

April 1, 2021

Report of the Special Commission on Men World Title Match 2021

Preamble

Special Commission (SC) was formed in the beginning of March 2021 by the agreement between FMJD President and Secretary on one side, and Latvian Draughts Federation (LDF) represented by its Chairman Mr. Vladislavs Vesperis on the other side. The special requests of the LDF were expressed in the letter from LDF to FMJD EB dated February 22, 2021, stipulating that:

“This special commission is supposed to include representatives of the FMJD Executive Council, the FMJD Technical Committee and the Ethical Committee... only objective (neutral) persons may be selected as members of this special commission, so they are not in any way related to the Netherlands and to the Russian Federation.

The representative of the FMJD Board should be a person who did not participate in and was not in any way involved in the decision-making process related to the World Title match as well this person should not be representative or affiliate of the Netherlands and the Russian Federation.”

Based on these conditions, the original composition of the SC included:

- Aare Harak (FMJD Executive Board (EB), Estonia)
- Airat Nurgaziev (FMJD Ethics Committee (EC), Kazakhstan)
- Lyublyana Turiy (FMJD Technical Committee (TC), USA)

However, on March 7 2021, Mr. Nurgaziev announced that he can no longer participate in the Commission’s work. He sent out his resignation letter and also attended the initial meeting with LDF representatives on March 13, 2021 where he confirmed his decision. After that, the remaining Commission members have reached an agreement with LDF to have Airat Nurgaziev replaced with the Chairman of the Player’s Committee (PC) Jean Marc Ndjofang (Cameroon). On March 14, 2021 Mr. Ndjofang has accepted the invitation to join the Commission, therefore, the final composition of the SC is:

- Aare Harak (FMJD EB, Estonia)
- Jean Marc Ndjofang (PC, Cameroon)
- Lyublyana Turiy (TC, USA)

Issues

In the above mentioned letter from February 22, 2021, LDF has outlined 3 questions they want the SC to answer. In particular,

- 1) Do you consider it to be ethical and fair to agree on the postponing the World Title match between Mr. Alexander Georgiev (who has already refused to play and, in fact, lost his right to play World Title match) and Mr. Roel Boomstra after Mr. Pan Yiming was given an opportunity to play but did not use it and Mr. Guntis Valneris was not even contacted as the next reserve player?**
- 2) Do you consider the decision of the FMJD Executive Council (to postpone the World Title match, to hold it between Mr. Alexander Georgiev and Mr. Roel Boomstra and to give the winner the right for the next World Title match) to be in conformity with the Article 11 of the Annex 17 which states: When a World Title Match cannot be played, the World Champion keeps his title but does not have the right for a title match two years later. Then this right for a title match goes to the numbers 1 and 2 of the World Championship tournament?**
- 3) Do you consider all actions of the FMJD Executive Council related to the World Title match to be compatible with Article 11 of the Annexes and the Code of Ethics of the FMJD, taking into account the above mentioned facts?**

As the wording of questions 2 and 3 is somewhat repetitive, during March 13, 2021 meeting with LDF, SC have been further instructed by LDF to treat questions 2 and 3 as:

- 2) Should the challenge match take place after WC 2021 at all?
- 3) If yes, shall its winner have the rights to the follow-up match in 2022?

Discussion

SC members carefully reviewed all available facts and documentation pertaining to the case, such as:

1. FMJD Annexes (February 14, 2021 version)
2. Official information pertaining to World Title Match 2021
3. Communication between Alexander Georgiev and FMJD TD Jacek Pawlicki
4. Website materials from government sources in Russia re. restriction of travel from Russia to the EU countries in the beginning of 2021
5. Communication between LDF and FMJD EB in reference to World Title Match 2021
6. Announcements on the FMJD.org website in reference to World Title Match 2021
7. Written and oral statements from both FMJD EB and LDF addressed to this SC

After reviewing these and other materials, the SC exchanged opinions through emails, as well as met two times via Zoom meetings to further thoroughly discuss and collectively produce the recommendations below, which represent unbiased and well thought through opinions of the SC members on the given issues.

SC members ask both FMJD EB and LDF to support our recommendations and further work together with each other and other institutions, such as TC, to straighten out the rules and protocol of communication in order to avoid such conflicts in future.

Findings/Recommendations

1. We believe that the decision of FMJD EB to pressure Mr. Alexander Georgiev to participate in the World Title Match 2021 and to invite Mr. Pan Yiming to replace him when he refused, was a bad judgement call at the time of Covid-19 health crisis and government lockdowns. The match should have either been postponed until it was safe and feasible to conduct it in a face-to-face format, or were replaced with an online version.

