

Boxing Champion Klitschko Announces Bid for Ukraine Presidency

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Klitschko speaking to the media and supporters.

World boxing champion and head of the Ukrainian opposition party Udar (Punch), Vitaly Klitschko, has announced he will run for the country's highest office during the presidential election in 2015.

"To put an end to all speculation and attempts to dispose of me as a possible candidate I want to announce that I am running for president," Klitschko said in a speech to the parliament on Thursday, Kommersant reported.

The public announcement was the first time Klitschko confirmed long running suspicions he would launch a bid for the post.

Following the announcement, political rivals were quick to discredit Klitschko's candidacy on account of his German residency.

Leader of the ruling Party of the Regions Alexander Yefremov said high-ranking state officials

such as Klitschko should not be allowed to live and pay taxes abroad while taking advantage of their native country's social benefits, Interfax reported Thursday.

On Wednesday, the parliament amended the country's tax code in order to deprive Ukrainian nationals of their citizenship if they reside in another country. The bill would bar Klitschko from running for president because the country's constitution demands that a presidential candidate live in Ukraine for ten years prior to election day.

Klitschko, however, dismissed the criticism and said the amendment had a "political context."

"I have been a Ukrainian citizen from the moment our state was established and I will always be one. But now they are trying to ban me from the presidential election, using a clause in the tax code they are basically trying to deprive me of my Ukrainian citizenship. It is nonsense and blatant trickery. It won't work!" Klitschko told parliament Thursday.

Some analysts say Klitschko's moderate views could sway Russian-speaking voters, who constitute a significant part of incumbent president Viktor Yanukovich's core electorate, making Klitschko a force to be reckoned with in the upcoming election.

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