

# Sports Events Seen as Catalyst for 'New Russia'

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ST. PETERSBURG — The major sporting events to be held in Russia over the next decade will help define a "new Russia" and give Russians more confidence, as well as make a lasting contribution to the country's infrastructure, senior Russian government officials said Friday.

Alexander Zhukov, president of the Olympic Committee, assured the public at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum that "the effect of the Sochi games will be manifold; for instance, it will provide an opportunity for the world to see Russia in a better light."

Echoing former French President Francois Mitterrand's grand project to create a lasting legacy of modern monuments in Paris, President Vladimir Putin has actively promoted Russian bids for many large-scale sporting events as part of the country's shift toward a new image.

This July, for instance, Russia will host more than 13,000 university athletes during the 2013

Summer Universiade in Kazan. In the run-up to the event, the capital of Tatarstan has seen a complete overhaul of its infrastructure, with new stadiums, transportation systems and a new university campus built.

When Sochi was selected in July 2007 to host the 2014 Winter Olympics, the event quickly became a symbol of the new resurgent Russia. As a result, the budget for the project has spiraled to a record \$50 billion.

Many economists have criticized the excessive spending and expressed doubts about its effectiveness.

"For every ruble the government spends on such high-profile projects, only about 40 kopeks actually remain to support the Russian economy," said Vladislav Inozemtsev, the international economy chair at Moscow State University.

Apart from the substantial economic return expected from investment in infrastructure, however, events such as Sochi also accelerate the development of intellectual capital, said Donald Almeida, vice chairman of PricewaterhouseCoopers.

"We think that the legacy [of Sochi] will be intellectual property — all those people who do planning, execution, project management and so on. Later on, this capital will be revealed in other projects, some in the area of sports and some in other areas," he said.

Russian officials have put greater emphasis on an enhanced national identity as the primary effect of the games.

"Sochi is the starting point for the whole world to believe in Russia, and for us to gain confidence that Russia is ready to implement large-scale projects," Sochi organizing committee chief Dmitry Chernyshenko said at the forum.

Erick van Egeraat, a Dutch architect who is particularly active in Russia and has helped in designing Olympic facilities, said the legacy of Sochi and other events will be the country's newfound ability to make use of its most talented and innovative people, those "who are trying to reinvent themselves and make the best out of the cities we live in."

In one scenario that Russian officials can hope to avoid, hundreds of thousands of people in Brazil took to the streets on Saturday to protest what they see as excessive government spending on the upcoming World Cup, spending which they say highlights the issue of rampant corruption.

Russia will be the next country to host the World Cup in 2018, bringing infrastructure in the entire central part of the country to a new level — with the current price tag set at 660 billion rubles (\$20 billion).

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