



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

The IOC continues to search for a way to smuggle athletes from Russia and Belarus into the Paris Olympics



Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu addressed the Russian Olympic team after their return from the 2021 Tokyo Games as subordinate soldiers: "There is no time to waste, you need to get to work!"

Shoigu awarded athletes who belonged to military clubs for their success at the Tokyo Olympic Games, and promised that the state would do "all so they could properly prepare for the next games".

However, they will not appear at the Olympics in Paris next year, as the International Olympic Committee decided not to invite Russia.

The usual IOC invitation, sent a year before the Olympics, went to the addresses of 203 national Olympic committees but not to Russia, Belarus and Guatemala.

Withholding a formal invitation to Russia is just a small step by the IOC towards the full exclusion of Russian athletes from the Paris Olympics.

IOC's hesitations and withdrawals

Although the IOC condemned the Russian aggression against Ukraine from the very start, its attitude towards the participation of Russian athletes in international competitions has been hesitant, searching for a way to find a place for them on the main world sports stage.

The IOC's reluctance to sanction Russia continues with this latest decision. An official invitation has not been sent, but the IOC has postponed a decision on whether individual competitors from Russia and Belarus could compete in Paris.

"The IOC will take this decision at the appropriate time, at its full discretion, and without being bound by the results of previous Olympic qualification competitions", it announced last Thursday.

This buying of time means there is still a possibility that some athletes from Russia and Belarus will be allowed to compete in Paris.

These would be athletes in individual, not team disciplines. They would not compete under national flags but under the IOC flag only if it determined that they did not actively support Russian aggression against Ukraine.

How to determine political neutrality?

By using this technique, the IOC continues to seek a "loophole" through which it could "smuggle" in some Russian athletes and make its decision not to send an official invitation to the Paris Olympics completely meaningless.

Last March, the IOC was of the opinion that Russian and Belarusian athletes should be allowed to participate as long as they are "individual neutral athletes".

In practice, this would mean that the IOC would assess on a case-by-case basis whether a particular athlete supported the aggression against Ukraine or the state leadership that initiated that aggression.

This would enter the field of countless precedents without previously established criteria, and arbitrariness would lead to endless polemics about whether specific athletes should have been allowed to participate in competitions.

The IOC has long had every reason to avoid such half-hearted solutions and completely excluded athletes with Russian and Belarusian passports from its competitions.

The Olympic Games in Paris will be the fifth in a row where athletes from Russia will compete under sanctions.

This is already proof enough that this country has been systematically violating the basic principles of the Olympic movement, and that this is not an incident but a long-standing practice of disrespecting the organisation of which it is still a member.

Russia has been systematically violating the rules of the Olympic movement

The roots lie in the inseparable and inadmissible bond between the state and its athletes, where athletes are an extension of non-sporting state projects and political operations.

At the end of last year, Russia ended its two-year suspension due to the established systematic doping of its athletes under the auspices of state programmes.

Even after the expiration of that suspension, the World Anti-Doping Agency is sceptical of Russia, which it says is still "noncompliant."

Russia deserves to have its athletes excluded from the Olympic Games without exception, due to its aggression, which has been condemned by the UN on several occasions by an overwhelming majority, even if it had not had long-term problems with systematic doping.

The regime in Moscow treats athletes as a tool of its propaganda and foreign policy. A significant number traditionally belongs to clubs founded and managed by the state and the military.

One of them - CSKA (Central Sports Club of the Army) - has a membership of more than 10,000 athletes from all over Russia, and numerous Olympic Games participants belong to it.

"We know that the links between state, military and sport in Russia and Belarus are root and branch", said Lucy Frazer, UK minister for culture, media and sport in a debate at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

Incitement to war propaganda

Allowing athletes from Russia and Belarus to still participate in the Olympic Games in Paris, under any conditions, would undoubtedly be a boost for Moscow's state propaganda and its war objectives in Ukraine.

No matter how they participate, even without displaying state symbols, they will bring fans, flags and all the support for the ongoing war invasion. Sport would then be weaponised for political purposes.

Since last February, there has been a request from 34 countries to the IOC not to allow athletes from Russia and Belarus to compete at the Olympics in Paris because it is impossible to ensure and establish their "neutrality" regarding the aggressive policy of their countries.

As they seek to buy a little more time, searching for an increasingly narrow space to allow athletes from sanctioned countries to the Olympic Games, the IOC has been faced

with the only correct decision, which would protect the noble foundations of this organisation - a clear and complete ban on the participation of athletes from Russia and Belarus in the Olympic Games.