that year, the St. Petersburg administration handed the general contract to MetroStroy, a rail and metro construction company with very little experience in stadium construction. According to Dimitry Sukharev of Transparency International, “It’s likely they [MetroStroy] are connected with someone influential in St. Petersburg.”³⁰

MetroStroy completed the Zenit Arena in December 2016 and was awarded a further 952 million ruble (\$16.2 million)³¹ contract to make additional improvements to the venue.³² The final cost of the stadium is a completely unknown figure. State News Agency TASS reported that the December 2016 official estimated cost for the stadium was \$663 million.³³ However, TASS later announced in February 2017 that Igor Albin told reporters that the cost for the project was \$728.3 million.³⁴ This cost does not include any other associated infrastructure projects such as roads and a new metro station. The six budget increases, approved by the St. Petersburg City Council, have diverted as much as 2.6 billion rubles (\$44.3 million) from schools, kindergartens, and hospitals.³⁵

In 2014, Sven Daniel Wolfe and Martin Müller of the University of Zurich estimated that the cost for the Zenit Arena was \$1.144 billion.³⁶ Müller and Wolfe stated, “It is hard to blame higher input costs

for these price excesses. Labor, building material, and land are, if anything, less expensive in Russia than Western Europe.”³⁷

Dimitry Sukharev has given an estimate of \$1.5 billion for the stadium³⁸ and a total estimated price tag of \$3 billion to include other associated infrastructure projects,³⁹ adding that the project could have been completed for approximately one third of its final cost.⁴⁰

Both the city administration and general contractors have given numerous reasons for the dramatic increases in expenditure. Igor Albin, the current vice-governor of St. Petersburg, tried to convince reporters the reason behind extra funds for the stadium was that cormorants were pecking holes in the roof,⁴¹ which had already received additional funds due to issues with its retractable design.⁴² Contractors blamed even the organization of the World Cup itself for budget hikes, citing demands to increase the minimum seating from 40,000 to 70,000 to match the capacity of other stadiums of equal cost and the need to comply with international work standards and practices.⁴³

Dimitry Sukharev concluded, “The only explanation for the dramatic increase in spending, is corruption.”⁴⁴

An Empty Legacy

The St. Petersburg arena may be the most extreme example of corruption at the Russia World Cup, but it is not the only one. Corruption by Russian officials and the lack of intervention by FIFA authorities has left the Russian people with a legacy of venues that are unsafe, incomplete, or where construction was never begun.

In the southern city of Rostov-on-Don there are major safety concerns about the brand-new stadium on the banks of the river. A report by a Russian anti-corruption website, *PASMI*, found that the contractor on the project, Krokus International, intentionally chose a construction site on a flood plain to inflate the cost to three times the usual price for a project of the same scale.⁴⁵

The publication's source, a worker who took part in the geological foundation works of the stadium, told *PASMI*, "The building has been disastrously built from the beginning."⁴⁶

"Krokus International had only filled in half of the necessary supports with concrete,"⁴⁷ he said.

Regarding the rest of the unfinished work, he said, "I am not able to say: whether it [the concrete] was stolen, or in general whether it was on paper or in the accountant's books. The price of the question is hundreds of millions of rubles."⁴⁸

Krokus International has no prior stadium construction experience,⁴⁹ and the construction watchdog in Russia, RosTechNadzor, currently has more than 30 pending cases against the company for multiple building safety failures.⁵⁰ None of these cases have resulted in more than a 50,000–60,000 ruble (\$850–\$1,020) fine, which the company regularly pays without taking any further action.⁵¹ Corruption has led to a stadium that is unfit for purpose and has cost the Russia tax payer 19.8 billion rubles (\$337 million).⁵²

Even if a venue is not unsafe, it is likely to be unsustainable. Manuel Veth, a journalist and editor-in-chief of *Futbolgrad*, an online publication and podcast focusing on soccer in Russia and the former Soviet Union, has questioned the sustainability

pledges of the Russian bid, claiming that there is a risk that multiple venues will become "white elephants."⁵³

