

# Putin Uses Olympics Cash to Start Soviet-Style Fitness Program

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**The**  **Moscow Times**

President Vladimir Putin launched a program to improve the physical fitness of Russians on Monday, using funds from the Winter Olympics to revive a Soviet-era plan.

Speaking at a meeting with officials in the Kremlin, Putin said that reinstating the plan, first introduced in the 1930s under Stalin and known in Russia by the acronym GTO, would "pay homage to our national historical traditions."

Putin said funds earmarked for the Winter Games in Sochi last month but unused would go to support sports venues and promote healthy lifestyles among Russians from the age of 6.

"The Olympics and Paralympics have demonstrated that we are again becoming one of the leaders in global sports," Putin said, after his country hosted the \$50 billion Games.

Putin frequently harks back to the Soviet era to appeal to nostalgic Russians.

The end of the Winter Olympic Games and the Paralympics in Sochi were marred by events

in Ukraine which led to Russia's annexation of its Crimea region in a move condemned by the West and the new government in Kiev.

The U.S. and European Union have imposed sanctions on Russia over the move but it has boosted Putin's popularity at home, where almost half of Russians said they supported the referendum to make Crimea part of Russia, according to a poll by the independent Levada Center published earlier this month.

Putin's own approval ratings were at 72 percent, up from 65 percent at the beginning of the year, according to another poll published by Levada this month.

The president has been seeking to increase Russians' life expectancy and stem a demographic decline that has seen the population fall to below 142 million in 2011 from 148.6 million in 1991, the year the Soviet Union collapsed.

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