

Obama's Sochi No-Show Means Nothing, Russian Official Says

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The decisions by U.S. President Barack Obama and several other world leaders not to attend February's Winter Olympics in Sochi do not represent a boycott and will have no bearing on the Games, Russian Olympic Committee head Alexander Zhukov said Tuesday.

Obama and French President Francois Hollande have both declined to attend, while German President Joachim Gauck is staying away reportedly in protest of alleged human rights violations in Russia.

"The point is the competition and not that 20 or 30 leaders come to the opening ceremony," said Zhukov, a former deputy prime minister and a close ally of President Vladimir Putin.

"Obama cannot come? Well, he has not been to a single Games during his time in the presidency. It does not reflect on the quality of the Games in any way."

"Regarding a boycott, I have not heard a single announcement about that. No-one is discussing that seriously, neither at the IOC [International Olympic Committee], nor at government level."

Zhukov's comments are apparently the first time a senior Russian official has addressed the issue.

The U.S. presidential delegation was announced last week and includes two openly gay athletes, former tennis champion Billie Jean King and hockey player Caitlin Cahow, in what has been widely seen as a protest against Russian laws banning "propaganda" of homosexuality toward minors.

The Sochi Games runs from Feb. 7 to 23 and will be the first Olympics to be held in Russia since 1980 in Moscow, which the U.S. boycotted.

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