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Racist Fans Could Spoil Russia's World Cup Chances

By The Moscow Times

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Russian fans pose for photos before the 2014 World Cup Group H football match between Russia and South Korea at the Pantanal arena in Cuiaba, Brazil.

Russia's football team is at risk of being docked points by the sport's governing body FIFA after fans unfurled racist banners during its opening World Cup match, a news report said.

Banners on display during Tuesday's game against South Korea featured the Celtic cross — a symbol associated with white supremacists and neo-Nazis worldwide, Britain's The Telegraph reported Wednesday.

In accordance with tough anti-discrimination rules introduced last year by the international football governing body, the Russian team could face disciplinary action for its fans' unruly behavior.

While a first-time racist offense by fans or players can be punished by the team having to play

a game behind closed doors, subsequent offenses can be punished by points deductions or even expulsion — and Russia are repeat offenders.

At the 2012 European Championships, the Russian team was given a six-point suspended penalty for the Euro 2016 qualifying campaign after its fans displayed offensive banners and directed monkey chants toward black players.

Piara Powar, executive director of Fare, a network set up to counter discrimination in football, hopes FIFA will come down hard on Russia.

""It seems that some fans of some countries will take their hatred halfway around the world. These images need to be acted on urgently," Powar was quoted as saying by The Telegraph.

Russia is not the only country to have gotten on FIFA's bad side — Croatian fans have also been accused of displaying fascist banners during their team's opening game against Brazil last Thursday, and Mexico faces disciplinary proceedings after reportedly racist behavior by fans during the Wednesday match against Cameroon, the BBC reported.

The global governing body is also conducting checks into homophobic slurs voiced by both Mexican and Brazilian fans during their match on Monday, the Telegraph reported.

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Russia Will Stage World Cup Despite Racist Incidents, FIFA Head Says

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