The choice of host cities has been questionable to say the least. General contractors and subcontractors have used FIFA seating requirements of a minimum of 35,000 seats per stadium, which was lowered especially for the Russian tournament, to create massive stadiums in cities that have neither the sporting prowess nor the fan base to warrant such massive infrastructure projects. Nizhny Novgorod has not hosted a top-flight Russian soccer team since mid-2014.⁵⁴ FC Baltika, the Kaliningrad team, will reduce the size of its stadium to 30,000 following the World Cup, as will the city of Saransk.⁵⁵ Sochi's soccer team will take a leave of absence until possibly the 2018-2019 season following the World Cup, and the Fisht Stadium, originally built for the 2014 Winter Olympics, will shut down entirely.⁵⁶

Enormous expenditures have failed to provide the build quality associated with most similarly budgeted projects. At the Zenit Arena, the Vice-Governor raised the previously mentioned farcical issue of damage caused by cormorants.⁵⁷ He did not, however, include the numerous problems of fire safety, exposed electrical wiring, and water-damaged concrete supports.⁵⁸

In addition, Russian authorities have failed to even begin, let alone finish, several other proposed projects. For example, six high-speed rail lines supposedly were included the 2010 proposal. Only one of them has been built; the others may not be completed until 2025 at the earliest.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, due to the lack of cooperation provided by FIFA and its failure to provide a copy of the original bid book, it is impossible to comprehend the full scale of this problem.

Mistreatment of Workers and Forced Labor

The Kremlin's impunity is not only evident in the widespread corruption mentioned above, but also in the treatment of those who are currently constructing President Putin's showpiece. The Russian government has continued its long history of mistreating Russian and migrant workers, which has

included allowing contractors to manipulate and withhold promised wages, provide inappropriately low living and working conditions, and promote the use of unsafe working practices to meet budgetary and time constraints. The World Cup Local Organizing Committee has perpetuated Russia's use of forced North Korean labor, meaning that Kim Jong-Un and his totalitarian leadership will directly benefit from the Russia 2018 World Cup.

The FIFA *Sustainability Strategy: 2018 FIFA World Cup* uses the International Labour Organization definition of *Decent Work*:

“Work that is productive and delivers fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organise and participate in decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.”⁶⁰

Mistreatment of Workers

Abuses of workers' rights are common at major construction projects in the Russian Federation. Workers regularly travel from across Russia and the former Soviet Union with the promise of well-paid jobs. Instead, they have faced obstacles and hardships from their employers.

Many workers face lack of any written confirmation of their official employment from their employer at the worksite. Despite the Russian Labor Code, which requires that “formal employment relations exist between workers and employers,”⁶¹ contractors at multiple World Cup sites have failed to provide workers with either an employment contract or service contract.⁶² According to Human Rights Watch, workers often receive this documentation months later, if at all. Even when employers do provide the forms, they are often completed incorrectly, and therefore unlawfully, allowing employers to coerce migrant workers to work for less and thus increase their own profits.⁶³

Human Rights Watch noted that approximately \$8.34 million in wages remained unpaid during the completion of infrastructure for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.

Source: Jane Buchanan, Semyon Simonov, Kathryn Zehr, Vladislav Lobanov, Natalia Estemirova, and Cornelius Runtsch. “Red Card: Exploitation of Construction Workers on World Cup Sites in Russia.” Human Rights Watch. June 14, 2017. P.4 Accessed October 19, 2017.

The lack of employment documentation is particularly concerning for workers migrating from former Soviet states. Although workers from the Eurasian Economic Union do not require a work permit to work in Russia, an individual must have valid proof of employment according to Russian law.⁶⁴ Even though a 2015 law has simplified the process for migrant workers heading for World Cup construction sites, it is still necessary for the worker to have a valid employment contract while in Russia.⁶⁵ A lack of a work permit, employment contract, or citizenship of a Eurasian Economic Union state makes both internal and foreign migrant workers vulnerable to coercion by employers and local authorities. Interviews with on-site workers indicated that World Cup general contractors and subcontractors are openly flouting Russian law and using it ease costs. Human Rights Watch interviewed workers at multiple World Cup worksites including at the Yekaterinburg Arena, Moscow Luzhniki Stadium, Kaliningrad Stadium, Rostov Stadium, and the St. Petersburg's Zenit Arena.⁶⁶

