

Russian Officials Face Life Ban Over Doping 'Extortion' Case

A three-day disciplinary hearing by the International Association of Athletics Federation's independent ethics commission into senior athletics officials accused of extorting €450,000 (£330,000) from [Liliya Shobukhova](#) to cover up her [doping violations](#) could mean a life ban for the officials.

The list of people who are accused of extorting money from the Russian marathon runner includes Gabriel Dollé, the most senior anti-doping official at athletics' governing body until last year, and Papa Massata Diack, the son of the former IAAF president Lamine Diack. Valentin Balakhnichev, formerly the president of the All-Russia Athletics Federation and treasurer of the IAAF, and the senior Russian endurance coach Alexei Melnikov, are also likely to face sanctions for their alleged involvement in assisting Shobukhova avoid punishment despite suspicious blood samples. A fifth unnamed person is also likely to face disciplinary charges. All the accused are not expected to attend the private hearing of the IAAF independent ethics commission in person but their case will be made by legal representatives.

Liliya Shobukhova, a winner of Chicago and London Marathon, was the second fastest female athlete in history behind Paula Radcliffe until she was banned in 2014. The Russian athlete was allowed to participate in the London Olympics despite anomalies in her blood passport after she allegedly paid €150,000 to Russian officials on three separate occasions that year. Disclosure about the payments surfaced in April 2014 when the IAAF ethics commission chairman, Michael Beloff QC, received a sworn deposition that alleged corruption at the highest level of the IAAF. This document, which was signed by Shobukhova's agent, Andrei Baranov, included testimony from an IAAF whistleblower. Dollé, Diack Jr., Balakhnichev, and Melnikov were alleged to have received money from Shobukhova and all accused denied any wrongdoing.

Meanwhile, French prosecutors are investigating many former officials of the world governing body of athletics, including former IAAF chief Lamine Diack. It was remarked by the national financial prosecutor Eliane Houlette that investigators believe Diack earned "more than €1m" by ignoring the activities of his son, Papa Massata Diack,

despite being warned several times. Houlette disclosed that what is certain is that Cissé, the legal adviser to Lamine Diack, traveled to Russia and gave the list of Russian athletes suspected of doping to the Russian federation and, in exchange for sums of money, these athletes were not sanctioned.

In November, Lamine was placed by French police under investigation on preliminary charges of money laundering and corruption. Lamine's former legal adviser Habib Cissé was also detained and charged with corruption along with Dollé. The whereabouts of Diack Jr., who was employed as a consultant for the IAAF, could not be arrested as he had not traveled to France as planned.

A separate report into corruption at the IAAF by an independent commission of the World Anti-Doping Agency, led by Dick Pound, is expected to publish its findings in Munich on 14 January. Pound has already issued a warning that people would be very surprised to know how such [doping and hiding activities](#) were performed and added it is a complete betrayal of what the people in charge of the sport should be doing.