

# INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS TIMES

## Euro 2016: Top Russian Ultra group trained British neo-Nazis

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Members of a Russian neo-Nazi organisation led by an martial arts champion who has allegedly trained violent skinhead groups throughout Europe have been accused of instigating violence and rioting during Euro 2016 championships in France.

Denis Nikitin is the founder of White Rex, which organises combat training camps for Russian youths and boasts its own clothing range. The group is regarded by experts as a neo-Nazi organisation.

On social media networks the group boasted of the presence of members in Marseille, where highly organised groups of ultra-violent Russian hooligans attacked England fans. The violence left England fan Andrew Bache, 51, with "life changing" injuries and both England and Russia on the verge of expulsion.

In one image posted online a member wearing one of its distinctive t-shirts, many of which contain disguised far right iconography, poses alongside a group of Russian fans holding aloft a St George's Cross banner seized from England fans.

"Their [Russian hooligans'] activities became much more violent in an organised way when Nikitin's crew from 'White Rex' arrived on the scene and took charge of the very well-organised attacks on English fans," according to London based anti-fascism organisation Searchlight.

The group describes "breaking the image of the Russian as a drinker as one of its key goals" and it mocks England fans as drunks insufficiently committed to violence. In images members are pictured in combat training camps in Russian forests, climbing mountains and dancing at punk gigs.

"Under the onslaught of alien propaganda, we – Europeans, have lost the discoverer spirit, the fighter spirit, the Warrior Spirit! One of White Rex's chief goals is to revive that spirit," according to the group's website.

The group was founded and is led by mixed martial arts (MMA) champion Denis Nikitin, who organises MMA tournaments in throughout Europe and Russia. In 2013 the group held a competition in Rome where Nazi war criminal and former SS officer Erich Priebke was the guest of honour, according to Anton Shekhovtsov, an expert on the European far right at the Legatum Institute.

Members of White Rex are believed to have held training camps for British neo-Nazi group Legend in Wales in 2014. Searchlight alleges that Nikitin personally took the sessions, with members of the group also provided combat training for far right activists in European countries including Poland and Italy. Nikitin also allegedly spoke at a meeting of the far right Iona group in London in 2014.

Following a fresh outbreak of violence between England and Russia fans in Lille on Wednesday, the tournament has been marred by the worst violence at a major football completion for years.

Rafal Pankowski, an expert on the Polish far right, warned of the presence of Polish members in France, while Ukrainian hooligans had pledged attacks on Polish fans when the two sides meet in Marseille on 21 June.

He criticised Uefa and French footballing authorities for not implementing a grass roots anti-racism campaign of the kind which saw the Euro 2012 tournament avoid the large scale violence that has plagued this year's contest.

"As far as I know, this year Uefa and Fare just focus on monitoring and punishing incidents at the games. Instead of anti-racist and multicultural education the fans are offered monitoring and repression," said Pankowski, whose Never Again organisation helped coordinate the campaign.

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