



## **FIDE ETHICS & DISCIPLINARY COMMISSION**

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

Chairperson: Mrs Yolander Sammy

Members: Mr Johan Sigeman  
Mr David Hater

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

### **DECISION**

#### **Case no. 5/2024: "Alleged postal harassment of female chess players"**

1. The EDC Chamber **notes** its establishment by the EDC Chairman on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2024.
2. The EDC Chamber **notes** that on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024 the FIDE Ethics and Disciplinary Commission (EDC) received a Complaint against IM Andrejs Strebkovs from the FIDE President, concerning allegations of postal harassment in violation of the FIDE Ethics & Disciplinary Code, more particularly:
  - (a) *Articles 2.2.4, 2.2.5* (unseemly behaviour) and *2.2.10* of the old Code of Ethics (the alleged offences occurred before the commencement date of the new EDC Code on 1 April 2022).
  - (b) *Articles 6.1(a)* – ethical value of human dignity – read with *Art. 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 (e) and 6.5 (g)* of the Ethics Code.
  - (c) *Article 11.9(a)* – socially unacceptable behaviour, and *Art. 11.9 (d)* - acts of misbehaviour and *Art. 11.9 (e)*- abuse and obscenity, of the Disciplinary Code.
3. The Complainant is the FIDE President, representing the general interests of FIDE.
4. The Respondent is IM Andrejs Strebkovs of Latvia (FIDE Identity number 11601310).
5. The EDC Chamber **notes** that the Respondent was given the opportunity to respond to the complaint by way of notice dated 14<sup>th</sup> May 2024.
6. The EDC Chamber **notes** the contents of the following documents received as part of the case file: the Complaint of the FIDE President along with its exhibits, the notice to Respondent sent by the EDC Chamber (14<sup>th</sup> May 2024), the Respondent’s response dated 30<sup>th</sup> May 2024 (which was received on the June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2024 by registered mail to FIDE offices in Lausanne).



7. The identities of the victims are anonymised in this Decision, but are known the EDC Chamber.
8. The EDC Chamber **notes** the subject-matter of the Complaint, and defensive statements submitted:
  - 8.1 The Complainant submitted a Complaint to the EDC, notifying the Commission of potential violations of the Code of Ethics and/or Disciplinary Code.
  - 8.2 The Complainant details that for a decade, sealed envelopes with pages from pornographic magazines and used condoms were sent to several women chess players (11 names of which are listed). The said letters were sent to the home addresses of the players, as well as their club, university and tournament venues.
  - 8.3 The envelopes usually contained pornographic material- a page from a magazine, which was folded in half with a condom with a substance (presumably sperm) inside. The letters were all sent through mailboxes in Riga, Latvia.
  - 8.4 The sender used a wide variety of names as the ostensible sender, sometimes the names of well-known male chessplayers and/or addresses to impersonate them.
  - 8.5 There were two investigations with evidence that traced the letters to FIDE-registered chess player IM Andrejs Strebkovs - an informal journalist investigation and a formal investigation by Riga police.
- 8.6 *Mail Recipients and details of transgressions*

Ms A - A letter was sent to Ms. A in spring 2018, and delivered to the chess club in Moscow (she was 14 at that time). The envelope labelled Mr. Alexander Khalifman as the sender. The envelope was opened by the head of the chess club, Mr. Sergey Nesterov, who stated that there were clippings from a pornographic magazine with two or three men raping a girl, and a condom with liquid in it. Mr. Nesterov called the police and the player's mother. The case was investigated by the police, but nothing concrete came from it. This incident was confirmed by the investigation undertaken by the Meduza Internet Platform (hereinafter referred to as the "Meduza Article").
- 8.7 Ms B - Ms. B received numerous letters from Latvia. The first letters received were sent when she was below the age of 18, in November 2013. The letters were sent to her home address in Moscow, Russia. At least 10 letters were sent and received by her mother between 2013 and 2018-2019. A few letters were kept safe in the refrigerator. This incident was also confirmed by the Meduza Article investigation.
- 8.8 Ms C - Ms. C received a letter from Riga in 2009 when she was 15. The labelled sender was a child of her age, who played in the same tournaments.



