

World Champion Isinbayeva Wants to Quit 'Awful' Volgograd for Monaco

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A week after swelling national pride by winning the world pole vault title and defending Russia's anti-gay propaganda law, Yelena Isinbayeva wants to leave her run-down hometown for wealthy Monaco.

In comments that might upset many Russians and President Vladimir Putin, who is trying to whip up patriotism to rally support after protests, the athlete said her long-revered home city of Volgograd was now impoverished and in decline.

"In Volgograd I'll have a lot of commitments, but I want to live in Monaco," Isinbayeva was quoted as saying by the Russian newspaper Argumenty i Fakty newspaper Thursday.

"What can you do here, in the city, when Volgograd is simply poor? The city has become awful and old. It's deteriorated. The roads are terrible."

Her home city, 900 kilometers south of Moscow, used to be named after former dictator Josef Stalin and is respected by Russians as the site of the 1942-43 Battle of Stalingrad, a turning point against Nazi Germany in World War II.

But Isinbayeva said the "city of victories" was in need of repairs and development to give people adequate living standards and better sports facilities.

"You simply need to create decent conditions to live here," she said. "In our city we do not have the conditions to live."

She said Putin had congratulated her on her victory in the World Athletics Championships in Moscow last week. But her comments highlighting the lack of sports facilities and other infrastructure in Volgograd are unlikely to please him.

Putin regards next February's Winter Olympics in Sochi, and the World Cup soccer finals in 2018, as opportunities to show that Russia is a modern state capable of holding international sports events successfully.

Sochi is now scrambling to be ready in time, and Volgograd is one of the World Cup venues.

Isinbayeva's gold medal was for many Russians the highlight of the Aug. 10-18 world athletics championships in Moscow.

At 31, she has two Olympic titles, has set 28 world records and is one of the heroes of Russian sport.

She also stood up for Russia's law prohibiting the spread of homosexual propaganda among minors despite international criticism, including from some athletes.

Her defense of a law backed by Putin is likely to have won her plaudits among many Russians, because opinion polls show the legislation is widely supported in Russia, although she later said some of her comments were misunderstood.

The anti-gay propaganda law is part of the conservative course taken by Putin since he returned to the presidency last year, but has prompted calls for a boycott of the Winter Games.

Referring to the criticism from abroad, the newspaper quoted Isinbayeva as telling reporters: "I don't want to go into politics, but I unwillingly became a political figure and my words started to be listened to."

Isinbayeva has lived before in Monaco, a principality on the Mediterranean, but returned to Volgograd to start working again with her former trainer, Yevgeny Trofimov. She has said she plans to take a break from athletics to have a baby.

She was quoted by Argumenty and Fakty as saying she might eventually like to work at Russia's Sports Ministry or in the International Olympic Committee.

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