

Fans Law Targets Problems Ahead of World Cup

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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MANCHESTER, England — Russia expects to welcome more than a million foreigners to the 2018 World Cup and the "Fans Law" guaranteeing their safety has taken a step closer to the statute books, a top official said Thursday.

Under the proposed law there will be visa-free entry to the country for fans arriving with match tickets and free travel between host cities. New regulations are also being introduced to deal with troublemakers at sporting events in the lead up to the finals.

Two days ago the lower house of the Russian parliament passed a first reading of the so-called Fans Law, which will now go to the upper house before being signed off by President Vladimir Putin later this year.

The law will dictate that public order offenses at stadiums will be punished with a fine of up to 5,000 rubles (\$500) or a 15-day detention.

"Hooliganism is a big concern in Russia and I'm really pleased the Fans Law is being passed to deal with such extreme behavior," Alexander Dzhordzhadze told delegates at the Soccerex Business Forum on Thursday.

"It envisages serious punishments but is just the first step in the process. We are not law enforcers, ... but we are very pleased such steps are being taken to eradicate this evil," added the deputy chief executive of the organizing committee.

Dzhordzhadze was speaking in the absence of his boss Alexei Sorokin, who is meeting Putin on World Cup business in Moscow.

Breaking the rules for fan behavior at matches could mean fines of up to 1,000 rubles or 160 hours of community service and a ban from attending sporting events from between one to six months.

"We want visitors to be treated as kings at our World Cup," Dzhordzhadze said. "We believe that the World Cup, by generating new and safer and beautiful venues, will change our fan culture completely to a family culture and away from elements of a hooligan culture.

"We are talking about extreme elements and you can find them anywhere. We admire the British experience because what you have achieved in England in the past 30 years is a true revolution, seeing stadiums as a place for families rather than as a battleground between two clubs.

"We believe all this can be done within four or five years."

Russian soccer has been blighted by hooliganism and racism for years but Dzhordzhadze said the West's perceptions of the country would change.

He said about 400,000 overseas fans traveled to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

With the Brazil finals next year also being a long way from soccer's power base in Europe, Dzhordzhadze believes that Russia's close proximity to Asia will guarantee many more visitors in 2018, the first European World Cup since Germany in 2006.

He said overseas fans would not need visas if they have match tickets and will be able to travel in and between host cities for free by bus or train.

"The visa agreement is totally unprecedented for Russia," Dzhordzhadze explained. "It didn't come from nowhere.

"It was tested during the Champions League final of 2008 in Moscow and went very smoothly as we dealt with 30,000 fans arriving from England in one day for the match between Manchester United and Chelsea.

"Of course, it will be different in 2018, but by that time hopefully the whole question of visas will be history anyway."

Dzhordzhadze told delegates the perception of Russia as a country based on political corruption and mafia-led crime was wrong.

"The world is imprisoned, if you like, by old clichés," he said. "Before 1991 it was all about the KGB and authoritarian regimes. Now we have a different culture, apparently — oligarchs and uncontrollable rule by tycoons.

"These are just myths and through the World Cup we want to change these perceptions and open up Russia big time. The world will see a different Russia in five years time."

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