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Sanctioned Sports Minister Degtyaryov Named Russia's New Olympics Chief

By AFP

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Mikhail Degtyaryov. **Yuri Kochetkov / EPA / TASS**

Russian Sports Minister Mikhail Degtyaryov was named the country's new Olympics chief, authorities announced Friday.

Degtyaryov, a member of the right-wing Liberal Democratic Party, was elected head of the Russian Olympic Committee after its previous president Stanislav Pozdnyakov unexpectedly resigned in October.

Russian sport has faced a myriad of crises in recent years, with a state-sponsored doping scandal seeing the country stripped of dozens of Olympic medals and its athletes banned from taking part in the Paris Games this summer over the war in Ukraine.

Moscow blasted the International Olympic Committee (IOC) ahead of the Games, accusing the sporting body of "neo-Nazism" and vowing to hold its own "Friendship Games" to rival those

held in the French capital.

Those plans were postponed several times until Russian President Vladimir Putin announced earlier this month they would be shelved indefinitely.

Just 15 Russian athletes were permitted to attend the Paris Olympics this summer, competing as neutrals.

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"Today, Russian sport is facing unprecedented external pressure. Thousands of our athletes are being discriminated against," Degtyaryov was quoted by the committee as saying in a speech ahead of his election. "It is time for us to stop the aggressive rhetoric against our international colleagues."

Described as a favorite of Putin by the team of late opposition leader Alexei Navalny, Degtyaryov has been a vehement supporter of Moscow's war against Ukraine.

The 43-year-old was appointed sports minister by Putin in May. In 2014, he was sanctioned by the EU over his support for separatist rebels in east Ukraine, and in 2023, he was blacklisted by the United States for helping conscript Russian citizens to fight Kyiv.

From 2020 until this year Degtyaryov served as governor of the Far Eastern Khabarovsk region, where he was tapped by Putin to replace popular governor Sergei Furgal after his controversial removal.

Degtyaryov served as a lawmaker in the State Duma from 2011 to 2020, floating a number of outlandish proposals including changing the colors of the Russian flag to the former imperial black, yellow and white.

In 2013, he ran for Moscow Mayor, suggesting in an interview with the Izvestia newspaper that he would allow gay pride parades provided they were held "quietly" and "at night."

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