This erroneous decision unfortunately brought forth future miscommunication issues when FMJD EB failed to give LDF straight answers about the situation. For example, in a published news statement on FMJD.org dated January 19, 2021, it is said that *"FMJD is talking to all potential participants of the men's World title match and a decision is to be expected on Feb. 1st at latest"*. Naturally, as LDF and Mr. Guntis Valneris have learned by that time about the inability of Mr. Pan Yiming to participate in the World Title Match 2021, they have expected to be contacted soon after that, as Mr. Valneris was the 3rd person in line with the results of WC 2019. It was indeed misleading and insulting to LDF that it has never been contacted with explanations or propositions - even though they have expressed willingness for Mr. Valneris to play.

With all this in mind, SC believes that both Mr. Georgiev and Mr. Valneris (and LDF organization) deserve a statement of apology from the FMJD EB, as well as working out and communicating to all involved the list of actions to take to avoid such miscommunication in future.

2. As per Item 1 above, we further believe that the match between Mr. Boomstra and Mr. Georgiev shall be allowed to take place at whenever it is safe and feasible to conduct it (assuming for now Fall 2021). Mr. Georgiev should have never lost his right to compete against Mr. Boomstra, and therefore, he should not be replaced with anyone else. It would have been the best if the Match Georgiev - Boomstra took place before the next WC Men to avoid any conflict of interest or other consequent problems, but because of the exceptional circumstances of Covid-19, this may not be possible. Still, SC feels that holding this match is both in the interest of two players who originally have deserved the right for it, as well as in the interest of all draughts community, and further popularization of the draughts sport.

3. As of the question whether the winner of such match should have the right to challenge the winner of WC 2021 for a new match, the following variants shall be considered:
 - a. If WC in Tallinn in Summer 2021 will be also postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic still strong in the world, there is a good chance that World Title Match will be played before it, and thus the chronological order will not suffer, so it will proceed as “business as usual”
 - b. The SC does not feel strong and unanimous about the rights of the winner of the World Title Match if WC in Tallinn will take place with no delays. However, since the GA meeting is planned to be held during the WC 2021, that determination can then be done by GA members’ voting in the most democratic way possible.
4. Regarding whether FMJD EB has been right in utilizing Article 13 of Annex 17 – “All exceptional cases must be dealt with by the Executive Board”: Covid-19 pandemic indeed created an exceptional situation in the world and the decision of FMJD EB to invoke this Article, cannot be called “incompatible the Annexes and the Code of Ethics of the FMJD”.

Same would apply to the meaning that FMJD EB implied to the Article 11 of Annex 17, that according to FMJD EB statement in the letter to LDF dated February 18, 2021 in Item 3, this Article “refers to cases where the match did not take place at all” rather than being postponed.

It is unfortunate, that with both these articles, the wording is not clear enough to prevent different meanings and ambiguity. Therefore, SC would like to further ask TC to rewrite FMJD Annexes section on World Title matches to make it more structured and clear. Among the issues to clarify are:

- Can the challenge matches be allowed to occur retroactively when all other options are exhausted?
- Who should have the right for the challenge if the current champion cannot or refuse to compete: does it stop at the 2nd or 3rd place when a reserve player is concerned, or should it proceed further down the line?
- Provide more clarity about what can be construed an “exceptional case”. It is the opinion of this SC, that in future FMJD EB shall act on “exceptional cases” only when it is a time constraint that prevents the resolution of such cases through the regular established procedures.
- Role of the organizers (representative of the challenger).
- Develop a mechanism to avoid whenever possible, technical mistakes in Annexes.

Any other omissions, ambiguities and the likes, shall be brought forward to the attention of TC if noted. We hope for the LDF cooperation with this task.

Conclusion

With these recommendation, this SC will conclude its work with the hopes and expectations that:

- a) both parties will find our findings/recommendations well-justified and fair, and
- b) will take the actions we recommend to avoid further escalation and avoidance of such conflicts from happening in future.

After LDF and FMJD EB will have the opportunity to review this Report and consider their next actions, we kindly request to make such Report available in its entirety to the wider audience by either attaching it to the official FMJD Website news blog, or by any other means that would help its diffusion, in order to demonstrate the transparency and due process taken by this SC.

Undersigned,



Aare Harak (FMJD EB, Estonia)
Jean Marc Ndjofang (PC, Cameroon)
Lyublyana Turiy (TC, USA)