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Andrey Filatov: Chess is an efficient way to fight drugs

Head of the Russian Chess Federation and Vice President of FIDE Andrey Filatov in an exclusive interview told ITAR-TASS about the scandal with Garry Kasparov, summarised the Chess Olympics, which ended with the Russian women's team's victory, and explained why Gennady Timchenko, Sergey Sobyenin, and Dmitry Peskov are members of the RCF's board of trustees.

- Are you happy with the results of the Olympiad?

- Yes, I can say I am. The victory of the women's team was triumphant, two Russian representatives have joined the FIDE governing bodies, and the men's team shared the second place based on the points scored.

- Are you happy with the result of the men's team as well?

- Obviously, we are always keen to see the national team take the first place. But when despite the fact that something is amiss and the game doesn't really go with a swing, the team pulls itself together and manages to snatch the second place, it proves that it has character and will. In chess, each game is thoroughly analyzed. Coaches and players will certainly do this to prepare for more ambitious goals for the next Olympiad.

- Will Yuri Dokhoyan remain as head coach of the national team?

- Mr. Dokhoyan is an outstanding coach. Under his leadership, the Russian women's team took gold during the 2010 Olympiad for the first time in history. Mr. Dokhoyan then moved to the men's team and made it a world champion. In Tromsø, in spite of all the difficulties, the team was able to finish the competition on a high note, beating France and joining contestants for sharing the second place. There are no grounds for replacing Dokhoyan.

- The Russian men's team is the world's strongest in terms of individual ratings, but it's the women's team that has been consistently winning. Why is that?

- Team play is different from individual. Our ladies are in a winning mood, they think as a team and are therefore a strong force. In the men's team, this process has only just begun. In terms of talent, we are the strongest of all, but in a team competition all depends on common tactics and confidence.

- *Kramnik and Svidler have played for the Russian national team in more than ten Olympiads. Don't you think that despite their merits it is time for a generational change? Giving way to the young? China did not send its Top 3 players to the Olympiad, but it is precisely the Chinese that have won the team competition in Tromsø.*

- Age in chess is a relative concept. What counts is the player's shape. Russia has an immense pool of players. If Kramnik is not selected for the national team, speculations will follow as to the reasons why; and if he is but does not deliver, people start evoking the need for a generational change. The balance is rather delicate.

- *10 days before the Olympiad, the Organizing Committee sought to prevent the Russian women's team from competing, for formal reasons. Did politics intervene?*

- It was the election campaign. The Olympiad's Organizing Committee included people close to one of the candidates for the presidency of FIDE, and they thought that this story could help them politically. I am convinced that their intention was to cause maximum damage to Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, above all, as a representative of Russia. Russia however has considerable international clout, which eventually led to Mr. Ilyumzhinov's more than convincing victory.

- *Despite everything, Russian ladies did participate in the Olympiad and showed a brilliant game. On the last day, the competition organizers even offered their apologies. How was it even possible to ensure this?*

- We are very grateful to the American law firm Quinn Emanuel, which defended our women's team. In fact, many Americans in Tromsø supported our team. That was really great. During the match China – Russia, one of the representatives of the United States Chess Federation came up to me and said that he was supporting a Russian team for the first time in his life. I think the organizers were ashamed of succumbing to political intrigues but, to their credit, nevertheless had the courage to admit their mistake and even offered us cooperation.

- *Do you intend to seek recovery of legal costs?*

- In our view, what counts most is justice, not money. The incident is resolved and we do not consider it necessary to seek a small financial gain to the detriment of friendly relations with Norway.

- *Russia's position in the world of chess seems to be somehow shaken due to the global geopolitical situation...*

- On the contrary, in Tromsø we received a lot of support. And the convincing victory of a Russian representative in the elections of the FIDE President is the best proof of this. Many privately mentioned that Russia was fortunate to have a sports-minded President, and that media coverage of Russia is often untruthful. Many people came to understand that they should not believe everything they read and hear about our country in the Western media.

- *Is it true that during the debate in the run-up to the FIDE presidential elections Gary Kasparov threatened you with sanctions from the U.S. State Department?*

- He predicted them, let's put it this way.

