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Putin Prepares 'Tough Response' to Olympic Ban

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Fedor Uspensky / TASS

President Vladimir Putin will use Russia's possible ban from next year's Olympic Games as evidence of Western antagonism in the run-up to the 2018 presidential campaign.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is expected to decide Tuesday whether to allow Russia to compete in the 2018 games in South Korea, following long-running allegations of state-sponsored doping.

Russian officials continue to deny that they ran a state-wide doping program, despite evidence provided by a whistleblower who claims he was involved in the scheme. In the past month, the IOC has stripped more than a dozen Russian athletes of their 2014 Sochi Olympics medals due to doping violations.

Three more athletes received bans from the IOC on Friday, with more hearings planned in the coming weeks.

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While there is still a chance that Russia will be able to participate in next year's Olympics, the "situation is difficult," a senior government official was quoted as saying by opposition-leaning Dozhd television channel.

If Russia is allowed to take part, its athletes may be forced to compete under a neutral flag and may have to sit out on the opening ceremony.

The Kremlin is preparing a "tough response" to the IOC decision as part of Putin's presidential campaign strategy, sources close to the presidential administration told opposition-leaning Dozhd television channel Friday.

Putin previously said that the doping scandal was instigated by the United States in an attempt to influence Russia's presidential elections scheduled for March 2018.

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