Employers on World Cup construction sites have used the precarious legal position in which they have placed workers to carry out wage abuses and deny collective bargaining rights. In Russia it is customary, though illegal, to pay workers with cash⁶⁷ and employers must provide pay at least twice per month.⁶⁸ It is also illegal “to withhold any portion of wages for over three months or to withhold wages altogether for more than two months.”⁶⁹

Yaroslav, a worker at the Zenit Arena, said, “They promised to pay twice per month ... The wages were calculated based on the volume of completed work. The work I completed each day was worth about 6,000 to 7,000 rubles (\$106–\$124), but they paid me just 5,000 rubles (\$88) once every two weeks.”⁷⁰

Kirill at the Kaliningrad stadium told Human Rights Watch, “I haven’t received my full wages from April to July. In May they gave me 12,000 rubles (\$212) and in June 15,000 (\$256). They should pay 30,000 (\$511) a month. There was no contract... I only received it now [in July]”.⁷¹

Employers at World Cup sites do not simply withhold wages, but actively suppress any attempts by workers to get their hard-earned pay. The Kaliningrad worksite organizers locked Kirill out of the construction area, following a request for his full wages. An unnamed worker at the Rostov Arena stated, “The employers threaten us, that if we complain, that they will fire us without any payment at all and maybe even call in the police.”⁷²

Roman at the Kaliningrad stadium told Human Rights Watch researchers, “Someone makes a fuss [about wages], they’ll send him home.”⁷³

Finally, general contractors and subcontractors force employees go to work on the stadiums in hazardously cold weather conditions. The International Labor Organization states that work in extreme cold can lead to “localized cold injuries as well as impaired physical work capacity.”⁷⁴ Therefore, it recommends employers supply warm food and clothing, in addition to “work-rest cycles with warm shelters for recovery.”⁷⁵ Russian law also requires that additional equipment and precautions are issued for workers in extreme cold.⁷⁶

Human Rights Watch interviewed two workers at the Yekaterinburg construction site and confirmed that they worked in all weather conditions, only refraining when instructed to by their employers.⁷⁷ They stated that they worked in cold conditions of -13 degrees Fahrenheit (-25 degrees Celsius).⁷⁸

Forced Labor

The 2017 Trafficking in Persons report by the U.S. Department of State outlines the extent of North Korean labor inside the Russian Federation. It estimates that there are approximately 30,000 registered North Korean citizens in Russia, with the regime in Pyongyang sending around 20,000 every year.⁷⁹ Russian officials have facilitated the trafficking of these victims, sought bribes from employers to avoid enforcement of Russia labor laws concerning illegal workers, protected traffickers, and returned any victims to their traffickers.⁸⁰

According to the Palermo Protocol, a 2000 agreement concerning the prevention of international trafficking, of which the Russian Federation is a signatory, defines trafficking in Article 3(a):

“‘Trafficking in persons’ shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”⁸¹

Russia’s collusion with North Korea in human trafficking provides Russia with a large and consistent supply of cheap labor; for North Korea, it offers a steady supply of foreign currency to maintain its totalitarian regime. North Koreans in Russia are routinely subjected to forced labor in industries such as “construction, manufacturing, logging, agricultural, brick factories, textile, grocery stores, maritime, and domestic service, as well as in forced begging, waste sorting, and street sweeping.”⁸² Russian authorities are often complicit with North Korea, deporting back to North Korea those who flee for “illegally” residing in Russia.⁸³

The External Construction Bureau led by Kim Kang Jin, Chol Hyun Construction,⁸⁴ and Korea Rungrado General Trading Company⁸⁵ facilitate the trafficking of North Koreans and their forced labor. According to an October 2017 State Department report on human rights abuses in North Korea, the External Construction Bureau is the “firm that sends laborers from the DPRK to work in countries around the world,”⁸⁶ and as of 2016 had sent workers, along with other state-run companies such as Mokran, to worksites across Russia.⁸⁷

