

Bach to Make First Trip to Sochi as IOC President

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A general view showing the city center of the sports resort of Rosa Khutor, a venue for the Sochi Winter Olympics. **Maxim Shemetov**

LONDON — Thomas Bach will make his first trip to Sochi as IOC president later this month, visiting the Russian city that will host the 2014 Winter Olympics in February.

Bach will attend the Sport and Environment Conference in Sochi from Oct. 30 to Nov. 1, the IOC told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

The trip will give him the chance to check up firsthand on preparations for the games and hold talks with organizers and government officials.

Bach singled out Sochi as a top priority after his election last month as International Olympic Committee president.

Within minutes of the Sept. 10 vote in Buenos Aires, Bach received a phone call from President

Vladimir Putin, who promised to collaborate closely with the IOC to ensure the success of the games.

It is not yet known if Putin will be in Sochi for Bach's visit, but the president goes there frequently and considers the Olympics a matter of personal and national pride.

Bach has been to Sochi before when he was chairman of the IOC evaluation commission during the bidding for the 2002 Winter Olympics. Sochi failed to make the list of finalists for those games, which were awarded to Salt Lake City.

Bach traveled to Greece for the ceremonial lighting of the Olympic flame Sept. 29. The flame arrived Sunday in Moscow, where it was greeted by Putin for the start of the 65,000-kilometer torch relay through Russia ahead of the opening ceremony in the Black Sea resort on Feb. 7.

The buildup to the Olympics has been overshadowed by Western criticism of a recently enacted Russian law outlawing the promotion of gay "propaganda" among minors, an issue that has raised concerns about the conditions for athletes and spectators.

Bach said during his trip to Ancient Olympia for the flame-lighting ceremony that he had discussed the matter with Russian officials and received fresh assurances that there would be no discrimination at the games.

The German said the IOC's task was to ensure compliance with the Olympic Charter, which prohibits discrimination of any kind at the games.

The IOC has also warned athletes that the charter prohibits them from making any political gestures or protests.

"As a sports organization we have to protect the athletes," Bach, a former Olympic fencing gold medalist, told the Russian agency R-Sport in Greece at the flame ceremony. "And having been an athlete myself, I know the last thing you want to be drawn into during the Olympic Games are political controversies. ... It is our task to protect the Olympic village. It cannot be a marketplace for demonstrations for all potential issues."

Bach is scheduled to travel to Monaco next week for the Sportel media convention. The IOC said trips to Beijing; 2018 Winter Games host city Pyeongchang, South Korea; and 2020 Summer Olympics host, Tokyo, are planned at the end of November.

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