The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Putin Urges Football Fans To Help Fight Nationalism

December 21, 2010



Prime Minister Vladimir Putin listening to representatives of Russian football fan clubs as they drive to take part in a flower-laying ceremony at the grave of Yegor Sviridov. **Aleksei Nikolsky**

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin urged football fans on Tuesday to resist influence of extremists who might use them to stage nationalist riots like the ones that rocked Moscow and several other cities earlier this month.

"We, the government, will cut off these radicals, but this cannot be done effectively without your support," Putin said at a meeting of representatives from fan clubs from central Russia and the North Caucasus. The meeting was arranged by the Sports, Tourism and Youth Politics Ministry.

The nationalist riots were sparked by the death of an ethnic Russian fan, Yegor Sviridov, during a Moscow brawl with a group of North Caucasus natives on the night of Dec. 5. Putin visited Sviridov's grave at Moscow's Lyublinskoye Cemetery after the meeting.

Many members of nationalist organizations are also football fans, but no clear command

structures can be traced linking the two communities. Instead, the communities exist as an assortment of independent, often violent, cells.

Putin said Tuesday that ultranationalists were pushing to destabilize the situation in the country "and then to shout their lungs out that only they are able to save Russia."

He repeated a demand that he made during his call-in show last week that visiting Russian citizens from other Russian provinces should respect the customs and cultures of the people who dominate the territory where they live.

He cautioned that if this demand was not respected, the government might reintroduce restrictions on the visitors, such as police registration. The practice requiring newcomers to get registered with Moscow police within three days of arrival dates back to Soviet times and was effectively suspended in 2004.

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