The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Swimmers Allowed to Compete Under National Flag After Restrictions Dropped

April 13, 2026



Russian swimmer Anna Chernysheva. **Yegor Aleyev / TASS**

World Aquatics, the international governing body for water sports, announced Monday that it has restored full membership rights to Russia and Belarus, allowing athletes from both countries to compete under their national flags and anthems for the first time in years.

"Senior athletes with Belarusian or Russian sport nationality will be permitted to compete in World Aquatics events in the same way as their counterparts representing other sport nationalities," World Aquatics said in a press release.

"Russia and Belarus now also resume full membership rights," it added.

The decision follows a sustained lobbying effort by Russian Aquatic Sports Federation President Dmitry Mazepin to end Russia's sporting neutrality ahead of the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles.

Mazepin had previously met with World Aquatics President Husain Al-Musallam to negotiate a return to elite competition. Last year, Russian athletes were permitted to compete only as neutral individuals at the 2025 World Aquatics Championships in Singapore.

World Aquatics is recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which banned Russia and Belarus for violating the Olympic Charter after President Vladimir Putin ordered the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Related article: Russian Swimmers Suspended From Tokyo Games Over Doping Violations

In Monday's statement, Al Musallam said World Aquatics and the sport's independent integrity unit had over the past three years "helped ensure that conflict can be kept outside the sporting competition venues."

Junior athletes from Russia and Belarus were previously allowed to compete with their flags and anthems in February.

Russian and Belarusian swimmers are still subject to background checks and at least four successive anti-doping controls, World Aquatics said.

Since 2016, Russian athletes have faced various bans on their national flags and anthems, initially due to a state-sponsored doping scandal and later because of the war in Ukraine.

The IOC has gradually softened its stance, allowing some Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete as neutrals if they could prove no ties to the military or security services.

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