

18 October 2019

**Dear Mr. Strydom,**

**Dear members of the FIDE Ethics Commission,**

Thank you for your kind attention and for giving me the opportunity to present my view of the case.

**1. On Zangalis complaint in general**

First of all, let me offer you a hypothetical situation to consider. A journalist comes across an interview given by some athlete to a local newspaper. The journalist (let it be 'he') reads the interview and then realises it's not a real interview, but a fake one, a paid-for advertisement disguised as an interview. He then comments on it on his Twitter as he sees fit based on his professional vision and the freedom of speech.

The athlete takes offence at the journalist's tweet and files a complaint about him to the International Olympic Committee. The athlete requests the IOC to ban the journalist from attending any competitions held under the IOC auspices, and also to apply any other possible sanctions the IOC deems necessary.

Was the International Olympic Committee the right authority to address? Were the athlete's demands appropriate?

I am an independent journalist. My Twitter account is my personal one; Chess-News website is an independent website that has nothing to do with the Chess Federation of Russia (CFR). I am neither a member of the CFR nor a journalist licensed by it. In my journalistic work, I'm guided exclusively by the legislation of my country and Chess-News internal guidelines. Those are the standard restrictions for independent mass media; there are no more and there can't be any.

Should anyone have any cause to complain against my writings, this person can go to civil court. That's what people do in a civilised society.

Instead, Kirill Zangalis first reported me to his own employer – Mr. Zangalis is Public Relations Director at the Chess Federation of Russia – and now also to the International Chess Federation.

Dear Commission members, please note that the decision by the CFR Ethics Commission you consider has been taken at the very complainant's office, namely at the following address: 14 Bld. 1, Gogolevsky Bulvar, Moscow, 119019, Russia.

In my opinion, Mr. Zangalis misdirected his complaints. A decision by a CFR's department on a complaint filed by a CFR employee cannot be taken seriously. And FIDE, in my

opinion, cannot act as a civil court just because the complainant has something to do with chess; all the more so because the matter of the case is not related directly to the complainants' chess activities.

## 2. The matter of Zangalis complaint

There are two complaints – by Kirill Zangalis and by Sergey Karjakin – to consider under this case, but I think Zangalis complaint can be deemed the main one. Initially it had been the only complaint, while Mr. Karjakin sent his own text later upon your request.

**2.1.** In his complaint, Mr. Zangalis attempts to mislead you using misrepresentations, distortions and substitutions.

His text begins with a false statement: 'Yevgeny Surov, a well-known chess journalist, published a post (tweet) on the Twitter social network, ... **calling ... Sergey's chess career a prostitution.**'

The highlighted fragment **is a lie**. The questions I ask in my tweet are based on a certain printed publication, namely the 'Sergey Karjakin's interview'. This can be seen very clearly from my tweet with a screenshot attached. Sergey Karjakin's chess career – which, by the way, I respect a lot – has nothing to do with it. Also my tweet doesn't contain the word 'prostitution' used by Zangalis.

**2.2.** All further points made by Mr. Zangalis in his complaint stem from this very statement which he made up himself.

Dear Sirs, I believe the screenshots provided, along with the English translation of the texts they contain, are convincing enough to deem his statement false. In my opinion, this is already a reason to deem the case technically unfounded.

**2.3.** To understand the whole tweet, one has to see the screenshot, i.e. a fragment of the 'Sergey Karjakin's interview'. So, what did Mr. Zangalis do? He sent you **just a part** of the screenshot. Meanwhile the rest of it (left out by Mr. Zangalis) contains more text highlighted by me which is the point.

**2.4.** Thus, Mr. Zangalis did not just distort the meaning of my tweet; he reversed it. Obviously, my intention was not to insult Mr. Karjakin. On the contrary, I addressed Mr. Karjakin as I did care about his reputation as well as the reputation of chess.

## 3. The matter and the cause of my tweet

**3.1.** Based on my professional expertise, I'm pretty sure that the 'Sergey Karjakin's interview' is a fabricated one, its main purpose being to glorify a Yekaterinburg businessman Andrey Simanovsky.

**3.2.** How does it work? Mr. Zangalis sells 'PR' i.e. the glorification of someone in mass media. But his own name does not often suffice to gain the readers' trust. There will be little impact if some text that repeatedly reads, for instance, '**Andrey Simanovsky is always successful in whatever business he undertakes**', is signed by Kirill Zangalis. That is why he involves Sergey Karjakin's name. When the same is said by a famous Grandmaster, it makes a much stronger impression on the readers, all the more so because it happens in a 'dialogue'.

**3.3.** The fact of using Karjakin's name in such unprofessional, unethical publications – this is what has caused my outcry on Twitter.

In my opinion, not only such publications denigrate the readers as well as the very authors and the persons concerned, but they also insult the journalistic profession and (as in this case) damage a famous chess player's reputation. It's exactly such so-called interviews that 'cause irreparable damage to the entire chess community'.

