

# SOCHI'S WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES - A DISASTROUS PROJECT?



On paper, the initial proposal for the 2014 Winter Olympic Games looks like it could be a fantastic achievement for Russia and the ideal chance to bring in tourists and sports enthusiasts from around the world. However, the project faces a number of serious problems.

The plan was for a grand Olympic village full of arenas, facilities and accommodation in a purpose-built resort - complete with a new airport - at the foot of the snowy mountains in Sochi. The reality of the situation is quite different and it seems that president Putin's extraordinary vision for Russia is collapsing all around him - in some cases literally.

**The Olympic Park at Sochi is now officially Europe's biggest building site and there is little hope that the numerous buildings and amenities required will be ready by the February deadline.** To make matters even worse, the few creations that have been completed have been disastrous - notably the exploding gas pipes and collapsed tunnels - and the migrant workers building the rest are being subjected to long hours, poor food and shelter and, in some cases, no wages. It is a recipe for disaster that is not helped by the escalating cost (GBP 30 billion) that has quadrupled the original budget and is nearly four times that of the London summer games.

Putin's response to all these concerns and failings was not exactly calm and understated; he may have spoken about being "absolutely convinced" that the venture would be completed "with proper quality and in time" but his decisions to completely relocate to the resort and fire the Vice President of the Russian Olympic Committee speak volumes.

It is as if he believes that he is the savior in this seemingly doomed situation and feels that the only way to ensure success is personal actions and appearances in Sochi - even if that means the entire Kremlin court following him into the mountains.

Assuming that Putin's assurances are all a sense of denial, and that he has reached the limits of his corrupt schemes and questionable means, **the chances of Sochi holding these games successfully are diminishing fast.** This is not just bad news for Putin but for all those hoping to see the winter wonderland for themselves. Marriott may have done a u-turn on their position with their Sochi hotels but the highly-polluted mountain air and lack of finished roads means that spectators may no longer have any desire to stay in them.

Unfortunately, there does not appear to be any light at the end of this tunnel for anybody involved. If the construction teams continue to cut corners and actually do get the Olympic Park finished on time it will be so poorly made that no-one will want to compete there and the games will be seen as a failure anyway. Nina Khrushcheva, a US-based professor, has suggested that this could all signal the end for Putin and she has a point - he may have visions of the opening ceremony being a defining moment for his leadership but it could be for all the wrong reasons.

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