Russian authorities do not screen DPRK workers at immigration, despite substantial evidence that they are victims of trafficking, such as prison-like sleeping quarters, heavily garnished pay, and weeks of work without leave.⁸⁸

Dr. Andrei Lankov, a lecturer at Kookmin University in Seoul, estimated that approximately 30 to 50 percent of workers’ meager wages will be taken directly by the North Korean regime.⁸⁹ Those in charge of the workers call the mandatory deductions “Party Duty” or “Revolutionary Duty”⁹⁰ and explain their dismal working conditions as self-sacrifice for the good of their home nation.⁹¹

A 2015 hearing by the Tom Lantos Commission on Human Rights concluded, “The assessment that these laborers are acting out of their own self-interest is short sighted.”⁹²

Robert King, the former Special Envoy for North Korea Human Rights Issues, testified, “These are people who are being exploited. These are people who are being sent overseas and they are being controlled because they have family members who remain in Korea. They have control over what they do, where they go, and what kind of things they are able to do in these countries.”⁹³

A report by Norwegian soccer magazine *Josimar* stated that a subcontractor, Seven Suns, was using 50 North Korean workers to construct the Zenit Arena, and that in August 2016 the Russian company DalPiterStroj used 60 North Korean workers to complete cosmetic work on the stadium.

A project manager, named only as Pavel, at the stadium construction site stated that 100 more North Korean workers were offered to the site for a price of six million rubles (\$102,600)⁹⁴. Four million rubles would go to the government and the remainder would be divided among the company and the workers, with worker wages at 600 rubles (around \$10) per day.⁹⁵

Pavel stated that the North Koreans who were working on the World Cup stadium lived in squalid conditions in shipping containers, without heating, near the construction site. A tightly-fenced area surrounded their container residences.⁹⁶

Josimar discovered that at another DalPiterStroj worksite in the St. Petersburg suburb of Shurshary, there were 100 more North Korean workers, many of whom had worked on the Zenit Arena from August 2016 to January 2017. A worker at the Shushary site stated that the North Koreans worked from seven in the morning until midnight every day of the week. Their quarters had barbed wire on top of the fencing and there are armed guards with dogs at the gates of the site.⁹⁷

Russian local media reported the death of a North Korean worker in one of the shipping containers at the Zenit Arena site.⁹⁸ According to *Josimar*’s report, several international organizations contacted FIFA with concerns about the death. Despite FIFA’s promise to investigate, none of the international organizations received any further information.

Upon the discovery of North Korean workers at the Zenit Arena worksite, German television station ARD investigated reports of other such cases at the famous Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow. During their investigation they spoke with North Korean workers, confirming their identity, nationality, and role on the construction project. During an interview, one North Korean worker stated that they had worked for three weeks without a single day of rest.^{99/100}

In June 2017, a letter responding to a report by Human Rights Watch, which referenced *Josimar*'s evidence, FIFA's Head of Sustainability & Diversity, Federico Addiechi, admitted that a FIFA Decent Work Monitoring Visit had found evidence of North Korean workers, and that this issue was discussed with the "highest levels of the LOC [Local Organizing Committee] and Russian Authorities."¹⁰¹

Yet the CEO of the Russia LOC, Alexei Sorokin, stated during a press conference at an extraordinary UEFA congress in Geneva on September 19, "We've made our own investigations, and we found no proof that any North Koreans have worked on any of our stadiums. We looked for them, but we just couldn't find anyone."¹⁰²

Violence and Racism

The Russian World Cup bid in 2010 presented an image of a diverse and harmonious tournament in 2018, but the reality is that government and soccer authorities in Russia have failed to resolve serious issues of racism and violence in Russian soccer. Although the situation has improved since the late 2000s, Russia still has some of the most severe incidents of racism and xenophobia at soccer matches in Europe and the World.¹⁰³ Furthermore, there is a growing subculture of soccer-associated violence in Russia, which revealed itself at the 2016 UEFA European Championship in France and repressive Russian policing methods in retaliation.

