

EU Commissioner Joins Sochi Olympics Snub

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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LAUSANNE, Switzerland — European Union commissioner Viviane Reding will not go to the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics in February over what she said was Russia's treatment of minorities, joining German President Joachim Gauck in a snub to the host nation.

"I will certainly not go to Sochi as long as minorities are treated the way they are under the current Russian legislation," Reding, EU Commissioner for Justice, Citizenship and Fundamental Rights, said in a tweet on Tuesday.

While it was unclear whether Reding had been invited or would have gone as an EU representative or a private citizen, her decision openly to oppose Russia's recent legislation was the most vocal statement by a politician to date.

Russia has been under mounting criticism over its human rights record especially after passing an anti-gay propaganda law earlier this year that critics say curtails the rights

of gays.

On Sunday, German president Gauck became the first European head of state to announce he would not be attending the Games at the Russian Black Sea resort.

He did not, however, say why he would not be attending, but his decision was instantly welcomed as a "wonderful gesture" by several human rights groups as well as the German government's human rights commissioner, Markus Loening.

But IOC President Thomas Bach said: "These kind of invitations are invitations from governments to governments, and it is not up to the IOC to interfere with government relations."

Asked whether he was disappointed by Gauck's decision, Bach, also a German, played down his decision not to attend.

"On a personal note I know President Gauck is a very straightforward man. If his decision would have any political motivation, he would have said this," he said.

Bach suggested it was protocol reasons that prevented Gauck from traveling to Russia as he had yet to visit the country officially.

"He cannot travel to the country without an earlier state visit. I know him a little bit. He knows how to use the words, and if he had something to say he would have said it."

Preparations for Russia's first Winter Olympics, which are expected to cost more than \$50 billion, have been overshadowed by the controversy triggered by the law as well as the arrests of Greenpeace protesters and members of punk protest band Pussy Riot.

President Vladimir Putin has said several times that gay athletes were welcome in Russia and that no discrimination would be tolerated. He has said the law is needed to protect young people.

Russia also faces security challenges as Sochi is next to the restive North Caucasus region, which is disrupted by almost daily violence from an Islamist insurgency rooted in two Chechen wars.

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