

World Skiing Chief Calls Sochi 2014 Price Tag 'Bad Example'

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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BERLIN — The \$50-billion price tag for the Sochi Olympics is a "bad example" for future candidate cities but Russia's first Winter Games will be secure despite mounting safety concerns, international skiing chief Gian-Franco Kasper said Friday.

The Swiss sports administrator, who has been critical of the Sochi Games in the past, said such investment in the two-week event and in related infrastructure projects would scare off traditional winter sports nations and damage the brand.

"It is an enormous cost. It could be that Sochi is more expensive than Beijing 2008, which was the much bigger summer Games," International Skiing Federation (FIS) president Kasper said in a telephone interview.

Beijing cost an estimated \$40 billion, though the exact cost of staging the Summer Games in China is not known.

"Those costs in Sochi are enormous and a bad example for future candidates. Most nations cannot afford it. Switzerland, France could never afford such amounts. Particularly for Winter Games," the 69-year-old Kasper said.

President Vladimir Putin has staked his personal political prestige on staging a successful Olympics, which officials said would cost \$50 billion.

In a separate interview with Swiss state broadcaster SRF, Kasper said 1/3 of the Sochi spending disappeared because of corruption, alleging that contracts were given to a "construction mafia" of businessmen closely linked to the Kremlin and Putin.

He said the 1/3 figure for corrupt spending is "what everybody says in Russia" and is not based on inside knowledge or evidence.

Kasper did praise Russia's ability to construct an entire industry out of the ground and surrounding mountains in less than a decade.

"We have to see that what we did in the Alps, we needed 150 years, and they had to do it in five years. If you see that then it shocks you," he said.

"But the Games will be terrific and we will have the most modern venues you can imagine. The expectations are good."

He also said that despite recent suicide bomb attacks in the southern city of Volgograd that killed 34 people, Sochi will be secure for athletes and visitors, though the atmosphere may suffer.

"The big thing with security for all events in the mountain area is that they [organizers] cut the number of spectators by almost 50 percent in the past two years. That of course makes it very difficult and really does not help to create a special atmosphere," he said.

The Games open Feb. 7 in the Black Sea resort on the western edge of the Caucasus Mountains, where insurgents want to carve out an Islamic state.

Russian forces have gone on combat alert this week in Sochi and about 37,000 personnel are now in place to provide security at the Games.

"I am convinced Sochi will be the safest place in the world during the Olympics," Kasper said.

"We know they [authorities] will be bureaucratic, not very flexible and then there is the language barrier. But we know that we need security. We know there is a terrorism problem not only in Russia but all over the world."

He said the atmosphere in the venues could be affected by the local fans' lack of deep interest for winter sports other than ice hockey.

"We know we might have a problem with ambiance because the Games are in an area where there are not really winter sports."

But he was quick to shrug off the absence of American skier Lindsey Vonn, whose withdrawal

with an injury has deprived the Sochi Games of arguably the most famous face in the blue riband event of Alpine skiing.

"We have of course some top starts that are missing but after the Games we have new winners and no one will talk about anyone else," Kasper said.

Material from The Associated Press is included in this report.

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