



## **Background paper for ECF Finance Council on the Ukraine Resolution**

From Tim Wall

ECF Council representative, Durham County Chess Association

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I am writing this background briefing paper on the ECF Council Chair's Resolution on FIDE President Arkady Dvorkovich and the war in Ukraine (originally proposed by Durham County Chess Association) to hopefully put it in some kind of context.

This is an unusual resolution, because it is about the chess world intersecting with real life (war, politics and human rights) outside chess. This is traditionally an area that we would not be discussing at an ECF Council meeting, but due to the extraordinary situation with the war in Ukraine, many cultural and sporting organisations have felt compelled to take a stance.

Relations between first the British Chess Federation and now the English Chess Federation on one side, and the two FIDE Presidents from Russia, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov and Arkady Dvorkovich, on the other, have been at times cordial and cooperative, but at other times complex and problematic.

We should obviously acknowledge the huge contribution made by Soviet and Russian chess players, coaches and writers to the game, and the great prestige that chess enjoyed in the Soviet Union (and continues to enjoy in the post-Soviet space).

However, we have to acknowledge that FIDE has been used as a soft power tool by the Kremlin, particularly over the last decade of Putin's increasingly repressive and dictatorial rule. The lure of potential sponsorship by Kremlin-connected companies undoubtedly influenced Dvorkovich's election as FIDE president in 2018, and helped many national federations to "look the other way" on the way FIDE would be used to bolster the credibility of Putin's regime, despite its woeful record on various issues, including Russia's war in Ukraine from 2014 onwards, abuse of human rights and increasingly dictatorial rule inside Russia, and the murderous actions of Russia's secret services in targeting dissidents abroad.

The ECF in 2018 took the decision not to support Dvorkovich in that election, with one of the key factors being precisely concerns over this close connection between the FIDE leadership and the Kremlin. Unfortunately, these concerns have now been borne out, and it is clear that Dvorkovich's close connections to Putin's regime,

which go back at least as far his appointment as Deputy Prime Minister in 2012, and run throughout the period 2014-18 when Putin annexed Crimea and backed the separatist takeover of sections of eastern Ukraine, mean that today Dvorkovich's links to Putin are so toxic for FIDE that they would hurt the game internationally as it seeks to grow chess worldwide and gain commercial sponsorship untainted by such connections.

It should be noted, however, that calling for Dvorkovich to resign is not necessarily a repudiation of his personal record as FIDE president, his support for chess in general or even his record as manager of various projects such as the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia.

It is true that Dvorkovich does not have a record of personal involvement in the war in Ukraine. But it is inescapable that he sat at the top table of Russian decision-making during that whole period when the war in Ukraine was launched by Putin, did not demur from Putin's policy, and therefore must carry some of the responsibility for it.

The resolution contends that Dvorkovich is unfit to be FIDE president precisely because of his long and close connections at the top of Putin's government. These connections are now clearly toxic for FIDE, and if they are not severed, they would result in chess not developing in the way that global chess community would like to see in the future.

The 2022 escalation of the war in Ukraine has shown the need for FIDE to avoid the type of political entanglements that can ensue from close association with a regime such as Putin's, and it is in that spirit – the need for FIDE to re-establish its credentials as a non-political, global professional sporting body committed to the principles of peace and human rights – that the ECF is justified in calling for Dvorkovich's immediate resignation.

The sooner that FIDE can sever its ties with Putin's regime, therefore, the better for the game as a whole. By putting this forward, the ECF is clearly putting principles first in its dealings with FIDE, and this should enable us to maintain good relations with the global body in the future.