- The letter, opened by her parents, contained one used condom. The parents deemed the letter as a prank and did not take it seriously. This incident was confirmed by the Meduza Article.
- 8.9 Ms D– Ms. D received a letter with a Riga postmark during or about 2012/2013, when she was 20. Her parents opened the letter and informed her of the contents- a used condom and pornographic material. This incident is detailed in the Meduza Article.
- 8.10 Ms E - Ms. E received letters addressed to her at a chess school in Moscow in 2013, when she was 24 years old. The envelope was opened by the director of the school with pornographic materials and a used condom. This incident was confirmed by the Meduza Article.
- 8.11 Ms. F- Ms F from Moscow received a letter in 2015 when she was 23 years old, containing a used condom and pornographic material.
- 8.12 Ms G and Ms H- Similarly in 2015. 18 year old Ms G and 21 year old Ms H received envelopes with pornographic materials and a used condom in St Petersburg. Ms G kept her letter and gave it to Meduza. There is also a photograph of Ms H’s letter.
- 8.13 Ms I- On August 31, 2023, Ms I received a letter with a Latvian stamp and the same obscene contents as the other young ladies. The information was provided to FIDE directly by Ms I’s father.
- Grand Swiss 2021 case*
- 8.14 During the 27th and 28th of October 2021, three envelopes addressed to J, K and L, participants of the Grand Swiss Tournament, were delivered to the Marriott hotel in Riga. The labelled sender was Alexei Dreev and Alexander Khalifman.
- 8.15 On the 3rd November 2021 two more similar envelopes were delivered, addressed to. M and N, participants of the tournament. These letters were collected by Ms. Dana Reizniece-Ozola, acting at the time of the tournament in her capacity as FIDE Managing Director, and the individual responsible for organising the tournament. The letters contained used condoms and pornographic material.
- The Meduza Article*
- 8.16 In February 2022, the Meduza Article was published regarding numerous letters delivered to different female chess players: A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H.
- 8.17 The Meduza Article is the product of in-depth investigative journalism, which concludes that the Respondent Mr. Strebkovs is the offender.
- 8.18 This conclusion is based on the following: numerous letters were sent from Latvia; though a few persons were labelled as the sender, only Mr. A Khalifman is labelled several times.
- 8.19 Mr. Khalifman is the moderator of the “Chess Professionals and Amateurs” online forum, where he banned the user under the nickname “Afromeev’s



- Cat.” This user was allegedly known and recognized at several chess forums, which gave the conclusion that it was the same person behind the alias. Afromeev’s Cat published photos of chess players with insulting captions, which eventually led to a warning and a ban by Mr. Khalifman in 2009. The Afromeev’s Cat user was later (in 2012) registered at another online forum and posted similar content that he was banned for in the past.
- 8.20 In 2012 a user with a similar nickname (“Afromeev’s Cat”) registered at an amateur writers' website Proza.ru, publishing humorous and erotic stories about the chess world. Although all events and characters were specified as “fictitious”, certain chess players were reportedly recognised in the heroes of texts with ease, including such characters as "Kalifman" or "A. B. Khalifman” and certain women characters with their names similar to those specified above.
- 8.21 In 2016 several comments appeared in the Russian social web “Vkontakte” signed by “Alexander Shneider” writing in a style like the style of the “Afromeev’s Cat”.
- 8.22 "Alexander Shneider" sent messages to female chess players from two VKontakte accounts in this name, where he also regularly posted links to stories by "the Afromeev’s Cat".
- 8.23 Meduza found an earlier account of Schneider which was used to share links to texts of the “Afromeev’s Cat” created in 2010 but frozen for suspicious activity. According to a source with access to the Vkontakte database, the Schneider page was linked to the email address “candyman@megabox.ru.”. Information about the candyman@megabox.ru was leaked as a result of a hacker attack by a hacker activist (hacktivist) with the nickname CyberAnakin.
- 8.24 The IP leak by the hacktivist concluded that the owner of the E-Mail entered the mailbox from Riga, Latvia, around the area with the postal code LV-1021 indicated on the envelope received by the chess player G. CyberAnakin also checked emails from the candyman@megabox.ru box from 2010 to 2014, upon which he specified that the name of the owner was Andrejs Strebkovs from Riga with a profile on the FIDE website.
- 8.25 FIDE wishes to note that Meduza and the hacktivist acted on their own accord, with no endorsement or assistance from FIDE.

#### *Riga Police Investigation*

- 8.26 The Riga Police launched an investigation of the case submitted by Ms. Reizniece-Ozola which included the envelopes received at the Grand Swiss 2021 event as well as the expertise record (from the Criminal Case Termination).
- 8.27 The criminal case was discontinued on the 10th January 2023 since it was found that the Respondent’s actions do not constitute a criminal offense in Latvia.



