

Russia Looks Ahead to 2018 World Cup

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RIO DE JANEIRO — Russia's sports minister says the conflict in Ukraine will not affect the next World Cup football tournament, to be hosted by Russia in four years.

Vitaly Mutko, who is also the local organizing committee chairman and a FIFA board member, said he did not foresee "any major issues" for the tournament in Russia and pledged that the national team would improve its game after this year's dismal performance.

Ukraine Crisis

The Ukraine conflict "will not influence preparations for the World Cup at all," Mutko said in Rio de Janeiro on Saturday at a briefing on Russia's \$20 billion project to host the next World Cup.

Tensions between Russia and Ukraine could persist for much longer, however, even if a cease-fire is soon reached.

If Ukraine qualifies for the next World Cup, it could be drawn in a group with Russia, which is automatically seeded as host.

World Cup host city Rostov-on-Don is about 160 kilometers from the current conflict in Donetsk. Sochi also faces the Crimean peninsula across the Black Sea.

Racism

While the World Cup in Russia is expected to be ready quicker and with less drama than FIFA saw in Brazil, incidents of racism and fan disorder are also a concern.

FIFA vice president Jeffrey Webb said this month his discrimination task force viewed Russia as a bigger challenge than Brazil.

Mutko said the problems with fan groups in Russian team matches were not worse than other countries.

"It is a whole subculture, and you just have to deal with it," he said. "The World Cup is something different. We should not mix the two things up."

A Better Team

Mutko also vowed that the Russian national team would improve its game after failing to advance beyond the group stages at this year's tournament.

"We can follow the example of the Sochi Olympics, where we had good results," state media outlet ITAR-Tass quoted him as saying.

Modern Games

Rostov-on-Don and Sochi are among 11 host cities which Putin's government is seeking to modernize with new stadiums and other infrastructure projects.

One of the biggest challenges is providing accommodation outside the main cities of Moscow, St. Petersburg, Sochi and Kazan.

"In some cities we will need to do a lot more with the help of investors," Mutko said, adding that Russia hopes to welcome one million international visitors for the month-long tournament.

Visa-Free Travel

In a move to make Russia's newly modernized football infrastructure foreign-traveler friendly, President Vladimir Putin announced on Friday that fans will be able to travel to Russia before and during the 2018 World Cup visa free, ITAR-Tass reported.

Entry visas would also be waived for players, team personnel and other foreign staff that are traveling to Russia for the tournament, Putin said. (*AP, MT*)

See also:

[Putin Says Fans Won't Need Visas to Attend 2018 World Cup in Russia](https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/07/13/russia-looks-ahead-to-2018-world-cup-a37252)

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