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Kasparov Bid Fails as Chess Federation's Boss Re-Elected

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Garry Kasparov (R) answers questions from reporters after he lost the election to head the World Chess Federation at the 41st Chess Olympiad in Tromsoe, Norway.

Former world champion Garry Kasparov failed in his bid to oust the eccentric longtime head of the World Chess Federation on Monday in a bitter contest steeped in Russian power plays.

Kasparov, a vocal critic of Vladimir Putin, was the sole challenger against Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, a wealthy businessman known to be supported by the Russian president. The vote was held on the sidelines of an international tournament in Norway.

Delegates at the 2014 Chess Olympiad in the northern city of Tromsoe voted 110-61 in favor of Ilyumzhinov, with four votes annulled.

Ilyumzhinov, who once claimed to have visited an alien spaceship, has headed the governing body of chess, known by its French acronym FIDE, for 19 years.

He has led Russia's predominantly Buddhist small region of Kalmykia and visited Moammar

Gadhafi in 2011, as the Libyan dictator was fighting NATO-backed rebels who eventually killed him. The next year, the chess chief met President Bashar Assad in Syria as fighting escalated there, boosting speculation he was an unofficial representative for Russia, an Assad ally.

Kasparov, who at 22 in 1985 became the youngest chess world champion, has described Putin as an arrogant dictator; in a recent AP interview he accused Ilyumzhinov of "working with Russian oligarchs in the Kremlin."

Supporters of Ilyumzhinov have said that Kasparov is too political for the job and that his advocacy of human rights is insincere.

The two camps have accused each other of financial skullduggery.

Kasparov's supporters say Ilyumzhinov channeled federation resources to his election campaign and have accused him of other corrupt practices. In a May letter to African chess officials, Lewis Ncube, a FIDE vice president from Zambia who supports Ilyumzhinov, said Kasparov was using "military contacts" to pressure national federations into supporting his bid to become president "by hook or by crook."

Russian embassies had reportedly contacted national chess federations worldwide to drum up support for Ilyumzhinov, but he denied any misconduct.

"We have had no cases of corruption. I am very proud of my job," Ilyumzhinov said in a live stream broadcast by the Norwegian VG daily and thanked Kasparov for participating in the election.

In 2010, Ilyumzhinov defeated a similar challenge by another former world champion, Anatoly Karpov, in an election marked by allegations of fraud, but organizers said that since then some voting procedures had been made more transparent.

English chess grandmaster Nigel Short, who campaigned for Kasparov as England's delegate, described the vote in a VG interview as "an absolute tragedy," saying that he had hoped "to expose the hypocrisy, lies, corruption of the current regime."

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