

Outgoing Kalmykia Leader Keeps Chess Federation Job

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Ilyumzhinov attending a FIDE congress in Khanty-Mansiisk on Wednesday. **Viktor Balin**

Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, the outgoing leader of the Kalmykia republic, managed to keep his other job Wednesday, winning elections to head the World Chess Federation, or FIDE.

A State Duma deputy said Ilyumzhinov's FIDE bid, backed by Kremlin aide Arkady Dvorkovich, was meant by Russian authorities as a sinecure for the flamboyant politician, who has governed the impoverished Buddhist republic of 300,000 people since 1993.

Ilyumzhinov, who has headed FIDE since 1995, needed all the support he could get because of tough competition from former chess master Anatoly Karpov. But he managed to win 96 out of 160 votes from FIDE member states at the elections held in Khanty-Mansiisk in West Siberia.

Karpov, who earlier accused Ilyumzhinov of nepotism and corruption, secured support from

his former chess nemesis-turned-Kremlin critic Garry Kasparov for his bid.

Karpov's supporters tried to disrupt the vote by accusing opponents of violating the rules on countries that authorize other delegations to vote for them. But that did not prevent Ilyumzhinov from securing a win.

In an attempt to mend fences with Karpov, the victorious Ilyumzhinov offered him the post of his deputy at FIDE, the Sovetsky Sport daily reported. Karpov, who personally informed the newspaper about the offer, said he was thinking it over.

Ilyumzhinov conceded that his re-election had been hard fought. "I never thought that I would struggle with Anatoly Karpov or Garry Kasparov," he told RIA-Novosti, describing them as "great sportsmen."

Dvorkovich wrote on his Twitter blog that Ilyumzhinov's victory had not surprised him. "As expected, Ilyumzhinov got more votes than Karpov. ... It is time to concentrate on work," he said.

"It was a good decision," said Rumen Rayev, a member of the Bulgarian Chess Federation, speaking by telephone from Sofia. "Maybe Mr. Karpov is a better chess player, but Mr. Ilyumzhinov is a better manager."

Oleg Shein, a Duma deputy and longtime Ilyumzhinov critic, said he believed that the Kremlin backed Ilyumzhinov's re-election in return for his departure as Kalmykia's leader. Ilyumzhinov announced several weeks ago that he would step down when his current, fourth term ends next month, and President Dmitry Medvedev has appointed Kalmykia's first deputy prime minister, Alexei Orlov, as his successor.

"FIDE will be his gardening plot, like bees for Luzhkov," Shein said, referring to former Mayor Yury Luzhkov's fondness for beekeeping.

Shein, speaking by telephone, said Ilyumzhinov's victory bode poorly for Russian chess, which he said has never regained its Soviet-era popularity because Ilyumzhinov has focused on high-profile tournaments.

"Chess today does not get the place that it deserves," said Mikhail Glotov, a Moscow-based chess coach. "If I could vote, I would give Karpov, who has more credibility as a player, a chance."

Karpov and Ilyumzhinov waged a heated campaign after Karpov was unexpectedly backed by the Russian Chess Federation in April.

Then Dvorkovich, who chairs the Russian Chess Federation, nominated Ilyumzhinov as the Russian candidate, forcing Karpov to campaign from the U.S. Chess Federation.

Earlier this month, Karpov challenged Ilyumzhinov's nomination in the Court of Arbitration for Sport in the Swiss city of Lausanne, but his lawsuit was thrown out.

Ilyumzhinov, himself an avid chess player, said before the vote that he was sure he would win. He has claimed to have attracted more than \$50 million to FIDE over the years, partially from

his own wealth.

Dvorkovich wrote on Twitter on Wednesday that some FIDE delegates had accused Kasparov and Karpov of trying to hack the vote. “Is this what they call a democracy?” Dvorkovich said.

Another Ilyumzhinov supporter, FIDE deputy head Georgios Makropoulos, accused Kasparov and Karpov of “dirty tricks” in an interview published in Sovetsky Sport.

Sergei Mitrokhin, head of the Yabloko party whose members distributed anti-Ilyumzhinov leaflets near the elections venue, said the re-election would “damage the reputation of FIDE.”

Yabloko has a long-running feud with Ilyumzhinov, whom it accused of involvement in the killing of opposition journalist and party member Larisa Yudina in 1998. Ilyumzhinov has denied wrongdoing.

“The investigation into Yudina's murder has not finished, but if Ilyumzhinov is elected again, nobody will care about it,” Mitrokhin said hours before the vote.

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