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First Russian, Belarusian Figure Skaters Cleared for 2026 Winter Olympics

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Russian figure skater Adelia Petrosyan. **Sofya Sandurskaya / TASS**

The International Olympic Committee has approved a small group of Russian and Belarusian figure skaters to compete as neutral athletes at the 2026 Winter Games, the organization said Thursday.

Russian skaters Pyotr Gumennik and Adelia Petrosyan, along with Belarusian skater Viktoria Safonova, were invited to take part in the Games after passing background checks confirming they have no ties to the military and do not publicly support Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The athletes must formally accept the invitations before they can be registered for the Games, which will be held in February in Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo.

Under IOC rules, neutral athletes may not join the opening ceremony parade because they are not considered part of any national delegation. Their results will also not contribute to the official medal table.

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IOC President Kirsty Coventry said in September that the neutral-athlete policy allows individual competitors to participate while maintaining broader sanctions against Russia and Belarus over the war in Ukraine. That approach was first used at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

While Belarus has not sent troops to Ukraine, it served as a staging ground for Russian forces at the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022.

Russia has been under various Olympic restrictions since 2016, initially over a state-sponsored doping program. Russian athletes competed under the Olympic flag in 2018 and under the banner of the Russian Olympic Committee in Tokyo in 2021 and Beijing in 2022.

Only 15 Russians and 17 Belarusians competed as neutral athletes at the 2024 Summer Games in Paris.

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