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Russian gymnast's European Championship success too much to bear for Ukrainian rival (VIDEO)

Russian and Belarusian athletes are competing under their national flags at the tournament for the first time since 2022

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Ukrainian rhythmic gymnasts were caught on video covering their ears and eyes during the Russian and Belarusian national anthems at the European Championship in Varna, Bulgaria.

The tournament marks the first time athletes from the two countries have been allowed to compete under their national flags in nearly five years, after World Gymnastics and European Gymnastics lifted their restrictions earlier this month.



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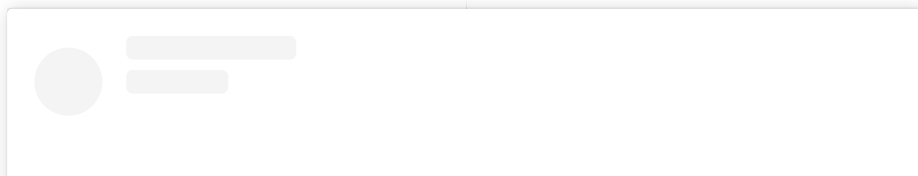
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One of the incidents took place during the medal ceremony for the junior ribbon event in Varna on Thursday, in which Russia's Yana Zaikina won gold, Ukraine's Sofia Krainska took silver, and Germany's Melissa Diete took bronze.

Krainska was seen standing on the podium wearing headphones and covering her eyes and face as the Russian national anthem played. Zaikina's victory was Russia's first gold at the tournament.



A similar episode occurred when Ukrainian gymnast Varvara Chubarova covered her ears and eyes as the Belarusian national anthem played following Kira Babkevich's victory in the junior ball event.



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Russian and Belarusian athletes were barred from most international competitions after the escalation of the Ukraine conflict in 2022. The two countries condemned the bans, calling them



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politically motivated. Some restrictions were later eased, allowing selected athletes to compete under neutral status.

Recently, major international sports organizations have started to lift their bans entirely.

The World Gymnastics Executive Committee announced earlier this month that Russian and Belarusian athletes can return to international competitions under their national symbols across all five disciplines represented by the Russian Gymnastics Federation. European Gymnastics followed with a similar decision last week.

Despite the lifting of the restrictions, the Russian team nearly missed the Varna championship after the Bulgarian authorities refused to approve its charter flight. The delegation eventually arrived via Istanbul one day before the competition began.

President Vladimir Putin has denounced what he described as selective sanctions against Russian competitors, accusing international sports bodies of political bias and corruption. Athletes should have access to competitions based solely on merit, as *“politics has no place in sports,”* the president said earlier this year.

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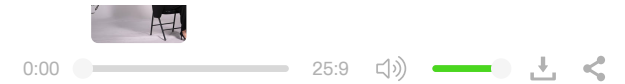


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