

Putin Hopes Russia Won't Lose Right to Host World Cup 2018

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An interior view shows the Otkrytie Arena, the home stadium of Spartak Moscow football club, in Moscow.

President Vladimir Putin said Friday he hoped Russia would not lose the right to host the 2018 soccer World Cup following Western calls to stop the country staging the tournament.

Asked whether there was any risk that Russia could lose its right to hold the tournament due to the complicated political situation, Putin said: "I hope not. (World soccer's governing body) FIFA has already said soccer and sport are outside politics and I think that is the right approach."

Senior FIFA members attending meetings in Monaco were unaware of Putin's remarks, and could not comment as of this article's publication. FIFA's media department was not immediately contactable.

Moscow has faced calls for the finals to be moved elsewhere because of its role in the Ukraine crisis and its occupation of Crimea.

Republican U.S. senators Dan Coates and Mark Kirk cited Yugoslavia's exclusion from the 1992 European Championship and 1994 World Cup over the wars in the Balkans when they pressed such demands in a letter to FIFA.

FIFA stated in July that it remained committed to the 2018 World Cup in Russia, saying a boycott would not be an effective way of reducing tensions in the region.

"History has shown so far that boycotting sport events or a policy of isolation or confrontation are not the most effective ways to solve problems," FIFA said.

A total of 2,593 people, including civilians as well as Ukrainian and separatist combatants, have been killed in fighting in eastern Ukraine since it erupted in mid-April, a senior UN human rights official said on Friday.

Following Russia's annexation of the Crimea in March, European soccer's governing body UEFA said it would not recognize any matches played by Crimean clubs under the auspices of the Russian Football Union (RFS).

Russia will host the 2018 World Cup at 12 stadiums in 11 cities, including two venues in Moscow.

The most westerly venue is Kaliningrad, the main city in an exclave next to Poland and Lithuania.

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