

Fatal Street Fight Sparks Ethnic Conflict in Saratov Region

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Television footage showing dozens of young men walking the streets.

A deadly street fight in a central Russian town has exposed smoldering ethnic tensions, with hundreds of locals shouting for resident Chechens to be evicted, and the government reportedly sending in armored personnel carriers filled with police troops to quell the unrest.

A 16-year-old ethnic Chechen fatally stabbed a "local man" with a scalpel outside the Golden Barrel restaurant in the early hours of Sunday morning in the town of Pugachyov in the Saratov region, the regional prosecutor's office said in a statement Monday.

The fight was apparently over a girl and the suspected killer was detained late Sunday, a senior investigator told RIA Novosti.

Russia fought two bloody civil wars in Chechnya in the mid to late 1990s, and many natives of that region fled to other parts of the country. Lingering ethnic tensions, however,

occasionally flare up between North Caucasus natives and Slavic Russians.

The funeral service on Sunday for the deceased, a 20-year-old former paratrooper, was followed

by a mass brawl as hundreds of angry locals marched to a part of town inhabited by an ethnic Chechen diaspora and called for them to be evicted, regional news site Vzglyad-Info reported.

Police were unable to stop the fighting, but a number of people were detained afterward, Councillor Denis Maletin said.

Prosecutors said that the march continued on Monday, but added that "police officers were maintaining public order." In a report about the incident, Russian news network RBC aired a video of armored personnel carriers rolling through the town. It said 600 locals had joined the march.

However, at around 11 p.m. that night another hundred or so people rallied outside a cafe popular among North Caucasus natives and threatened to set fire to it as revenge for Sunday's murder.

Police managed to persuade the protesters who gathered outside the Halal cafe not to take the law into their own hands, Interfax reported Tuesday, citing a police source.

Mikhail Starshinov, first deputy head of the State Duma's committee for affairs of nationalities, on Tuesday asked Russia's top investigator Alexander Bastrykin to take the criminal case into Sunday's murder under his personal control, RIA-Novosti reported, citing the lawmakers' press office.

Starshinov also asked Prosecutor General Yury Chaika, Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsev and FSB chief Alexander Bortnikov to "provide a legal opinion about the actions or inaction" of local authorities and law enforcement agencies "who didn't take sufficient measures to prevent the conflict," the lawmaker said in reference to the rallies that followed Sunday's murder.

Material from The Moscow Times is included in this report.

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