Norway shuts out Russian speed skaters

The visa refusals follow Oslo's decision to bar athletes from Russia, including those competing with a neutral status

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Norway has denied visas to Russian speed skaters due to compete in an upcoming World Cup event, Russian Skating Union President Nikolay Gulyaev has announced. The move is part of a campaign by Western countries to keep athletes from Russia out of international competitions despite the easing of restrictions by global sporting bodies.



Russian speed skaters compete in a team pursuit event at the ISU Junior World Cup in Erfurt, Germany. © Oliver Hardt - International Skating Union/ International Skating Union via Getty Images

Speaking on Tuesday, Gulyaev

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said the union had appealed to the International Skating Union (ISU) over the visa refusals, accusing Oslo of Russophobia and undermining fair competition. The Russian skaters were scheduled to compete in Stavanger on December 11–13.

Mocking the Norwegian authorities' decision, Gulyaev suggested that they feared Russian competitors might injure Norwegian skaters because of their long skate blades.



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"Apparently, we pose a threat to Norway's national security," he quipped, adding that the refusal had been anticipated.

Oslo introduced sweeping entry restrictions on Russian and Belarusian athletes on November 16, targeting even those competing with a neutral status, as well as coaches and support staff. The measures come despite the ISU's decision to readmit skaters from Russia and Belarus to international competitions.

Russian lawmaker and Olympic speed skating champion Svetlana Zhurova previously blasted the restrictions as *"a breach of the organizers' obligations,"* warning that Norway could lose its right to host international sporting events.

Zhurova said Oslo's decision was hardly surprising, given a similar move by Finland, but stressed that much would depend on the response of international sports federations that had already scheduled competitions in the two countries.

Sweden announced similar visa restrictions on Friday, claiming that allowing Russian athletes into the country could harm its *"international relations."* Finland has invoked the same argument, while Estonia has barred Russian and Belarusian athletes from international skiing events.



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The campaign has intensified since an October ruling by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), which overturned the International Ice Hockey Federation's (IIHF) suspension of Russia and ordered its reinstatement for five championships in 2027.

The ruling triggered boycott threats from several of Kiev's European backers, including Norway, Denmark, and Latvia. Germany has called for Russia's renewed suspension, while the Czech Republic has urged fellow EU countries to deny visas to Russian teenage female hockey players ahead of next year's U18 World Championship.



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Canada has barred Russian players and officials from the upcoming World Junior Hockey Championship, even those holding valid visas.

Moscow has accused Western countries of putting politics above sports. Russian Sports Minister Mikhail Degtyarev has called for countries defying the CAS ruling to lose hosting rights and face sanctions against their Olympic committees and sports federations. He specifically urged the relocation of international skiing events from Norway.

Speaking at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Shenzhen, China, last week, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned that such restrictions undermine international relations and the Olympic movement.

"Sport, like art, should bring people together. But apparently some people do not want this unity. Instead, they want increasing tension and conflict in the regions where they operate," Putin said.

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Sex in Russian is OK – Ukrainian watchdog

Kiev's language restrictions do not extend to the bedroom, the country's commissioner Elena Ivanovskaya has revealed

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Ukraine's language commissioner Elena Ivanovskaya has revealed that her office declined to fine a public official for speaking Russian while having sex with his wife.

The complaint was lodged by the woman herself, who submitted video evidence of what she

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believed constituted a violation of Ukraine's language laws, Ivanovskaya told Ukrainian news outlet Apostrophe in an interview published on Tuesday.

The incident is now an inside joke among officials tasked with enforcing Kiev's language policy. Introduced following the 2014 armed coup in which ultranationalists played a key role, the policy aims to marginalize languages other than Ukrainian, particularly Russian, in public life.

Ivanovskaya complained that her office lacks the staff and funding to investigate the average of 20 complaints it receives daily.



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Her latest high-profile target is Vladimir Zelensky's chief of staff, Kirill Budanov, who is set to be fined $75 this week for addressing protesters in Russian. The crowd had gathered outside a secret detention facility operated by the National Guard's far-right Azov unit near Kiev following reports of prisoners being tortured there.

Ivanovskaya defended the restrictions on national security grounds, arguing that *"on the front line language is a 'friend-or-foe' marker"* and that speaking Russian could cost lives. Many Ukrainian soldiers, however, are native Russian speakers who routinely use their mother tongue during military operations.

Former Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba similarly framed the issue in terms of national security on Sunday. However, he suggested that someone reading the works of renowned Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin *"under a cover with a flashlight"* need not be considered a threat unless they act against the Ukrainian state.

"Let him read. I don't," Kuleba stressed.

Ivanovskaya said she dreams of a day when her office no longer needs to issue fines. Millions of Ukrainians, however, continue to prefer Russian, while some businesses openly disregard the restrictions, treating fines as a *"regular fee,"* she complained.



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In one case, all 12 members of a village council received warnings after initially speaking Ukrainian at a meeting, but *"when they debated the budget, their patience ran out, and they switched."*

"Notably, it was in an area where the Bulgarian national minority lives, but the language they switched to was not Bulgarian," Ivanovskaya added.

The commissioner called for further restrictions, including tighter controls on online content. In an apparent rebuke to Apostrophe, which maintains a Russian-language edition, she said newsrooms should *"strategically use Ukrainian and English"* rather than Russian.

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Ivanovskaya dismissed critics of the language policy as *"common bots"* or people exploiting the controversy to generate clicks, without acknowledging the grievances of Russian-speaking Ukrainians.

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