

Swimming Body Defends Decision to Award Putin Highest Honor

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A swimming pool on the territory of Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow.

Swimming's world governing body has defended a decision to award it highest honor to President Vladimir Putin, saying it had nothing to do with politics.

FINA has been criticized over the timing of the decision with relations between Russia and the NATO alliance under strain, but the body's executive director Cornel Marculescu said the award was related only to sport.

"Our constitution is very clear," Marculescu said. "(there is) no discrimination for the political region or anything like that.

"Our award was only related to the sport, not with the rest."

FINA president Julio Maglione announced earlier this month that Putin had been awarded the FINA Order — swimming's top accolade — for his role in bringing international

swimming events to Russia.

Russia has been a regular stopover on swimming's annual World Cup circuit for the past decade and also hosted World Cup diving meets.

Next year, Russia will host FINA's world championships, in Kazan, swimming's last major international event before the 2016 Rio Olympics.

FINA released a statement explaining its decision at the time of the award: "In the case of President Vladimir Putin, FINA recognized his important support in the organization of major FINA events in Russian soil, thus bringing additional development to the FINA disciplines and providing increased value to Aquatics within the Russian society and worldwide."

But FINA's decision has also attracted some criticism.

A German lawmaker, Frank Steffel, told the local Die Zeit newspaper that FINA's decision was "insensitive", while swimming website Swimvortex.com published a letter of complaint from the American Swimming Coaches Association, or ASCA.

According to the letter, the ASCA was upset the award had been given at a time when Russia is facing the risk of being suspended from international competition after a series of positive drug tests.

Marculescu, in Singapore for this weekend's final round of the FINA World Cup series, said he was surprised by the criticism.

"It's not the first time we have given this kind of award to people in the highest position, the president of countries, or the mayors of cities," he said.

"In general, every place where we have a big championship, we give this award."

"It's nothing special, it's nothing that's not going happen anymore, it's part of our policy to thank you for everything you have done for us."

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