



FIDE ETHICS & DISCIPLINARY COMMISSION

The First Instance Chamber of the Ethics & Disciplinary Commission (hereafter called “the EDC Chamber”), sitting in the following composition

Chairperson: Mr. David Hater

Members: Mr. Ravindra Dongre
Mr. Alan Borda

during an exchange of correspondence and online meetings, made the following -

DECISION

Case no. 7/2024: "Alleged boycotting of game against Israel-associated team at the FIDE World Rapid and Blitz Team Championship"

INTRODUCTION

1. The EDC Chamber **notes** its establishment by the EDC Chairman on 15 November 2024.
2. The EDC Chamber **notes** that on 21 October 2024, the FIDE Ethics and Disciplinary Commission (EDC) received a complaint from Alon Shulman representing Pavel Eljanov FIDE ID 14102951, Isabek Tanikin FIDE ID 13728717, the Israeli Chess Federation, and Ashdod Chess Club against respondents M. Amin Tabatabael FIDE ID 12521213 and Aghiad Mero FIDE ID 7608420. In the complaint, it is alleged the respondents boycotted their games in round 8 of the FIDE World Rapid and Blitz Team Championship.
3. Both respondents are alleged to have violated Articles 6.3 & 6.4 Human Dignity (Respect) and Article 11.9 (a) Socially Unacceptable Behavior and 11.5 (d) Inciting a boycott of a FIDE competition.
4. The EDC Chamber **notes** that on 19 November 2024, the Respondents were given the opportunity to respond to the allegations in the complaint with a deadline of 5 December 2024. Mr. Tabatabael’s response was received by EDC on 5 December 2024. However, the email address provided by the complainant to contact Mr. Mero proved unsuccessful. Eventually, a valid email address for Mr. Mero was obtained. On 22 January 2025 Mr. Mero was given an opportunity to respond with a deadline of 7 February 2025. Mr. Mero’s response was received on 7 February 2025.



5. The EDC Chamber **notes** the contents of the following documents and correspondence received as part of the case file: the complaint received from Mr. Shulman mentioned above and the responses received from Mr. Tabatabael and Mr. Mero.

FACTUAL DETAILS OF THE CASE

- 6.1 The FIDE World Rapid and Blitz Team Championship was held in Astana, Kazakhstan from 1 to 6 August 2024.
- 6.2 On 3 August 2024, in round 8, team “GM Hans” was paired against team “Ashdod”. Respondent GM Tabatabael plays board 2 for team GM Hans while Mr. Mero plays board 6 for GM Hans. Complainant GM Eljanov plays board 2 for Ashdod while complainant Tanikin plays board 6. Respondents Tabatabael and Mero did not show up for their games against complainants Eljanov and Tanikin respectively and forfeited their games.

ALLEGATIONS OF THE COMPLAINT

- 7 The complainants allege that the reason the respondents did not show up for the games is because Ashdod is an Israeli team. The complainants note that even though the team is associated with Israel, Eljanov and Tanikin are not Israeli. GM Eljanov is a Ukrainian GM while Mr., Tanikin is from Kazakhstan.

DEFENCES PROVIDED BY RESPONDENT

- 8.1 GM Tabatabael admits to forfeiting the game but claims he was ill and he provides a doctor’s note to document the illness.
- 8.2 Mr. Mero admits to forfeiting the game and acknowledges that he did so because Ashdod is an Israeli team. However, he states he had no choice because he had to follow the laws of Syria. Specifically, Mr. Mero states, “ My decision to withdraw from the match was not an act of personal boycott or an attempt to disrupt the tournament. Rather, it was a necessary step to ensure my safety and compliance with the laws of my country. This is not a theoretical concern; Syrian citizens who engage in activities deemed contrary to national policies often face severe questioning, legal investigations, and potential repercussions upon their return. I was placed in a difficult situation where I had to choose between completing the tournament as planned or risking consequences beyond the chessboard.” It is clear



that his decision was not based on animosity toward Israel or his opponent, but that the decision was made at the behest of his government and made under duress

