Analyses OSW

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Explosion of ethnically-motivated violence in Moscow

At the beginning of December, the centre of Moscow saw a number of illegal demonstrations by several thousand supporters of the Moscow Spartak football club and members of nationalist organisations, after the death on 6 December of a Spartak fan during a brawl with residents of the South Caucasian republics. The demonstrations, and the murders of immigrants in Moscow which followed them, show the scale of the xenophobic mood in Russia, as well as the government's ineffectiveness and sometimes total lack of will to combat this phenomenon.

Many representatives of nationalist organisations participated in the 6 December demonstration, including the Movement Against illegal Migration and the Slavic Alliance. The aggressive participants shouted slogans along the lines of "Russia for the Russians", and attacked people of non-Slavic appearance. The militia arrested 60 of the most aggressive participants, but they were released the next day. In the next few days two immigrants (a Kyrgyz and an Azeri) were murdered in Moscow and many were beaten up. Nationalist groups have been mobilising online, inciting reprisals against immigrants. Similarly extreme expressions have appeared on Caucasian online forums, although reports that mass retaliations are being organised in Moscow have not been confirmed.

The basis for these acts of xenophobic violence is the anti-immigration sentiments which are widespread in Russian society, and which are encouraged by ultra-rightist organisations. Despite repeated announcements that the guilty will be punished, the government has been ineffective at combating crime with a nationalistic background. <JR>