

Zhukov Defends Olympics Venue

November 28, 2010

The  Moscow Times

BELGRADE — Georgia's proposal to move the 2014 Winter Olympic Games from Sochi is unacceptable and represents meddling in the affairs of the Olympic movement, Alexander Zhukov, Russia's top Olympics official, said Friday.

"It is completely unacceptable for politicians or governments to interfere with the business of the Olympic movement," Zhukov, a deputy prime minister and head of Russia's Olympic Committee, said on the sidelines of a meeting of the European Olympic Committees in Belgrade.

Russia fought a brief war with Georgia in 2008 that resulted in the rebel regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia breaking away from Georgia. Russia has recognized their independence, but the international community regards them as Georgian territory.

Tension between Russia and Georgia has run high since the war. Earlier this month, Georgia asked the International Olympic Committee to reconsider holding the Winter Olympics in Sochi, near the border with Abkhazia.

Zhukov said the move "goes against the spirit of the Olympic charter, which is above politics"

and that Sochi was democratically chosen as the venue.

"Russia has good sporting relations with Georgia, and we will support their bid to host the 2015 European Youth Olympic Festival, a decision which is due to be announced tomorrow," he said. "We do not support the statement of the [Georgian] government, but we support the Olympic Committee of Georgia."

The Northern Caucasus is a flashpoint where Islamic insurgents want to carve out a separate state, and earlier this month a bomb exploded on a rail line in the Sochi area.

In May, President Dmitry Medvedev ordered tighter security at the 2014 Winter Olympics. Zhukov said the security remained the organizers' top priority.

"The investigation of this case is under way and ... the safety of all visitors is of vital importance for our security services," he said.

Zhukov also said Russia's Olympic Committee wanted to improve on its poor performance at the 2010 Games in Vancouver, when the country's athletes earned three gold medals, the worst-ever result after the breakup of the Soviet Union. "We are going to win in Sochi," he said.

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