- *And is it true that Mr. Kasparov also said that Barack Obama himself supported his election as the FIDE President, and that Mr. Obama would personally call the vote participants?*

- More precisely, that he would call the President of the Canadian Chess Federation Vladimir Drkulechu. But I believe all this came from a member of Mr. Kasparov's election team. Kasparov is a chess genius but his incursions into politics have so far been somewhat clumsy and inconsistent. He first aggressively criticizes Gennady Timchenko, and then attends a dinner at the Franco-Russian Chamber of Commerce, which Mr. Timchenko co-chairs together with the CEO of Total Christophe de Margerie. He sends an official letter of support to Elena Boytsun who ran for Vice President of FIDE from Ukraine but does not

vote for her during the elections. Because of the position of the 13th world champion, Ukraine failed to obtain vice presidency of the International Chess Federation.

- Have you been following his election campaign?

- Tromsø is a small town and hundreds of campaign posters with the face of the 13th world champion were impossible to ignore.

- According to Kasparov, the FIDE elections were undemocratic and corruption is rampant in its governing bodies...

- If you have facts and if you are sure you are right, go ahead and initiate legal proceedings. Everything else is a political slogan. Delegates from 172 countries attended the FIDE presidential elections. Kirsan Ilyumzhinov received 110 votes, Garry Kasparov - 61, and 1 delegate abstained. Kasparov's candidacy did not gather support from either Canada or the national federations in Europe. And the problem was not the voting process but a low ranking of the 13th world champion. According to my observations, something has broken in Kasparov. And it happened long time ago, after he lost to Kramnik in 2000. I really deplore the change in him. There are many projects aiming to develop and promote chess, there is chess diplomacy. And Kasparov's role in all this would be invaluable. As for his outright bashing of his compatriots, it is somehow not becoming of a champion and certainly not of a man...

- What are your impressions of the elections of the Vice President of FIDE?

- I ran for Vice President for the first time in my life, went through the entire election process from beginning to end, and obtained 98 votes out of 148. /Formerly, the FIDE President appointed the Vice President of FIDE from Russia. - ITAR-TASS Note/. I can say with confidence that there is no corruption in the FIDE election process. Voters simply wish to know what you have done for chess in the past and what you are able to do in the future. And if you have something to say, if you are trusted, you will be voted for. By the way, I would recommend all the Kasparov supporters to be more prudent with unfounded statements alleging corruption in the FIDE governing bodies. Again, if you are in possession of reliable information, bring a court action. As an official representative of governing bodies of both FIDE and the Russian Chess Federation, I believe one should be responsible for one's own words.

- Do I understand it right that you see your main job as the President of the Russian Chess Federation in developing chess for juniors?

- We want to develop all kinds of chess in Russia but, indeed, children are a priority. Obviously, chess for seniors, veterans' and students' chess tournaments are also important. And it is very important to develop chess in the army. We need to promote and popularize chess and restore at least the status it enjoyed in the Soviet Union.

- In today's Russia, how does chess score in popularity compared with other sports?

- It is in the top five. Virtually everyone in Russia has a chessboard at home. Probably thanks to the Soviet past, everyone in the country knows chess piece moves.

- But how can you make children interested in chess when all they do is playing the World of Warcraft?

- I do not mind videogames. But one can also play chess on his screen. It is necessary to create conditions to get children involved and make them enthusiastic. What we need are junior tournaments, chess schools. We need to promote chess. You should have seen Tromsø and experienced its ambiance during the Chess Olympiad! Chess was omnipresent. People played chess out in the streets, in hotels, everywhere. Bars offered chessboards – it was just incredible!

- The Board of Trustees of the Russian Chess Federation now counts Dmitry Peskov, Sergei Shoigu, Sergei Sobyanin, Gennady Timchenko and other prominent figures among its members. What is the reason for this?

- The fact that chess has always been a symbol of our country. Chess has been bringing together the country's best minds, the intellectual elite. The fact that these highly worthy national figures have honored the chess movement by entering the RCF Board of Trustees helps us to revive the tradition of chess and promote chess in Russia. I will give you one example: a junior graduating from a chess school never uses

any illegal substances. This is confirmed by various studies. In Armenia, chess has been introduced as a compulsory subject in school, and a dedicated TV show is now broadcast in the country. This aims not only to promote chess among youngsters but also to prevent drug abuse. Chess is an effective way to combat drug addiction.

- In what way?

- By playing chess a child begins to recognize and calculate his/her next moves and their consequences. He/she begins to understand responsibility for his/her actions, which, among others, can lead to disastrous results. This is why I am a strong supporter of the popularization of chess. This game teaches respect for rules and laws, it develops analytical skills and teaches respect for the opponent. Positive aspects are many.

- Is it possible that chess one day will be introduced as a compulsory subject in Russia's schools?

- I believe chess should be available in all schools as an optional course.