8.28

Despite this, the investigation revealed evidence that the material contained in the envelopes belonged to the Respondent. (a) On the 17th February 2022 the experts of the State Police Criminology Department reported that the biological material of the same male person, valid for identification, was found on the typographic sheets and the condom submitted for expert examination; (b) on the 28th April 2022 the experts of the State Police Criminalistics Department reported that on all examination objects submitted for expertise, namely 3 pcs. sheets of paper and 3 pcs. condoms, biological material of one male person was found matching with the DNA profile studied on the 17th February 2022; (c) on the 19th August 2022 the experts of the State Police Criminology Department reported that the biological material taken from the Respondent matches with the material studied in the two expert opinions specified above.

8.29

The case, including the materials and results of the expert research provided for the criminal case specified above, was then studied by the Administrative Offences Investigation Department of the Order Police Bureau of Riga Ziemeļu Administration of the State Police.

8.30

On the 27th June 2023 the Police decided that there was enough evidence in support of the fact that the Respondent during the period from October 27 to November 3, 2023, sent five letters to the participants of the tournament organized by the International Chess Federation (FIDE) Recipient J, E, M, N and L to the hotel "AC Hotel by Marriott Riga" in Riga, Dzirnavu street 33, that contained clippings from pornographic magazines/newspapers, as well as used condoms, thus violating generally accepted norms of behaviour and thus disturbing peace/work of a person and institution. The police made a Decision as a result of the case, an administrative penalty was applied, which was never appealed by the Respondent or anyone else.

8.31

The Complainant submits that considering the evidence and conviction by the Riga Police, there is confirmation without a doubt that the Respondent did send letters to 5 female chess players in 2021.

#### *Respondent's Response*

8.32

The Respondent's statement only addressed the issue of admissibility of the complaints and failed to present any arguments on the merits of the charges, not even denying guilt.

8.33

The Respondent contends that only the 2021 case can be subject to a complaint as the other letters "have nothing to do with the chess competitions..." or chess.

8.34

The Respondent further claims that the letters do not concern FIDE or the national chess federations and activities of those organisations. The Respondent even suggests in a hypothetical manner that the 'ordinary correspondence of private persons' is not related to chess.



- 8.35 Basically, the Respondent claims FIDE and the national chess federations lack jurisdiction.
- 8.36 The Respondent addresses the potential violations of the Old Code, and states that since he did not participate in the Grand Swiss Tournament in 2021, he could not break the norms of courtesy and chess etiquette during the tournament.
- 8.37 The Respondent reiterates his argument of private correspondence between persons during a chess event, which cannot be classified as unworthy behaviour, as it is of a private nature. As such, it could not affect the reputation of FIDE or any National Federation since it is of a ‘private character between two private individuals and does not in itself become public’.
- 8.38 The Respondent’s final argument was that receiving a letter every 6 months could not be considered harassment.
9. Upon due consideration, the EDC Chamber, by unanimity of its members, **finds** regarding the admissibility of the complaint that:
- 9.1 The Complainant is the FIDE President, who has the necessary *locus standi* to submit a complaint to the EDC as he represents FIDE’s general interests, over which FIDE exercises jurisdiction.
- 9.2 The Respondent is a FIDE titled and registered player, and as such a member of the FIDE family.
- 9.3 The complaint discloses a *prima facie* case of a breach of the EDC Code by the Respondent, with a possible breach of
- (a) *Articles 2.2.4, 2.2.5 and 2.2.10 of the Old Ethics Code*- for the first set of charges which relate to the incidents which occurred at the Grand Swiss Tournament in Riga, Latvia in October & November 2021 (the offences occurred before the commencement date of the new EDC Code on 1 April 2022); and
- (b) *Art 6.1 (a) read with art 6.3, 6.4, 6.5(e), 6.5(g); and Art 11.9(a), (d) and (e) of the Ethics & Disciplinary Code (new)*- for the incidents related to envelopes sent to I and B sent in 2023/2024.
- 9.4 Some of the misconduct took place at FIDE tournaments venues with international participation, the victims are from various nationalities and federations, therefore this matter is regarded as having taken place in the international sphere.
- 9.5 The alleged misconduct which occurred within 3 years from the date on which the complaint is received by FIDE shall be the misconduct under scrutiny and possible sanction as those fall within the prescriptive period- *Art 5 (e)*.
- 9.6 The incidents which occurred prior to 2021 were considered to establish *modus operandi* and in aggravation of the sanction.





