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Russian Lawmaker Unimpressed With Absentee Football Coach Capello

By Gabrielle Tetrault-Farber

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Russia's national football team coach Fabio Capello attends a news conference after training at Friends Arena in Stockholm, Oct. 8, 2014.

Outspoken lawmaker Vladimir Zhirinovsky suggested that Fabio Capello, coach of Russia's national football team, should consider resigning in light of the Italian's failure to attend Monday's State Duma committee meeting on preparations for the 2018 World Cup.

The head of the Duma's committee on physical education, sports and youth, Igor Ananskikh, had invited Capello to participate in Monday's meeting, where lawmakers mulled over the legal framework underpinning the country's preparations to host the tournament.

But the 68-year-old coach chose not to attend, sparking the ire of his detractors among Russian parliamentarians.

At Monday's meeting, Zhirinovsky — the flamboyant leader of the nationalist LDPR party —

said that resignation would be the appropriate next step. "The whole country has the right to hear the head coach," Zhirinovsky said, the TASS news agency reported. "But he doesn't care about us. Coaches resign in these situations."

Zhirinovsky's comments surfaced amid a wave of discontent with the coach following the Russian squad's dismal performance at the World Cup in Brazil this year, when the team was eliminated at the group stage without winning a single match.

Following the team's disappointing draw to a weaker Moldovan squad in a Euro-2016 qualifying match earlier this month, Russian Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko said that he was "not pleased" with the Russian side's performance and that he would summon Capello to discuss the situation.

Still, after Team Russia's early exit from the World Cup, Mutko said Russia would honor Capello's contract, which comes to an end after the country hosts the 2018 World Cup.

Mutko also jumped to Capello's defense with regard to legislators' expectations that the Duma "was not an appropriate forum for the coach to speak about the sport," in comments carried by the RBC news site.

Despite officials' vows that Russia remains committed to Capello, TASS reported earlier this month that the Russian Football Federation had not paid the coach for the past four months and now owed him some 250 million rubles ($5.9 million).

Capello's agent, his son Pier Filippo Capello, said that his father did not want to "fight" with the Russian Football Union and that he believed the issue would be settled in a "friendly manner."

Nikolai Tolstykh, the head of the Russian Football Union, said Capello — who was reportedly the highest paid coach at the World Cup with an annual salary of more than $11 million, according to Forbes — would be paid as soon as the federation receives funds from its sponsors, Interfax reported Monday.

Tolstykh also said that the union was grappling with other organizational issues, including its realization that some foreign players in the Russian Premier League were in the country on tourist visas, the terms of which forbid holders from working in the country, Lenta.ru reported Monday.

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