Racism

Russian soccer has a long-standing problem with racism. This issue stretches from the fans to senior figures and players in Russian soccer.

Two reports by FARE Network (Football against Racism in Europe)¹⁰⁴ and SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, a Moscow-based nonprofit that deals with issues of nationalism and xenophobia,¹⁰⁵ have shown the extent of racism and discrimination in Russian soccer. Together, these groups have collated data and photographic evidence concerning racist and xenophobic incidents during the two soccer seasons between

2015 and 2017 in their latest report. In total, 190 racist or xenophobic incidents occurred in Russian soccer during these years, through either chants, banners, graffiti, on-field incidents, or attacks.¹⁰⁶ These incidents predominantly feature neo-Nazi symbols.

During the World Cup bidding process, Russian government and FIFA authorities committed to proactively combat racism and discrimination in soccer. However, neither Russia nor FIFA have fulfilled their promises in time for the 2018 World Cup. For example, during the same 2015–2017 period, UEFA only imposed four sets of fines and sanctions against Russian fans for racist behavior.¹⁰⁷ UEFA's maximum reprimand for such behavior in this time was a \$35,000¹⁰⁸ fine (€33,000) against FC Spartak Moskva fans for "illicit banners and chants,"¹⁰⁹ a tiny monetary penalty against an organization with a total estimated market value of \$130 million.¹¹⁰

In May 2013, at the personal request of former FIFA President Sepp Blatter, FIFA established the FIFA Task Force against Racism and Discrimination.¹¹¹ However, according to Osasu Obayiuwana, Task Force member and respected soccer journalist, FIFA's initiative failed to "address discrimination issues ahead of the 2018 World Cup."¹¹²

Despite serious concern from members about possible racism at the upcoming Russian tournament, it was clear to Obayiuwana that Blatter's successor, Gianni Infantino, and FIFA Secretary-General Fatma Samoura did not see the importance of the group.¹¹³ After only three meetings in three and a half years, FIFA's Diversity and Anti-Discrimination Manager, Gerd Dembowski, disbanded the Task Force.

FARE and SOVA concluded, "Despite measures taken by the authorities, racism and other prejudices manifested through discriminatory insults and incitement of ethnic hatred, sexism and nationalism are still common in Russian football and its fan scene."¹¹⁴ The report added that "these manifestations remain potentially dangerous," and

Russian authorities orchestrated the creation of the All-Russia Fans Organization (ARFA) in 2007 to limit the possibility of soccer-related violence by putting the fan groups under government control.¹ The former head of the ARFA, Aleksandr Shprygin, has ties to Russian far-right activists and held open sympathy for far-right causes. He was previously photographed at a far-right gathering, holding a neo-Nazi flag and performing a Nazi salute. Shprygin, as head of the ARFA, chartered a flight for 150 Russian fans to the 2016 European Championship in France, many of whom participated in the violence.

Sources: Staff. "Футбол. ВОВ: от создания до распада." *Sportbox.ru*. July 24, 2016. Accessed April 04, 2018. https://news.sportbox.ru/Vidy_sporta/Futbol/Russia/spbnews_NI644131_VOB_ot_sozdaniya_do_raspada; SPORTS.RU. "«Когда приезжаю в Европу, я нахожусь в тюрьме народов». Что за человек руководит российскими фанатами." *Sports.ru*. June 14, 2016. Accessed October 27, 2017. <https://www.sports.ru/tribuna/blogs/dud/761216.html>; Owen Gibson and Shaun Walker. "Euro 2016: Notorious Far-right Activist at Tournament with Russian FA Delegation." *The Guardian*. June 13, 2016. Accessed April 19, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2016/jun/13/far-right-activist-euro-2016-russian-fa-alexander-shprygin-nazi-salute>.