**3.4.** It's important to understand why such 'interviews' intended to glorify hiddenly (or openly) other persons or events alongside with Mr. Karjakin are possible at all in the Russian mass media. The fact of the matter is that Mr. Zangalis is simultaneously the official PR Director at the CFR and the PR manager to a leading Russian chess player. In addition, he sometimes authors chess-related publications in mass media as an ordinary chess journalist. Here we can see an obvious **conflict of interest**. Such a combination would be impossible in any democratic society; a conflict of interest is forbidden by Article 10 of the Russian Federal Law No. 273-FZ 'On Combating Corruption', but, alas, many laws of our country exist just in theory.

Dear Sirs, in paragraphs 2 and 3 I did my best to help you understand well the real meaning of my tweet. Not only did Mr. Zangalis fail to do the same in his complaint, but he also deliberately tried to do the opposite.

#### **4. The matter of Karjakin complaint**

**4.1.** In my reply to the CFR Ethics Commission, I have already explained a lot of what I explain above in paragraphs 2 and 3. No doubt Mr. Zangalis and Mr. Karjakin have seen that reply; probably that is why Mr. Karjakin's complaint is formulated in a somewhat more vague language. Yet it also contains distortions.

**4.2.** Mr. Karjakin already doesn't state that I 'call his chess career a prostitution'. Instead, he states that I 'compare their [*his and Zangalis*'] long and fruitful partnership to a relationship between a prostitute and a pimp'. As one could see from paragraph 2, this is not true either.

Another false statement reads: '... according to Surov, [*Zangalis*] uses me for his own personal and selfish purposes ...' There is nothing in my tweet about Mr. Zangalis' personal and selfish purposes. It's just the other way round as I wonder: 'How much of this goes to Karjakin?'

**4.3.** Dear Sirs, please note that both Mr. Zangalis and Mr. Karjakin try to rephrase my tweet, each his own way, in spite of it containing just a few short sentences. What for?

**4.4. Both Mr. Zangalis and Mr. Karjakin deliberately draw your attention away from the point of my tweet.** They both speak about his chess career – Mr. Karjakin even lists his chess achievements in detail — but my tweet is not about it; its only subject is Mr. Karjakin's interview to a Russian newspaper, which I think was made up by Mr. Zangalis to glorify a certain Yekaterinburg businessman. That's it. Let me emphasize once again: **my tweet has nothing to do with Mr. Karjakin's chess career.**

#### **5. Irina Lyymar's explanatory letter**

**5.1.** Dear Mr. Strydom, in a recent email to you I asked you which official materials translated into English you have got on the CFR Ethics Commission case on a similar Zangalis complaint. And it was not without a reason. It's a pity that you deemed it unnecessary to answer my question.

Judging by the documents you sent me, I conclude that the only translated one you have got on the matter is the explanatory letter by Ms. Lymar who is the Chairman of the CFR Ethics Commission.

'... The RCF Disciplinary Commission is requested to proceed with its inquiry as soon as possible and to advise the FIDE EC of the outcome in due course', you wrote in your first reply to Mr. Zangalis (sent on August 19, a copy sent to me). In this connection, is just one short letter by Ms. Lymar enough for such a serious organisation as yours?

Let me shed the light on what kind of letter it is.

**5.2.** Let me begin with citing the official letter I received (along with the complaint of Mr. Zangalis) from **Ms. Lymar on August 13, 2019:**

*'Dear Mr. Surov,*

*The CFR Ethics Commission has received a statement filed by K.Zangalis in regard to you (attached).*

*I inform you that the statement has been accepted by the Commission for proceedings. In this connection, I request you to send me, on or before August 25, 2019, your written explanation as to the points made in the statement.'*

There was just one more exchange of letters between me and Ms. Lymar before I sent my written explanation. Let me cite those emails here to clarify the situation:

**Me on August 13:**

*'Dear Irina,*

*Thank you for your letter. I will send my reply within a few days. Will it suffice to send it via email?*

*Given that the statement of K.Zangalis has already been accepted for proceedings, I request your permission to publish it on Chess-News website. I believe that openness and publicity will be nothing but beneficial for the Commission and for the whole chess community. As for my explanation, I will publish it as well (I believe I have the right to do so without anyone's permission), but it will look strange if the readers do not understand what exactly I reply to.'*

**Ms. Lymar on August 18:**

*'Dear Mr. Surov,*

*As Chess-News editor-in-chief, you have the right to publish anything you consider appropriate according to the policy of your website.*

*I would also like to inform you that the Commission's meeting on the statement of K.Zangalis will take place at 11:30 on August 26, 2019, in the Central Chess House (Gogolevsky Bulvar 14, 2nd floor). You have the right to attend it and provide your oral explanation. I also remind you that you have the right to send your written explanation to this address before August 25, 2019.'*

**5.3.** Now let's take a look at Ms. Lymar's explanatory letter to you.

*'As stated in the decision, we have given Mr. Surov the necessary opportunities and sufficient time to find a compromise and apologise to Kirill Zangalis and Sergey Karjakin, and we expected him to take steps towards reconciliation.'*

**It's a lie.** As you could see, Ms. Lymar in her letters to me did not mention any 'compromise' or 'apologies'; she just asked me to send my written explanation, which I did.

