

Sprinter Denies Podium Kiss Was Meant to Back Gay Rights

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A Russian athlete denied Tuesday that she had intended to show her disapproval of her country's "anti-gay propaganda" law when she kissed a teammate on the lips on the winners' podium at the Moscow world championships.

Ksenia Ryzhova said she was insulted that the Russian 4x400m relay team's victory celebrations on Saturday had been overshadowed by speculation in the Western media that the kiss with Yulia Gushchina had been intended as a protest.

"There was no hidden political motive," she said of the kiss, shown by television channels around the world.

"Instead of congratulating the athletes, they [the press] decided to insult not only Yulia but the whole [Russian] athletics federation. First of all, both Yulia and I are married," she said to applause from Russian journalists.

The law against spreading "gay propaganda" among minors is part of the conservative course Vladimir Putin has charted in his third term as president, following protests against his 13-year rule of Russia.

It has been widely condemned abroad, but opinion polls show a vast majority of Russians support it.

Despite calls from gay rights groups for a boycott of Russia's hosting of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, some Russian athletes have defended the law.

World champion pole vaulter Yelena Isinbayeva suggested in a statement to the media, which she later distanced herself from, that there were no homosexuals in "normal" Russia.

She also said two Swedish competitors who painted their fingernails with rainbow colors in support of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) rights had been disrespectful to her homeland.

Ryzhova said she and the other three members of the Russian relay team had been overjoyed by their success in narrowly defeating the U.S. team on Saturday.

"For eight years, we have not won a gold medal. You can't even imagine what it was like ... when we understood that we'd won," she said.

"It was a wave of unbelievable feelings and if somehow, completely by chance, while we were congratulating each other, our lips touched ... whoever fantasizes about that is sick."

Gushchina and Ryzhova declined to comment on the law, saying they had been too busy preparing for the world championships to think much about it.

"I have not heard or read [about it] because of the world championships," Gushchina told journalists.

Putin critics say the law is one of a string of repressive measures introduced by the former KGB spy in the first year of his third presidential term to clamp down on dissent.

The president denies cracking down on opponents and has said Russia needs order and discipline. But the criticism has overshadowed preparations for the Sochi Olympics — a top priority for Putin, who wants it to show Russia as a modern state with top-notch infrastructure.

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