World Champion Soviet Gymnast Says Russia Denied Her Citizenship

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Former Soviet Olympic gymnastics champion Maria Filatova has said Russia has denied her application for citizenship, leaving her without a passport from any country.

Filatova, who won gold medals at the 1976 and 1980 Olympic games as part of the Soviet Union team, emigrated to the United States in 1996. She has received U.S. residency but is not an American citizen, International Gymnast magazine reported in an [article](#) published Wednesday.

Filatova said the Russian government denied her request for citizenship in 2006, citing a "lack of merit" in her application.

Last month, Federal Migration Service head Konstantin Romodanovsky said there are no grounds for Filatova to receive a Russian passport, RIA-Novosti reported. A migration service spokeswoman told the news agency that people living permanently in Russia can apply to the service for citizenship, but that foreign residents must request a passport at a Russian consulate.

Filatova, who runs a gymnastics club in Rochester, New York, told International Gymnast that she does not want to move back to Russia but wishes simply to visit. Her mother and brother have died in recent years and she was not able to attend their funerals.

The State Duma Committee on Physical Culture, Sport and Youth is currently examining the case, the International Gymnast article said.

"It's so much easier to become an Olympic champion than to get a Russian passport," Filatova told the magazine.

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