*'After a while, however, [! – E.S.] he sent a written explanation to the Commission, not only failing to repent [! - E.S.], but even [! – E.S.] attempting to justify himself...'*

That is, I'm being accused as I dare attempt to justify myself!

*'...and insisting that his insulting Twitter post was fair.'*

Here Ms. Lymar's judgement about my tweet ('insulting') is given as something undisputable. I think this is improper on her part and thus cannot be taken into account.

*'Mr. Surov was also formally **invited** to attend the Commission's meeting on this case, but failed to appear without good reason.'*

**This is a barefaced lie.** As you could see, Ms. Lymar in her first official letter to me **did not invite** me anywhere. I'm just requested to send a written explanation.

Ms. Lymar's next letter to me (which I'm not sure would have followed if not for my clarifying questions) reads: *'You have the right to attend the Commission's meeting'*. Obviously, this means I had the right to attend but I also had the right to **not** attend. Once again, there is no invitation of any kind.

Therefore, along with my official explanation, I informed her in the same reply – out of sheer politeness – that, regrettably, I would not be able to attend the Commission's meeting because I would be out of Moscow on August 26, 2019.

That has been interpreted as though I 'failed to appear without good reason'.

But Ms. Lymar did not ask me why I would be out of Moscow. The fact that I reside in another country with my family is probably not a 'good reason' to her.

*'In view of the foregoing, the Commission had every reason to impose on Mr. Surov the disciplinary measures set out in the decision, which remain in force indefinitely.'*

Dear Sirs, I believe you could kindly draw your own conclusions 'in view of the foregoing'.

**5.4.** Another detail is that the official decision by the CFR Ethics Commission says nothing about the period of time for the disciplinary measures to remain in force. Meanwhile, Ms. Lymar in her explanatory letter decided to add 'indefinitely'. Why? Also, why is this absent in the official decision? It is because the 'indefinite' period of time (let alone unspecified) makes very little sense from the legal point of view?

**5.5.** *'At the same time, bearing in mind that Mr. Surov is a talented and popular chess journalist [This is the only truth in the letter; I'm flattered that Ms. Lymar bears this in mind – E.S.], the Commission is ready to review the sanctions imposed on him provided Mr. Surov takes reciprocal steps, in particular by making a public apology to Kirill Zangalis and Sergey Karjakin.'*

This is another thing I learned first from this letter, as the official decision says nothing about the possibility of 'reviewing the sanctions'.

I am sorry if my comments on Ms. Lymar's explanatory letter look harsh, but it was hard to find another way of responding to so many lies packed into a few lines.

**Dear Mr. Strydom,**

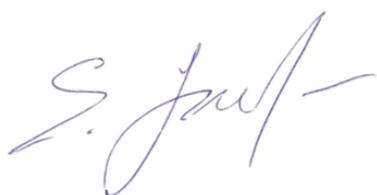
In view of the foregoing, kindly let me summarize my submissions regarding points (1), (2), (3) of your Notice of September 23, 2019:

- (1) As explained in paragraphs 2, 3, 4, I deem unfounded the allegations that I have violated the articles 2.2.4, 2.2.10 or 2.2.11 of the Code of Ethics. Moreover, as explained in paragraph 1, I believe the FIDE Code of Ethics is inappropriate to refer to in this particular case.
- (2) I am not prepared to tender a public apology to the complainants. As to whether to remove that particular post from Twitter or not, this issue is not of vital importance for me. A tweet is a momentary remark everyone has the right to post; I have already exercised my right in regard to that tweet which has been lost among millions of other tweets long ago.
- (3) As for the sanction already imposed upon me by the Chess Federation of Russia, I deem it unfair, contradicting the laws of the Russian Federation, and politically motivated – I do not elaborate upon it in this letter but I can provide further explanations in case you request me to. The sanction by the CFR causes damage not to me, but to many thousands of Chess-News readers who have been deprived of the possibility to read my reports from any events held under the auspices of the CFR.

As for the complainants' request to ban me from attending as a journalist any chess events held under the auspices of FIDE, I find it absurd and outrageous. The readers of my website are the only ones to be harmed by it.

Kind regards,

Evgeny Surov, journalist, Chess-News editor-in-chief



*Enclosed:*

- 1) *The Karjakin's interview translated into English*
- 2) *Full screenshot of my tweet*
- 3) *Screenshots of Ms. Lymar's letters to me*