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Russia Used Gifts, Politics to Keep World Chess Dominance – FT

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Arkady Dvorkovich **Fredrik Varfjell / Zuma / TASS**

Russia has wielded gifts and political office to maintain control of the World Chess Federation (FIDE) last year, according to a Financial Times investigation.

FIDE elected former deputy prime minister Arkady Dvorkovich in October 2018 on his pledge to draw a line under years of scandal and internal feuding.

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Russia secured Dvorkovich's victory "with promises of money and political pressure," according to FT interviews with a dozen senior figures in the chess world and document reviews.

"[M]ore than 120 federations got pressure, either direct, by Russian embassies, or through their ministers of sport, or even ministers of foreign affairs," claims Georgios Makropoulos,

Dvorkovich's rival in the 2018 election.

In exchange for backing Dvorkovich, Russia's embassy in Brasilia had touted the prospect of a significant funding boost for Brazil's chess federation, according to the FT. Russian embassies elsewhere in the world sent similar notes, the paper writes.

According to the FT, the Russian Embassy in Belgrade had offered the Serbian chess federation 220,000 euros in exchange for the vote. The Serbian federation president was later found guilty of selling his vote.

Dvorkovich denied as "completely wrong" the assertion that politics were involved in his election as chief of FIDE.

The FT writes that Dvorkovich's assistant — a holdover from his Russian predecessor Kirsan Ilyumzhinov — had offered financial assistance in exchange for individual chess federations' votes via WhatsApp. The WhatsApp offers were standard practice under Ilyumzhinov, a British chessmaster who ran for FIDE deputy president last year told the Wired tech website last November.

Ilyumzhinov was sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury in 2015 on accusations of assisting the Syrian regime, then suspended in July 2018 for allegedly violating FIDE's code of ethics and banned from seeking re-election.

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