

Football Fans, Troops Clash in Central Moscow

December 11, 2010

The  Moscow Times

Several football fans were injured in central Moscow Saturday in clashes with Interior Ministry troops that broke out during a thousands-strong rally in memory of a Spartak Moscow supporter killed a week ago.

The incident, with its racist overtones, is likely to darken Moscow's image less than two weeks after Russia won the right to host the 2018 soccer World Cup.

Thousands of young men gathered at an unsanctioned rally on Manezh Square near the Kremlin around 7 a.m. EST in memory of Yegor Sviridov, 28, shot dead during a fight in northwest Moscow last Sunday night.

A number of passers-by, who were of a non-Slavic appearance, were attacked by the fans, according to a Reuters witness.

When the OMON troops beat off the attackers to rescue the victims, the crowd attacked them with fists and makeshift weapons, including flares and metal fence posts.

The clashes lasted for about 30 minutes, followed by a standoff between the two sides for more than an hour.

Several suspects, believed to be from the Caucasus, have been detained in the Sviridov murder case.

Small-scale political protests are relatively common in the capital, but a gathering on this scale so close to the seat of Russian power is highly unusual.

Moscow has become a focal point for racist violence in recent years, given its combustible mix of disenchanted ethnic Russian youth and labor migrants from the Russian Caucasus and impoverished former Soviet republics in Central Asia.

Police recorded 26 racially motivated murders in Russia last year.

Opponents of Russia's successful bid to host the 2018 World Cup cited frequent racist incidents involving local fans as one of the reasons to play the tournament elsewhere.

Many of the protesters on Manezh Square wore scarves and other memorabilia from Spartak and rival clubs, while chanting nationalist slogans such as "Moscow is a Russian city!" and "Russia for the Russians!."

The head of the Moscow division of the Interior Ministry, Vladimir Kolokoltsev, later appeared on the square in order to calm the angry crowd.

"When flares are burning and ordinary people are injured, it is unacceptable," he said.

"We tried to resolve the situation with minimal force."

A Moscow medical source told Interfax news agency that 29 people were hospitalized after the clash.

The protest was the latest in a series of demonstrations that have taken place in the aftermath of Sviridov's murder, including an incident last Tuesday when Spartak fans blocked traffic on Leningradsky Prospekt, a key Moscow thoroughfare.

Itar-Tass news agency said about 60 protesters were arrested Saturday in a similar demonstration in support of Sviridov in St. Petersburg.

More than 1,000 Spartak Moscow fans gathered earlier on Saturday at the bus stop where Sviridov was killed. They laid scarves with the phrase "Spartak Ultras Moscow" next to candles at a makeshift memorial on a bus stop bench.

Russian media have said Sviridov was a member of the Spartak Ultras, a group linked to fan violence in the past.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/12/11/football-fans-troops-clash-in-central-moscow-a3648>