- 9.7 The matter is therefore admissible, and the EDC has jurisdiction to investigate and sanction a violation of the old Code of Ethics and new EDC Code.
10. Upon due consideration, the EDC Chamber, by unanimity of its members, **observes** and **finds** regarding the issue of the Respondent's guilt as follows:
- 10.1 Sexual harassment and sexual abuse in the world of sports have become a more spoken about matter in sports in recent times with the advocacy of the 'me too' movement, and the support victims have received to encourage them to speak up.
- 10.2 Sexual harassment and abuse (SHA) have "severe and long-term physical, psychological, social and performance related consequences."<sup>1</sup> It is understood that the true impact on the victim is "based on a subjective experience of a situation as uncomfortable, asymmetric in terms of power, and unwanted in terms of actions." Lack of consent, or key terms like "unwanted" and "unwelcome" are the root of SHA.
- 10.3 FIDE strongly supports chess players competing in a safe and respectful environment. This environment includes and extends to playing venues. Part of this support is encouraging and empowering victims to speak up and report transgressions which contravene with these principles to safeguard a safe environment.
- 10.4 The EDC is comfortably satisfied with the police report and investigation which linked the DNA sample in the condom sent by the Respondent to match the DNA sample of the ones found in the Respondent's home. The DNA matching in a fully equipped crime lab is key evidence and conclusive proof in the EDC's deliberations.
- 10.5 The Respondent also never denied sending the letters, but rather makes an argument on admissibility. This further strengthens the panel's belief that the Respondent is the offender.
- 10.6 The Meduza report and investigation was considered as persuasive evidence.

*Offences under the old code- Code of Ethics effective till 1 April 2022*

*Articles 2.2.4, 2.2.5 and 2.2.10*

- 10.7 The Old Code applies to the incidents which occurred at the Grand Swiss Tournament in Latvia in 2021. These were the postal items sent to E, K. L. M and N.
- 10.8 Article 2.2.4 reads - "*Failure to comply with normally accepted standards of courtesy and chess etiquette. Misbehaviour of a personal nature which is generally unacceptable by normal social standards.*"
- 10.9 When considering the contents of the letters sent by the Respondent, it appears as if the Respondent has a penchant for inappropriate explicit and downright

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<sup>1</sup> Sexual harassment and abuse in sport: some legal and criminological considerations by Salomeja Zaksaitė.



disturbing conduct towards women, minors included. The conduct of the Respondent is not socially acceptable behaviour. The Respondent is therefore guilty of Article 2.2.4.

- 10.10 Article 2.2.5 reads in part - *“Violent, threatening or other unseemly behaviour during or in connection with a chess event.”*
- 10.11 The EDC finds that although the contents of the letter are obscene, the EDC finds this section to speak of behaviour in the physical presence of each other, with a more direct interaction in nature. The Panel therefore finds the Respondent not guilty of this charge.
- 10.12 Article 2.2.10 reads - *“In addition, disciplinary action in accordance with this Code of Ethics will be taken in cases of occurrences which cause the game of chess, FIDE or its federations to appear in an unjustifiable unfavourable light and in this way damage its reputation.”*
- 10.13 Considering the Respondent is a FIDE titled player, the EDC finds that his behaviour has damaged the reputation of FIDE, in particular FIDE’s inability over a lengthy period to trace and act against the offender, one of its registered players. The Respondent is found guilty of Art. 2.2.10.

*Offences under the new code*

*Article 6.1(a)- read with Art. 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5(e) and 6.5(g)*

- 10.14 The Respondent, as a member of the FIDE Family, is bound by the Principles of Human Dignity- *Art. 6.1*. As a titled player, it is expected that the Respondent should be familiar with the conduct expected of chess players.
- 10.15 It is strictly prohibited by the Code to infringe on the dignity of an individual, and all forms of harassment are explicitly prohibited (*Art 6.4*).
- 10.16 Harassment is defined in *Art 6.5* of the Code. *“Harassment refers to systematic, hostile and repeated acts intended to isolate or ostracise a person or group and affect the dignity of a person or group.”*
- 10.17 In particular, *Art. 6.5 (e)* defines psychological abuse as *“any treatment that may diminish the sense of identity, dignity or self-worth, and may include without limitation any unwelcome act such as confinement, isolation, verbal assault, humiliation, or infantilization.*
- 10.18 Art 6.5 (g) defines sexual harassment to mean *“unwanted and unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, whether verbal, non-verbal, or physical. The assessment is based on whether a reasonable person, in the given cultural and contextual circumstances would regard the conduct as undesirable or offensive.”*
- 10.19 The EDC notes that the Complainant’s Report contains details of the allegations are supported and largely corroborated by exhibits, including a police investigation report and an investigative journalism report, as compared to the Respondent’s position which has no supporting evidence.





