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June 9, 2020

For the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, xenophobia and related intolerance

Brief on anti-Semitic incidents and other forms of racism and intolerance related to COVID-19 in Russia

The outbreak of Covid-19 has caused a rise of xenophobia around the globe, including Russia. In Russia, during the first phase of the pandemic, the group most exposed to discrimination were people associated with China or the Chinese descent. In the later stadium of the lockdown, the attention shifted to the migrants, especially from Central Asia. Acts of vandalism of antisemitic character were also noted.

Anti-Chinese incidents

Since February, an increasing amount of attacks and racist comments against the Asians in relation to Covid-19 have been reported.¹ It has been widely observed in the social media and on the streets, both from random passer-bys² and organized groups in different cities.³ At the beginning of the pandemic, public officials and media actively commented that the virus is ethnically-oriented and targets only the Chinese.

In February, there were cases of raids organized by Cossack patrols on the largest market in Yekaterinburg in the Sem Klyuchey micro-district, where many people from China live. The patrols "checked for coronavirus" only visitors from Asian countries. According to the chieftain of the non-profit partnership "Ural Cossacks" Gennady Kovalev, similar patrols took to the streets of Ryazan and Tula.⁴

Also, in February, MosGorTrans' (a state-owned company operating public transport in Moscow and the Moscow region) employees received instructions to call the police if the Chinese used the public transport. The company explained that by safety and comfort in the public transport.⁵ The monitoring of people of Chinese descent has appeared also in the Moscow Metro; they were arbitrarily stopped every time they tried to take a subway and subsequently surveyed about the date and the purpose of arrival, place of actual residence, their state of health, whether they were quarantined, and whether they plan to leave Moscow in the next 15

¹ SOVA, Russian Nationalism and Xenophobia. Summary of March 2020, <https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/publications/2020/04/d42254/>

² Lenta.ru, «I'm being called " Coronavirus! " - as if this is my middle name ". How Russians fear the coronavirus and who they blame for their fear (RU), <https://lenta.ru/articles/2020/03/29/racism/>

³ Ura.ru, In KMAO the coughing Chinese were thrown away from the bus, <https://ura.news/news/1052419155>, Znak, In Yekaterinburg the pensioners did not let the Chinese citizens to the bus, https://www.znak.com/2020-02-07/v_ekaterinburge_pensionerki_pytalys_ne_pustit_v_zonu_karantina_avtobus_s_grazhdanami_knr, KavkazRealii, The Chinese were prohibited to enter the restaurant in Mahachkala, <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/30411619.html>

⁴ SOVA, Nationalism and Xenophobia in February 2020, <https://www.sova-center.ru/en/xenophobia/news-releases/>

⁵ DW, MosGorTrans demands to inform the police about the Chinese in public transport, <https://www.dw.com/ru/мосгортранс-требуется-сообщать-полиции-о-китайцах-в-общественном-транспорте/a-52438056>

days.⁶ In February, Moscow officials also ordered police raids of hotels, dormitories, apartment buildings and businesses to track down the shrinking number of Chinese people remaining in the city. During some raids the police forced the Chinese into the quarantine regardless the time they arrived to Russia.⁷ They also authorised the use of facial recognition technology to find those suspected of evading a 14-day self-quarantine period upon their arrival in Russia.⁸

All these measures, targeting the Chinese nationals have been racial profiling, and not an effective epidemic control strategy.

Antisemitic incident

In Arkhangelsk, on the night of April 12-13, 2020, an unidentified person set the fire to the Jewish cultural center and the synagogue 'Star of the North'. There were no injured since the synagogue was closed due to the quarantine. Nevertheless, the material damage was significant. It was the third attack on the synagogue since its building in 2015. In all of the cases, the police has not managed to find the criminals.⁹

The conspiracy theories on coronavirus are also quite wide-spread in Russia, blaming inter alia Jews in creation and spread of the virus.

Anti-migrants incidents and hate speech

Migrants constitute a significant part of the Russian society, whose number reaches several millions. Xenophobia towards the migrants, primary from Central Asian countries (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan) is already long present in the Russia. However, the pandemic and the restriction that it has brought made it even more wide-spread.¹⁰

A significant part of the migrant workers had no possibility to return to their countries of origin due to the closure of borders, thereby they were forced to stay in Russia, often without work and social protection.¹¹ With the development of the pandemic, the wave of increased xenophobia has shifted into their direction. Mass media and social portals publish numerous materials spreading the hate speech towards migrants and even of calls to deport or attack them.¹²

One of the most common reaction was the concern that the immigrants left without income would massively attack the Russians and take money and food from them. As the Fergana.ru, international news agency summed up, the typical headings of such publications are: 'Question of the day: how dangerous are unemployed migrants?' , 'Famine, theft and suicide: what coronavirus has brought migrants to' , 'Migrants shots in Moscow: black masks, large groups' , 'Millions of migrants threaten Russians with coronavirus rebellion'. Under publications in popular in Russia messenger Telegram, appeared numerous comments

