

Dutch Prime Minister and Royals Planning Sochi Visit

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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AMSTERDAM — Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said he will attend next month's Winter Olympics in Sochi with King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima, even though relations between the two countries are strained.

For Russia and the Netherlands, 2013 was supposed to be the year when they celebrated 400 years of diplomatic ties with a string of high-level visits by politicians and business leaders, and various cultural exchanges.

Instead, relations turned increasingly sour over human rights, particularly gay rights, as well as Russia's detention of Greenpeace activists, two of whom were Dutch, and the impounding of their Netherlands-registered vessel.

But Rutte said Friday that the government would not boycott the Winter Games in Sochi.

"The Netherlands has several concerns about the human rights situation in Russia," he told journalists at his weekly press briefing in The Hague.

"[But] we see nothing to gain with a boycott. It is better to engage in dialogue."

He also defended the decision to attend the Sochi Games, saying that several other government leaders and royals would also be attending.

The Netherlands has taken a tough line on Russia's treatment of homosexual rights.

Dutch Foreign Minister Frans Timmermans has denounced Russia's law banning homosexual "propaganda" among minors, and has said the inhumane treatment or violation of the fundamental rights of Russian lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people could be grounds for asylum in the Netherlands.

When President Vladimir Putin visited Amsterdam in May, he was greeted by crowds of gay rights activists and banners saying: "Putin, Go Homo."

In October, senior diplomats from each country were beaten in their respective homes in Moscow and The Hague.

The Netherlands apologized after Dutch police illegally detained a Russia diplomat. In Russia, unidentified people wrote "LGBT" in lipstick on the mirror of a Dutch diplomat after assaulting him in his Moscow apartment.

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