ADMISSIBILITY AND JURISDICTION

- 9.1 In order to satisfy the admissibility criteria, the complaint must meet the minimum requirements laid down in article 5 in the EDC Code.
- 9.2 Complainants Eljanov and Tanikin are FIDE players and members of the FIDE family. The Israeli Chess Federation is a Federation member of IDE and a member of the FIDE family. The Ashdod Chess Club entered a team in a FIDE competition and thus is also part of the FIDE family. (see article 4.2).
- 9.3 The Respondents must be a member of the FIDE Family (see article 5.1 b). The Respondents are active players registered in the FIDE database and therefore a member of the FIDE Family (see article 4.2 k).
- 9.4 The alleged misconduct must have been committed during a course of no more than three years immediately preceding the date on which the complaint is received by FIDE (see article 5.1 e). This condition is fulfilled.
- 9.5 The complaint contains allegations concerning actions committed at a FIDE Championship event which clearly FIDE has an interest in.
- 9.6 The alleged misconduct has international implications as it revolves around allegations connected to an international chess competition with participants from multiple national Federations.
- 9.7 For all the reasons mentioned in 9.2 – 9.6 above, the jurisdiction of the EDC Chamber in the present matter and admissibility of the complaint against the Respondents are confirmed.

FINDINGS

- 10.1 The complainants provide numerous instances of boycotts of Israeli players and teams from many sporting competitions, including chess. The EDC Chamber accepts as a matter of fact that boycotts of Israeli players and teams do occur for political reasons.
- 10.2 The original Notice with list of charges did not include a violation of Article 11.5(d)



- Boycott. However, the Chamber considered this charge because it was very clear from the facts of the case that a boycott was alleged. The respondents were not disadvantaged by the addition of this charge because their arguments address a boycott. Adding a charge that is similar to the original specifications has been done in previous cases – see Case 6-2023.

- 10.3 The complainants allege that GM Tabatabael has previously boycotted Israeli players on at least two occasions. While the Chamber is inclined to believe these allegations, it cannot be completely accepted as fact because no complaint was filed regarding these past actions, thus the Respondent did not have a chance to respond to them at the time. GM Tabatabael did show evidence that he has participated against Israelis on at least two previous occasions. He also claims to have played GM Eljanov on at least two previous occasions. GM Tabatabael introduces evidence that his previous forfeits to Israelis were also health related and claims to have a history of chronic illnesses. The EDC Chamber finds that the timing of these illnesses is very suspicious given that it has often revolved around Israeli players. However, GM Tabatabael has provided medical evidence to support his claims. Because of this, the EDC Chamber cannot be comfortably satisfied that the reason for this (and possibly other forfeits) is not medically related. If the standard of evidence were balance of probabilities, the decision might be otherwise. The standard of comfortable satisfaction is a high bar and GM Tabatabael has supplied enough evidence that he must be given the benefit of the doubt, even if the EDC Chamber is not completely convinced in the veracity of his claims.
- 10.4 The EDC Chamber finds that Mr. Mero did boycott the game for political reasons, but we accept his statement that he did so under duress. We accept Mr. Mero's statement that he had no choice but to follow the laws of his country because doing otherwise would subject him to great peril. We accept that Mr. Mero's boycott was not based on any animosity toward his opponent. Mr. Mero was cooperative throughout the process and was quite candid in his admission of the reasons for the boycott. This gives further weight that he had no animosity and is therefore not guilty of violation of articles 6.3, 6.4, and 11.9(a).
- 10.5 The EDC Chamber believes that the entity that bears responsibility for these boycotts is the governments of the players who are engaging in the boycott. However, EDC has no jurisdiction over those governments.
- 10.6. Accordingly, and considering all the above, the EDC Chamber **unanimously decides** as follows:



- (i) Respondent Tabatabael is found **not guilty** of breach of articles 6.3, 6.4, 11.9 (a) and 11.5(d) of the Disciplinary Code.
- (ii) Respondent Mero is found **not guilty** of articles 6.3, 6.4 and 11.9 (a) of the Code.
- (iii) Respondent Mero is found **guilty** of violating article 11.5 (d) of the Code.
- (iv) Respondent Mero is **sanctioned to a warning**.

11. The Respondents are referred to Rules 42.3 and 43 of the EDC Procedural Rules and advised that this decision may be appealed to the Appeal Chamber of the EDC by giving written notice of such appeal to the FIDE Secretariat within 21 calendar days from the date upon which this decision is received. The notice of appeal must clearly state all the grounds for the appeal and an appeal lodgment fee of 5000 Euros is payable to the FIDE Financial Department. Failing the due exercise of this right of appeal, the EDC Chamber's decision will become final.
12. The EDC Chamber **requests** the FIDE Secretariat to communicate forthwith the decision to the Respondents, and the FPL and to publish the decision on the FIDE webpage.

DATED ON THIS THE 15th DAY OF MARCH 2025

David Hater

CHAMBER CHAIRMAN
FIDE ETHICS & DISCIPLINARY COMMISSION