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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Says BBC Football Hooligan Doc Is 'Assault' on 2018 World Cup

February 17, 2017



French police use tear gas against England supporters in downtown Marseille, France, June 10, 2016.
Darko Bandic / AP

Russia has blasted a British documentary into the country's football hooligans, saying it is an "assault" designed to stop fans from traveling to the 2018 World Cup.

"Russia's Hooligan Army" aired on Britain's BBC Two on Thursday. The film promised viewers, "a shocking look at Russian football firms: from the thugs who terrorized Marseille to the next generation preparing for the 2018 World Cup by arranging brutal forest fights."

Russians interviewed by the filmmakers described English football fans as "the forefathers of [football] hooliganism." Interviewees added that those traveling from England for the games next year would be targeted by Russian thugs.

"For some, it will be a festival of football. For others it will be a festival of violence," one fan said.

In a statement, the Russian embassy in the UK said that the program was an attack on Russia by a government-funded media outlet.

Embed:

> "Russia's hooligan army" on @BBCTwo : not Army or Navy, but football fans to conquer the West. Assault by Govt supported channel vs Russia pic.twitter.com/Glc2lBMKQi
>
> — Russian Embassy, UK (@RussianEmbassy) February 16, 2017

"Based on edited footage of football fans' clashes in Marseille and violent Russian fans, the filmmakers from the government-funded channel did their best to discredit Russia and the forthcoming World Cup," the statement said. "[A] similar campaign was launched prior to the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi."

The Russian Embassy's statement maintained that "ensuring security at the World Cup is a top priority."

A spokesperson for the BBC said that its filmmakers had asked to speak to both the Russian police and the World Cup organizing committee, but saw their requests turned down. "The program spoke with a number of Russian football firms to understand why they behave the way they do, some of which are notorious for their extreme violence, views and organized operations," a spokesperson told The Moscow Times in a statement. "The program highlights the efforts made by the Russian government and police to tackle the violence of these firms. Our request to film with the police was declined and despite efforts to arrange an interview with the 2018 organizing committee to discuss what was being done to tackle the issue, our efforts were unsuccessful."

Related article: Penned In: Russian Police Go After Football Hooligans Ahead of World Cup

Russian football fans have struggled to shake off their reputation for violence since a match against England at last year's Euro 2016 championships erupted into a mass brawl.

At least 36 people were injured in the fighting, including four who were seriously wounded.

European football's governing body UEFA fined the Russian Football Union 150,000 euros ($168,000), and both the English and the Russian teams were handed a "suspended disqualification."

Russia ultimately plunged out of the tournament in the group stages.

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