- What exactly does the board of trustees of the RCF?

- It supports and promotes chess. The situation has been changing: we are seeing a revival of interest in chess and chess education, reopening of chess clubs in our cities, and inaugurations of grand master schools. The RCF trustees have been playing an important role in this process, for which we are sincerely grateful. Dmitry Peskov, in particular, has been passionately dedicating his time to chess.

- And what about the sponsors?

- Sponsors are extremely important in the chess world. Examples of long-term cooperation include Alpari, the Elena and Gennady Timchenko Fund, and Mr. Friedman. Our project "Chess in Museums", which benefits not only chess but also museums, including regional ones, would quite simply not exist without sponsors. Our patrons organize chess competitions, support national chess teams and grandmaster schools. There are also sponsors who prefer not to publicize their involvement but invest in the development of chess projects for orphans and disabled children.

- How important are sponsors to individual chess players?

- Chess players are not wealthy people and financial support is therefore important to them. But supporting a grandmaster is always very beneficial for sponsors. A simple example: India's Viswanathan Anand has 260 million fans who watch and analyze his games. During the game Anand-Karyakin, all these people became aware of the existence of Alpari, Sergei's long-term corporate sponsor.

- Do sponsors usually manifest themselves or are long negotiations needed?

- A real sponsor is always passion-driven. And in chess, we only have those.

- The President of the Russian Tennis Federation Shamil Tarpishchev recently said that the development of tennis in the country requires US\$30 million a year. How much is needed to develop chess?

- This question is not mathematical. The more support we gather, the more different chess competitions and projects will emerge. RCF is currently working on the preparation of a major international tournament - the Tigran Petrosian Memorial. The President of Armenia is a member of the Memorial's Organizing Committee, which is a great honor for us. Petrossian was a great chess player, the 9th World Champion. He was an unbelievably gifted man, a historical figure in chess and the pride of Armenia and the USSR. This tournament would be impossible without sponsorship. We are keen to organize and develop an entire range of competitions.

- Including junior competitions?

- Especially junior competitions. 130,000 students participated this year in the school teams' tournament «White Rook». Four years ago they were less than half of that and our current goal is twice as many! And this is realistic. There are ideas to revive the match Russia - China and Russia - other countries. We are prepared to work with any budget. Because the more projects we have, the more people we can make truly excited about chess.

- Would a match Russia - United States be possible in the current environment?

- Of course it would. We maintain a very good relationship with the United States Chess Federation. In America, chess has been gaining momentum; a chess museum has recently opened its doors there. Our chess museum is yet to open in September, on Gogolevsky Boulevard in Moscow.

- Is «White Rook» an international tournament?

- We are working in that direction. In Tromsø, the Russian Chess Federation signed agreements with the national federations of Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Israel, to standardize competitions. From now on, tournament and selection rules and criteria in these countries will be the same as ours, while winners will compete in the all-round international final. A similar agreement with Armenia is in the pipeline.

- In football, there's been debate around the inclusion of Ukrainian clubs in the Football Union of Russia /FUR/. Does RFC face any issues with Crimea?

- This issue was on the agenda of the General Assembly of the European Chess Union in Tromsø. It was decided, with respect to this issue, to rely on the UN documents and guidelines of the International Olympic Committee. There is no place for politics here, and the Crimean Chess Federation will not exist. Crimean players will play for Russia. As you may know, Crimean juniors have already formally participated in the «White Rook» Tournament. And we were very pleased to welcome them at our country's main junior competition.

- Is the scandal around the transition of Ekaterina Lagno from the Ukrainian team into the Russian team still ongoing?

- There is no scandal and there has not been one. No one contested Ekaterina's transition, there were just a few people who played a political game and were openly unsupportive of the Russian chess players, hence the splash. This is not football, where a player «overexposed» in a national team cannot really play for other national teams. In chess, this is common practice. In 2009, Sergey Karyakin smoothly moved from the Ukrainian team to the Russian one. After the departure of Lagno, ranked third, she was replaced in the Ukrainian team by Slovenia's Anna Muzychyuk, ranked second. From the ranking point of view, Ukraine has actually benefited from this transition.

- Have you been playing chess for a long time?

- From childhood. In 1992, I graduated from a Physical Training University, with a specialization in chess. Then I took time off and went into business. Together with my partners I founded Globaltrans and Global Ports, two transport and logistics companies. Both companies are publicly listed on the London Stock Exchange. The management now ensures day-to-day operational control, while I am a minority shareholder, which leaves me time for chess.