

Russian Olympic Official Sparks Scandal by Berating Ossetian-Born Wrestling Champion

By [Pyotr Kozlov](#)

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Mikhail Mamiashvili and Vladimir Putin. kremlin.ru

A Russian Olympic official's dust-up with a Russian-born wrestling champion representing Albania has sparked a controversy in the Russian sporting world as the Kremlin continues to lobby for a return to the Olympic Games.

Chermen Valiev, a wrestler born in Russia's republic of North Ossetia, had previously competed for Russia but changed his sporting nationality to Albania just before the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) official Mikhail Mamiashvili, who heads the national wrestling federation, got into an altercation with Valiev at the European freestyle wrestling championships in Bratislava, where Valiev defeated a Russian athlete in the final.

Video of the incident shows Mamiashvili aggressively placing the gold medal around Valiev's neck during the award ceremony and saying something that visibly upsets the athlete.

Mamiashvili, himself an Olympic champion in Greco-Roman wrestling, then roughly grabs Valiev by both hands, and the athlete frowns. He then shoves the champion's bouquet into Valiev's hands and walks away.

"[Mamiashvili] called Valiev a traitor, accompanying his words with profanities," [reported](#) the Wrestling Russia Telegram channel, the first outlet to cover the incident.

Valiev later confirmed this, saying he was "taken aback."

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Russia has been barred from the Olympics and other major international sporting competitions due to its 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

And although the Kremlin announced plans to launch the World Friendship Games — an alternative to the Olympics — the project was delayed and eventually [shelved](#).

President Vladimir Putin, who is well-acquainted with Mamiashvili and personally [awarded](#) him with the Order of Merit for the Fatherland in the Kremlin last year, has [repeatedly](#) criticized international sporting authorities for allegedly politicizing sports.

"[Valiev] was on our national team just a year ago. The national team trained him. But today he's under the Albanian flag with tears in his eyes. Maybe that embarrassed him? People like Chermen don't care — what flag? Today it's Albanian, tomorrow it'll be Bulgarian," Mamiashvili said.

"These are young guys who, unfortunately, don't fully grasp the value of the banner on their shoulders. They don't understand the responsibility to the country that made them and gave them opportunities. Yes, sometimes in difficult conditions, but still, great Russia made them athletes," Mamiashvili [said](#).

However, the official's behavior sparked outrage from former Russian national team coach Dzambolat Tedeev, who [said](#) the behavior of the ROC Executive Committee member "goes beyond all bounds."

"The incident doesn't just personally disgrace the head of the federation — it damages the reputation of all of Russia, as it is being broadcast live across Europe," the former coach of the Russian team said. "How can one not think about this and undermine the country's image on the international stage? Maybe that's what betrayal looks like?"

Deputies from Valiev's home region of North Ossetia called the incident "brazen" and "unjust," and demanded that the Russian sports ministry conduct an investigation and that Mamiashvili issue an apology.

"At the very least, we expect an apology to Chermen Valiev and to all freestyle wrestling fans, and in particular, to the Ossetian people," [said](#) Ossetian MP Soslan Bestaev.

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