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Putin Denounces WADA Calls for Russian Olympic Ban as 'Political'

By The Moscow Times

July 19, 2016



Kremlin Press Service

Russian President Vladimir Putin has claimed that calls to ban Russia from the upcoming Olympic Games on doping charges represent a "dangerous slide towards political interference in sport," the Kremlin said in a statement Monday.

His comments followed a report by an independent World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) commission which found that Russia's Sports Ministry and intelligence services ran an elaborate doping program at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.

WADA has since called for the entire Russian squad to be barred from participating in the Olympics.

The commission, headed by independent Canadian expert Richard McLaren, investigated allegations made by the former head of the Moscow anti-doping lab, Grigory

Rodchenkov. In an interview with the New York Times in May, Rodchenkov claimed that the government had sponsored an elaborate scheme to cover the use of performance-enhancing drugs by Russian athletes at Sochi.

Putin claimed that the doping allegations stemmed from "one man with a scandalous reputation" and called on "a more complete and more objective WADA commission, the findings of which can then be examined by Russian legal specialists."

The president stressed there was no place for doping in sport and that all individuals directly implicated in using drugs should be temporarily suspended until an investigation in concluded.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov also said Tuesday that Russia's Minister for Sport Vitaly Mutko would remain in his post. The WADA report was damning of Mutko's role in the scandal, maintaining that "inconceivable that Mutko was not aware of the doping cover-up."

Russia's Olympic Committee expressed its "total disagreement" with WADA's call for a blanket ban on all Russian athletes, arguing that hundreds of "clean" athletes would miss their chance to compete.

"The Olympic Committee of Russia fully supports using the harshest punishments against those who use banned substances," the committee said in a statement on their website.

Russia's Minister for Economic Development, Alexey Uliukaev, also described WADA's position as an attack on the principle of personal responsibility, RIA reported.

"There can be no collective responsibility. If an individual is guilty of an offense then they must answer for it. You cannot answer for what you have not done," he said.

"It's a completely unjustified move. It certainly reflects a certain political motivation."

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