⁶ MBH-media, The Chinese in the Moscow metro will be questioned. They will be asked about the symptoms of SARS, <https://mbk-news.appspot.com/news/simptom-y-orvi/>

⁷ Interfax, The foreigners are deported from Moscow for violation of quarantine, <https://www.interfax.ru/moscow/697140>

⁸ South China Morning Post, Chinese Targeted in Russia as coronavirus fears spread, <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/russia-central-asia/article/3051964/chinese-targeted-russia-raids-coronavirus-fears>

⁹ Ria News, Yuri Kanner commented on the arson of the synagogue in Arkhangelsk, <https://ria.ru/20200413/1569986258.html>

¹⁰ Modern Diplomacy, What Effect Will the Coronavirus Pandemic Have on Migration Issues?, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/05/23/what-effect-will-the-coronavirus-pandemic-have-on->

¹¹ Open Democracy, Russia's labour migrants are caught between poverty and a pandemic, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/russia-labour-migrants-covid19/>, Population and Economics, Coronavirus pandemic challenges migrants worldwide and in Russia, <https://populationandconomics.pensoft.net/article/53201>, HRW, Covid-19 Fueling Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia Worldwide, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/12/covid-19-fueling-anti-asian-racism-and-xenophobia-worldwide?>

¹² Radio Sputnik, The virus of radicalism. How the extremists took advantage of the pandemic. An interview with A. Verkhovsky from the Sova Centre, <https://radiosputnik.ria.ru/20200517/1571576679.html>,

spreading hatred and even calls for reprisals against them.¹³ Due to lockdown, the majority of xenophobic activities became online.

Russian nationalists have been spreading fake rumors of robberies carried out by "hungry migrants" from Central Asia (including via the Tsargrad television channel). As a corollary, groups including Conservative Yekaterinburg and the Nation and Freedom Committee have been calling for Russians to arm themselves.¹⁴

In May, anti-migrant publications continued to be disseminated on nationalist sites about robberies and murders, e.g. about "guest workers' gangs" operating in various parts of Moscow. Petitions demanding tightening of the migration regime began to appear on far-right resources. The National Democratic Party (NDP) published a petition "We will protect the labor market and security for Russian citizens!" with proposals to deport migrants who have lost their jobs and introduce visas with countries in Central Asia. For the immediate deportation of all jobless migrants, the famous Orthodox nationalist Konstantin Malofeev also spoke out. The Russian Corps organization in Volgograd promised "in the event of a deterioration in the situation with the number of migrant attacks" on local residents, "put our squad on the streets of our glorious city.»¹⁵ Among those who shared fears of increased crime by migrants, there were even state officials.¹⁶

The growth of crimes committed by foreign citizens were demented by the Ministry of the Interior. ¹⁷ Meanwhile, criminality among migrants in Moscow has even decreased over the past months.¹⁸

Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs also spreads information about the possibility of increase of criminality and extremist behavior among migrants. It also underlines the possibility of increasing xenophobia towards migrants as a result of the above-mentioned factors, but it does not show specific agencies and activities that could improve the situation.¹⁹ Together with that it is known that as least 5 persons have been brought to administrative liability due to hate speech in social media against Chinese, Russian and persons from Central Asia.

¹³ Fergana News, Search and wait for victim near hypermarket using carsharing cars, <https://fergana.news/articles/117596/>

¹⁴ SOVA, Russian Nationalism and Xenophobia in April 2020, <https://www.sova-center.ru/en/xenophobia/news-releases/2020/05/d42366/>

¹⁵ SOVA, Russian Nationalism and Xenophobia in May 2020, <https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/publications/2020/06/d42484/>

¹⁶ Fergana News, Search and wait for victim near hypermarket using carsharing cars, <https://fergana.news/articles/117596/>

¹⁷ Echo of Moscow, The Ministry of Internal Affairs does not observe an increase in the number of crimes committed by foreign citizens, https://echo.msk.ru/news/2630274-echo.html?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter

¹⁸ MSK Agency Sergei Sobyenin: Crime among migrants in Moscow has decreased over the past three months, <https://www.mskagency.ru/materials/2999539>

¹⁹ NG, The authorities predict the growth of crime among migrant workers, http://www.ng.ru/politics/2020-04-27/1_7854_migrants.html, MK, Coronavirus triggered xenophobia explosion: migrants take away jobs from local, <https://www.mk.ru/social/2020/05/20/koronavirus-vyzval-vzryv-ksenofobii-migranty-otbirayut-rabotu-u-mestnykh.html>