

# [***IOC urges sports and governments to avoid Russia-organized possible rival to Olympic Games***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BKG-86J1-JC5B-G2HR-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

GENEVA — Facing a Russia-organized potential rival to the Olympics, the IOC urged sports and political leaders on Tuesday not to take part in the event dubbed the Friendship Games that is set to launch weeks after the Summer Games in Paris.

The [*International Olympic Committee denounced*](https://x.com/iocmedia/status/1770046991671665002?s=20) what it called intensive diplomatic moves to promote the inaugural event in September as “a cynical attempt by the Russian Federation” to bring ***politics*** into sports.

“The IOC strongly urges all stakeholders of the Olympic movement and all governments to reject any participation in, and support of, any initiative that intends to fully politicize international sport,” it said in a statement published during a meeting of its executive board chaired by IOC president Thomas Bach.

Later Tuesday, the board decided to exclude all Russian and Belarusian athletes [*from taking part in the opening ceremony*](https://apnews.com/article/paris-olympics-ioc-russia-e08f47312dc558eb885825ed0f8874ee) of the Paris Olympics, even if they are granted neutral status to compete at the games.

Russian President Vladimir Putin decreed last year to start organizing summer and winter events under the banner of the Friendship Games, paying tens of millions of dollars in prize money.

The games aim to counter the country’s increasing isolation in international sports — and growing [*tensions with the IOC and Bach*](https://apnews.com/article/paris-olympics-ioc-bach-israel-russia-8b6005213cb0e680bf533c0454ece216) — since the military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

At the United Nations in New York four months ago, Russian diplomat Maria Zabolotskaya used a [*debate on an Olympic truce*](https://apnews.com/article/olympic-truce-paris-ioc-un-russia-77121ad0b700b2d6d6a27f2ce5f60631) for Paris to invite the world to the Friendship Games, citing her country's support for "honest and fair competitions.”

The first games are scheduled in Moscow and Yekaterinburg from Sept. 15-29, with a prize fund reported by Russian media totaling 4.6 billion rubles ($50 million) across almost 40 sports.

The Friendship Games aim to open five weeks after the Aug. 11 closing ceremony at the Paris Olympics. The IOC does not give prize money to medalists.

Russia is excluded from all team sports at the Olympics and individual athletes must pass two layers of checks — by their sport’s governing body and the IOC — to get neutral status to compete without their national symbols of flag, anthem and uniforms in red, white and blue.

The IOC said Tuesday it estimates that 36 athletes with Russian passports will qualify to compete in Paris. Some of those could then be blocked in the vetting process.

One reported goal of the Friendship Games has been to create international competitions for Russian athletes and teams whose careers have stalled during the war in Ukraine.

It is unclear which countries have committed to sending teams to Russia in September and if sports officials are involved in the process.

IOC officials declined to say whether athletes would face consequences for traveling to Russia to compete in the Friendship Games.

The IOC did warn of athletes “being forced by their governments into participating \u2026 thereby being exploited as part of a political propaganda campaign.”

“To make their purely political motivation even more obvious, they are deliberately circumventing the sports organizations in their target countries,” the IOC said.

A winter Friendship Games is planned in Sochi in 2026, the IOC said. The Black Sea resort hosted the 2014 Winter Olympics at a time when Russia and the IOC were close allies, with mutual praise expressed by Bach and Putin.

A decade later, the IOC also pointed Tuesday to the Russian government’s “total disrespect for the global anti-doping standards” and competition integrity.

The Sochi games were tainted by the Russian state-backed doping program detailed two years later by [*a whistleblower who fled to the United States*](https://apnews.com/ap-interview-rodchenkov-lives-in-fear-after-exposing-doping-e6ba87b38e4e0e03a5a012c932530f9e) with federal protection.

Despite the state doping and cover-up program being proven, the IOC decided against banning Russia from subsequent Olympics, though its athletes have not been allowed to compete under the team name “Russia” since the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Summer Games.

Within days of Russia invading Ukraine during the Olympic Truce period for the Beijing Winter Games, the IOC urged sports bodies to exclude Russia from competing in and hosting international sports events.

That stance eased as the Paris Olympics approached and Bach began to suggest it [*would be discrimination*](https://apnews.com/article/politics-sports-ukraine-government-boxing-8dafee4093a0e1d5c75ac3f350e80d5b) to exclude all athletes from Russia and its military ally Belarus.

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AP Olympics: [*https://apnews.com/hub/2024-paris-olympic-games*](https://apnews.com/hub/games)

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