

Two Austrian Athletes Get Kidnap Threats on Eve of Games

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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VIENNA — Two Austrian competitors have received kidnap threats on the eve of the Winter Olympics in Sochi, heightening security concerns at the Games and triggering an investigation by counter-terrorism experts.

It was not clear who made the threats, in a letter to the national Olympic Committee, but Islamist militants have warned of attacks to undermine President Vladimir Putin's hopes of using the Games to show Russia is a safe, modern state.

Austrian media named the two competitors as skier Marlies Schild and skeleton racer Janine Flock but the government and sports officials declined to identify them.

The threatening letter was the latest of several to be sent in the run-up to the Games, which open Friday. Several countries, including the U.S., said they had received "terrorist" threats last month but the International Olympic Committee said they posed no danger.

"It is correct that we got a letter, it was in the mailbox yesterday. We immediately contacted the federal criminal bureau, which is investigating," Peter Mennel, secretary general of the Austrian Olympic Committee, told the Austria Press Agency.

"I have already spoken to Ms. Flock. Janine is sitting here with me on the plane. She is not concerned and is placing her trust in our protection," he was quoted as saying from a charter flight on the way to Sochi with several athletes.

The Krone newspaper said the letter, apparently from Russia, had threatened the abduction of Schild — a former world champion and the all-time leader in World Cup slalom victories — and European champion Flock.

The Austrian Olympic committee confirmed it had received an anonymous letter targeting team members but said: "At the moment we do not assume an acute threat."

A spokesman for the Austrian Interior Ministry confirmed the national counter-terrorism agency had been brought in to look at the origin and content.

"We have taken all precautionary measures. The people affected have been informed and the Russian authorities are aware," he said, but did not name those involved.

No other national Olympic committee reported receiving such letters this week.

Putin has staked his political and personal prestige on the Sochi Games, intended to show how far Russia has come since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. A bombing, suicide attack or hostage crisis would seriously threaten those ambitions.

Security concerns grew after suicide bombers killed at least 34 people in the southern Russian city of Volgograd in late December, and police have been hunting four "Black Widows," women they fear may be planning more suicide bombings.

The Austrian Olympic team was due to arrive in Sochi on Tuesday evening. APA said two Austrian special police officers would protect the athletes if they leave the Olympic village.

Russian and IOC officials say they are confident that the about 6,000 athletes and several hundred thousand spectators at the Games will be safe.

"Every big event nowadays is under threat," IOC President Thomas Bach said in Sochi on Monday. "We have to address this. The alternative would be to surrender to terrorists."

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