“we remain alarmed by the significant manifestations of racism involving football fans and consider it as a serious threat to the security of Russian society as a whole.”¹¹⁵

Senior figures in Russian soccer have done little to address the presence of discrimination. In September 2015, Alexei Smertin, the former captain of the Russian national team, said that racism in Russia “does not exist.”¹¹⁶ In 2017, Smertin was appointed to investigate racism in Russian soccer, despite his previous failure to acknowledge the issue of racism in the sport.¹¹⁷

Even as recently as April 2018, FIFA began disciplinary proceedings against the Russia Football Union, following racist behavior by Russian fans toward black players at friendly between France and Russia.¹¹⁸

Former FIFA Vice-President and Local Organizing Committee member, Vyacheslav Koloskov told the BBC World Service in February 2015 that “too much was made of racism in Russia” and that he could not believe that monkey chants toward players of African origin were racist, asking, “Where is that written?” Such examples of discrimination at the highest levels of Russian soccer do not resemble the Russian bid promise of an inclusive World Cup.¹¹⁹

“A Festival of Violence”¹²⁰

The prejudices held by many within Russian soccer are augmented by a disturbing trend of violence. Die-hard Russian soccer fans, commonly referred

to as “ultras,” have channeled their energy and loyalty into organized combat sports rather than supporting their team. Online “ultras” communities have fueled a growth in organized and unorganized clashes between groups from rival teams. The growth of this “ultra” subculture creates a very real threat to the personal safety of those who plan to attend the 2018 Russia World Cup.

“Ultras” groups, known as firms, often advocate for their members to train in combat sports and offer classes in boxing, Muay Thai, and the KGB designed self-defense method of SAMBO.^{121/122} For example, Landscrona, a forum for “ultras” supporting the St. Petersburg Zenit FC, advertises combat sports training sessions with militaristic, nationalist, and neo-Nazi imagery.¹²³

Following rigorous training regimes, “ultras” also often take part in larger combat tournaments, in many cases with logistical support from far-right groups. Julia Glathe, of the Osteuropa Institut at the Frei Universität Berlin, notes that the “Spirit of War” tournament was funded by the neo-Nazi group White Rex,¹²⁴ a group that advocates for the “‘white nations of Europe’ to rediscover their ‘fighting spirit.’”¹²⁵

This breed of Russian soccer violence came to prominence during the 2016 UEFA European Cup in France. Approximately 150 trained and organized “ultras” from several hardcore supporters’ groups banded together to attack England fans in Marseille.¹²⁶ British government sources reported the Russian “uniformed services” members also

participated in the attack.¹²⁷ Russian “ultras” specifically formulated tactics designed to maximize the number of England fans they could injure, such as attacking in tight groups down small narrow alleys away from the main police presence. “Ultras” paralyzed one individual,¹²⁸ posted photos with bloodied England flags online,¹²⁹ and uploaded videos of the attacks from head-mounted cameras.

The “ultras” actions in Marseille received vocal support from politicians. Vladimir Putin questioned, “How could 200 of our fans beat up several thousand English?”¹³⁰

An Russian member of Parliament from the pro-Kremlin Liberal Democratic Party, Igor Lebedev, tweeted in the wake of the violence, “I don’t see anything wrong with fans fighting. Quite the opposite, well done lads, keep it up!”¹³¹

Although Russian politicians have endorsed the actions of “ultras” actions abroad, the attitude toward them in Russia is very different. The often-repressive crowd policing methods used by authorities have led “ultras” and other violent groups to share feelings of persecution. Many “ultras” see stadium bans and control orders as “state attempts to further restrict freedom and to criminalize the fan scene.”¹³²

Police tactics have included large police presences at games, extensive surveillance of firm members and leaders, unexplained and unsubstantiated arrests of fans, and excessive use of force.¹³³ Russian authorities have installed 4,000 new security cameras in the Moscow region.¹³⁴ There have also been reports of intimidation by officials toward those seeking to disturb the World Cup and suspected hooligan organizations preemptively prosecuted as “extremist groups.”¹³⁵

Despite Russia’s methods to dissuade “ultras” from attending, Reuters reported that a fan, blacklisted for bad behavior, had attained World Cup credentials, allowing him to attend matches this summer.¹³⁶

A lack of engagement with Russian “ultras” and oppressive policing by authorities have fostered the

growth of a violent subculture and pushed it toward other violent groups. Supporters often document the excessive violence and surveillance used to prevent firms organizing brawls and upload it to supporter forums.¹³⁷ These include acts of violence not only the near stadiums, but also in public places such as the Moscow Metro.¹³⁸

These police tactics have not only failed to stem this growing subculture, but also instilled a fearlessness of law enforcement in “ultras,” strengthened ties with Russian neo-Nazi groups, and put into question the safety and security of the fans from all over the world who will travel to Russia to support their national teams.

