The Moscow Times
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Russian, Belarusian Gymnasts to Return to International Competitions

By AFP

July 20, 2023



Russian gymnast Alexandra Skubova at the Gazprom Cup of Champions named after Alina Kabaeva in Moscow. **Sergei Kiselev / Moskva News Agency**

Russian and Belarusian gymnasts will be allowed to compete in international competitions as "individual neutral athletes" from Jan. 1, the sport's governing body said.

In March 2022, gymnasts from both countries were banned from taking part in international competitions in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) said in a statement on Wednesday that it had authorized "the participation of athletes and support personnel of Russian and Belarusian sporting nationality in FIG sanctioned events listed on the FIG Calendar as 'individual neutral athletes'."

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The gymnasts will be readmitted from the beginning of 2024, but they will not be allowed to have any association with Russia or Belarus or their national sporting bodies, the FIG said.

"By accepting Russian and Belarusian gymnasts to participate in competitions as independent neutral athletes, the FIG is ensuring that the rights of all athletes are respected and is sending a message to the world that Gymnastics is seeking peace," said the body's president, Morinari Watanabe.

But the gymnasts' participation in next year's Olympic Games in Paris remains a matter for the International Olympic Committee to decide, the FIG said.

The IOC has said it wants to reintegrate Russians and Belarusians into world sport under a neutral banner.

But with one year to go until the Games, international sporting groups are split on the issue.

Athletics and swimming federations have said they will continue to exclude Russian and Belarusian athletes, while judo and fencing associations have already announced their return.

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