10.20 By the definition of harassment as systemic, hostile and repeated actions affecting the dignity of a person, the conduct of the Respondent qualifies as such behaviour. The Respondent's unwanted and disturbing letters which contain lewd sexual contents is repeated and clearly of a sexual nature. Though at first some of the victims dismissed or thought the envelopes were a joke, some eventually felt the negative, psychological effect. The EDC rejects the Respondent's position that these envelopes were 'private correspondence'. One needs only to check a dictionary for the definition of correspondence to know that it includes communication between both parties, known to each other. Sending envelopes under an alias and impersonating other does not qualify as correspondence, especially when there is no element of a reply. Even if the Respondent had sent the letters under his own name, it would not have qualified as "private correspondence". The main reason for this is that the sender and the recipients were not acquainted with each other. The only connection between them were the fact that they all belong to the FIDE Family. The Respondent is guilty of Art 6.1 (a).

*Article 11.9 (a) of the Disciplinary Code*

10.21 *Article 11.9 (a)* speaks of socially unacceptable behaviour as an offense - misbehaviour of a personal nature which is generally unacceptable by normal social standards, or a failure to comply with normally accepted standards of courtesy and chess etiquette.

10.22 This Article mirrors that of *Art 2.2.4 of the Old Code*. The Respondent is therefore guilty of Art 11.9 (a) as well.

*Article 11.9 (d) of the Disciplinary Code*

10.23 *Art 11.9 (d)* addresses acts of misbehaviour, particularly acts of misbehaviour including abusive conduct in a disturbing, ugly or provocative manner...or infliction of mental harm to others. The EDC finds that this section speaks more to unsporting behaviour, physical assault, verbal abuse or threatening behaviour. The Panel does not find any such evidence presented in the Complaint and therefore finds the Respondent not guilty of this charge.

*Article 11.9 (e) of the Disciplinary Code*

10.24 *Art. 11.9 (e)* addresses abuse and obscenity. This Article mirrors that of *Art 2.2.5 of the Old Code*. Although the contents of the letter are obscene, the EDC finds this section to speak of behaviour in the physical presence of each other, with a more direct interaction in nature.

10.25 The Respondent is not guilty of Art. 11.9 (e)



11. Accordingly, and considering all the above, the EDC Chamber **unanimously decides** as follows:
- 11.1 The Respondent is found **guilty** of Art.2.2.4 and 2.2.10 of the Old Code.
  - 11.2 The Respondent is found **not guilty** of Art 2.2.5 of the Old Code.
  - 11.3 The Respondent is found **guilty** of Article 6.1(a) for infringing on the dignity of the victims, read with 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 (e) and 6.5 (g) of the Ethics Code (new).
  - 11.4 The Respondent is also found **guilty** of *Article 11.9(a)* of the Disciplinary Code.
  - 11.5 The Respondent is found **not guilty** of Art 11.9 (d) and (e) of the Disciplinary Code.
  - 11.6 Taking all the convictions together, the Respondent is **sanctioned** a worldwide ban of **5 years** from participating in any FIDE rated event as a player, or to be physically present at any such FIDE rated event.
  - 11.7 A comparison of sanctions in the recent case of Case 3/2024 is worthwhile, where the EDC sanctioned the Respondent to two years from serving as an IA, with half of it suspended for 3 years. The transgressions in that case were far less egregious and less sexually explicit.
  - 11.8 The extant case involves victims some of whom were minors at the time of receiving the letters and its disturbing contents. These letters had the potential to be intimidating and cause mental distress to the recipients. Another factor taken into consideration is the long period over which the Respondent's conduct was displayed and the repeated occurrence of the misconduct. Another aggravating factor is that the Respondent in this case attempted to blame innocent persons and disparage their reputation and good standing. These are the motivating factors for a longer and stricter sanction to be imposed by the EDC Panel, in addition to the lack of remorse shown by the Respondent.
  - 11.9 In keeping with the precedent set in *Case 10/2023* the EDC shall not revoke the Respondent's title, as the transgressions by the Respondent did not take place in the course of play, like cheating in a game of chess.
12. The Respondent is referred to Chapter 7 of the EDC Procedural Rules and **advised** that this decision may be appealed to the EDC Appeal Panel by giving written notice of such appeal to the EDC Chairman ([ethics@fide.com](mailto:ethics@fide.com)) within 21 days from the date upon which this decision is received. The notice of appeal must clearly state all the grounds for the appeal. An appeal lodgement fee of 150 EURO must at the same time be paid to the FIDE Financial Department. Failing the due exercise of this right of appeal, the EDC Panel's decision will become final.



13. The EDC Chamber **requests** the FIDE Secretariat to communicate forthwith the decision to the Respondent and the FIDE President and to publish in due course the decision on the FIDE website.

DATED ON THIS 7th August 2024

*Yolander Sammy*

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CHAMBER CHAIRPERSON  
DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON  
FIDE ETHICS & DISCIPLINARY COMMISSION