What Can Be Done?

Despite the efforts of several U.S. public officials to have FIFA choose another venue for the 2018 World Cup, there is virtually no chance of that happening at this late date.

However, it remains important for the international community to press FIFA to take steps to ensure that future hosts of the World Cup adhere to minimal standards that Russia has consistently violated. In the words of the Russian sportsman and Chess Grandmaster Garry Kasparov, “We can support the beautiful game without supporting the world’s ugliest regimes.”¹³⁹

For starters, FIFA could require all future hosts of the World Cup to demonstrate they are not guilty of major human rights violations through unfettered access to international charities and organizations, and demand future hosts pledge to conduct all contracting for World Cup venues in an open and transparent manner. FIFA should review and improve its Work Monitoring System to prevent the future use of trafficked persons on World Cup sites.

Given Russia’s well documented use of forced labor in preparations for the World Cup, there should be no public acclamation of Vladimir Putin’s role as host. Ideally, FIFA could arrange a ceremony for the World Cup trophy to be awarded in a neutral venue outside Russia.

Finally, it is not too late for soccer fans to take adequate precautions to protect themselves if they choose to attend World Cup matches in Russia. Fans can register with their embassies upon arrival in Russia and take note of emergency contact information in case they need assistance.

summer, and FIFA will take the appropriate steps to ensure that potential hosts of future championships be held to more stringent standards. This is the only way to erase the stain on the reputation of this great tournament.

Hopefully the corruption, discrimination, and violence that have characterized Russian sports in recent years can be avoided at the World Cup this

About the Helsinki Commission

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission, is an independent agency of the Federal Government charged with monitoring compliance with the Helsinki Accords and advancing comprehensive security through promotion of human rights, democracy, and economic, environmental and military cooperation in 57 countries. The Commission consists of nine members from the U.S. Senate, nine from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense, and Commerce.

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[ment/tournament/competition/02/66/69/50/sustainabilitystrategyfor2018fifaworldcup_neutral.pdf](#). Responsibility is defined as: “accountability for sustainability, shared by all those whose actions affect environmental performance, economic, activity and social progress.”

⁷ Ibid. Inclusivity is defined as: “practice of fair and non-discriminatory treatment and meaningful involvement of all interested parties. Inclusivity refers to the integration of all interested parties, regardless of skin colour, ethnic, national or social origin, gender, disability, age, language, religion, political opinion or any other opinion, wealth, status, or sexual orientation or any other reason.”

⁸ Ibid. Transparency is defined as: “openness about decisions and activities that affect people, the economy, the environment and their outcomes; willingness to communicate these in a clear, accurate, timely, honest and complete manner.”

⁹ Ibid. Integrity is defined as: “behaviour that is in accordance with accepted principles of right or good conduct in the context of a particular situation and is consistent with international norms of behaviour.”

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“Migrant workers from the member states of the Eurasian Economic Union (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan) are not required to have a work permit to work legally. However, workers from these countries must have a written employment contract or civil-legal contract if he or she wishes to remain in Russia for longer than 90 days. Migrant workers from other countries must have both a work permit or patent as well as an employment contract. Law on the legal status of foreign individuals in the Russian Federation Federal Law 115, July 25, 2002, art. 5. A 2015 government order simplified procedures for issuing worker permits for foreign workers on 2018 World Cup sites. Order of the Russian Government, ‘To accelerate and simplify: issuance of temporary residence permits to foreign citizens and stateless persons hired by legal entities or individuals who have signed civil contracts for the construction of infrastructure needed to host the 2018 Football World Cup in the Russian Federation’ No. 735 of July 18, 2015.”

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