

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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