

Excellent Minds together in Europe

Laudatio

for

Europchess,

Ukrainian Women chess team,

Anna und Mariya Muzychuk

by

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Chairman

Emanuel Lasker Gesellschaft (ELG),

Berlin, Germany

Dear Ms. Picierno,

Dear Excellencies,

Dear Anna and Mariya,

Dear Johannes and Frank,

Dear chessfriends,

on behalf of the ELG -the Emanuel-Lasker-Gesellschaft - I also welcome you all to „Excellent Minds together in Europe“. It is a great honor and pleasure for ELG to be a part of this touching event.

One year ago ELG has celebrated the 100th anniversary of the chess federations of Italy, France, Austria and Belgium with an special event right in the heart of Berlin close to the „Brandenburger Tor“ and the „Reichstag“, the residence of the Bundestag, the German Parliament. Two weeks ago ELG has celebrated chess as an art with an special event in the Hamburger Kunsthalle, the so-called “Louvre of the North“. Both events have simply been phantastic. It is hard to believe that such events can be topped, but to my mind today we will

exactly proof this in a slightly different way under a headline which perfectly summarizes everything what chess is standing for -bringing people together on the basis of the european values tolerance, fairness and respect. We do this in the Station Europe right in front of the European Parliament – with the Ukrainian Civil Society

With this event Europchess, the chess club of the European Institutions, celebrates its 50th anniversary. We could combine this event with a tribute to the Ukrainian Women Team for the best reason sport can offer - the win of the Chess Olympiad in India in 2022. In addition to that I am able to reward Anna and Mariya, the two present members of this team, with a little personal present keeping a proposal and a promise of ELG. The team members who are not present were Anna Ushenina, Nataliya Buksa and Julia Osmuk.

As you all know, it is still unclear if chess is an art, a science, a game or sport. For ELG chess is a combination of all these aspects and, moreover, chess can not be divided into a game for men, women or any other gender. Chess should be open

for everybody and chess is to our opinion one of the best -if not even the best- tool to bring people of all ages, gender and nationalities together in order to show the already mentioned values respect, tolerance and fairness for and to each other.

It may surprise you but the ELG itself is not a chess club. We are a non profit organisation located in Berlin, dedicated to the memory of the second World Champion Dr. Emanuel Lasker, his contemporaries and successors. With respect to their achievements it is our aim to promote chess as a cultural and educational good. As you can witness today's event matches perfectly with this purpose.

Of Course, the 50th anniversary of Europchess is strongly connected with the „Match of all Time“ between Robert „Bobby“ James Fischer and Boris Spasski in Reykjavik back in 1972. Fischers victory caused a tremendous chess fever around the globe which luckily has also infected chessfriends in Brussels and encouraged them to bring Europchess on its way very shortly after the end of this match.

There is no doubt that Europchess was very successful in promoting our beloved game as a sport in the last 50 years. A lot of top events have taken place at Europchess and a mass of world class players has performed at the Club. All these top players have learned in simuls or matches that among Europchess are also a lot of strong players. If you take a look at the homepage of Europchess you could find a lot of games ended in draws or wins against the best players in the world. So Anna and Mariya have to be aware that they were facing a more than challenging simul this afternoon.

There is also no doubt that Ukraine is a super power in chess - and may be not even in chess. In the last 31 years the national chess teams of Ukraine -female and male- has won several gold and silver medals in Chess Olympiads. A great number of chess players of Ukraine are among the best players in the world, with some of them like Anna and Mariya have even become world champions. This is truly an outstanding success.

Nevertheless, for me the last win of the Ukrainian Women Team was the most important one for two reasons:

First it happen in a year which has been announced to the „Year-of-women-in-chess“ by FIDE due to the worldwide and well deserved success of the Netflix-Series „The Queens Gambit“ which like Fischers victory back in 1972 has caused a similar chess fever around the globe during the pandemic. What better year could be found for winning the Women Chess Olympiad.

Second as you all know Ukraine is still facing an illegal and brutal invasion by Russia. By winning the Chess Olympiad under this more than rough and tough circumstances the Women Team of Ukraine showed the whole world in their own way and words that nobody never ever should underestimate the fighting spirit of the whole Ukrainian nation. It seems to me that this message has finally reached the right receiver outside the battlefields of chess in the last month.

Before we honor the whole team and Anna and Mariya in person, please allow me to take you with me on a short trip

back in time surprisingly including a mass of aspects connected with this very special event.

The arbiter of the Match between Fischer and Spasski, Lothar Schmidt, was a member of honor of ELG. I have stayed in close contact with him in his last years and he gave me the clever advice „when you face a historical moment always remember the roots -there is no history without history“. I truly believe that this moment is a historical moment. So let us look at the history of this history, especially the history of the chess queen and see what we can learn from it.

As you all know the queen combines the power of all other pieces of her colour and is therefore the strongest chess piece of each army on the board. That has not ever been the case. In former times the chess queen was even no queen, but a symbol for the male „whezir“, the adviser to the king, whose powers are much lower than the powers of all other pieces except the pawns.

The most important change to this chess piece happened more than 500 years ago when Isabella of Aragon was crowned to the Queen of Spain. She was a highly intelligent and well educated woman, trained in arms, riding and similar male dominated areas at that time. She has initiated the Reconquista which finally enabled Spain to become one of the mightiest power at and after her reign. It cannot be an accident that the change in gender and power of the closest piece to the king came along with the phenomenal rise of such a woman like Isabella. Afterwards, chess has never been the same again. The game has become more complex, more vivid, more dynamic and more delightful.

Nearly 100 years after this modernization of chess one of the most famous writers of all time, the great William Shakespeare, had to admit in his last play „The Tempest“ that the rules of chess finally has changed and playing with a modern and powerful queen was the only way of playing chess correctly. As you might remember not long before this play has been published Spain under the reign of Phillip II attacked England with the Spanish Armada, an powerful army which

seemed to be unbeatable. Nevertheless, as you all know - the young English Nation under the reign of Queen Elisabeth I not only withstood this attack, but afterwards became one of the mightiest powers of the world itself.

It is not well known that most ships of the Armada could escaped from the last battle with the english fleet in the Northern Sea. They sailed on a route around Scotland and Ireland on their way back to Spain. At the west coast of Ireland the still great and powerful Armada was attacked by a small fleet of irish ships under the command of Grace O`Malley. This happened shortly after a great storm.

Finally, in both battles the Armada lost 64 Galleones. Only 68 more or less damaged ships of the former great Armada managed to sail back to Spain.

Who was Grace O`Malley?

Grace O`Malley herself was the first elected female commander of an irish fleet. She has had a special relationship

to Queen Elisabeth I because when one of her sons was imprisoned several years before in the Tower of London, she sailed unarmed with her flag ship right to the harbour of London in order to free her son. She asked Queen Elisabeth I for an audience and when this finally was agreed -as you can guess after some confusion in London about such Irish courageness- both „Queens“ agreed to a reasonable settlement for both sides. The son of Grace was freed and Grace promised to support Queen Elisabeth I against her enemies in the future.

I am convinced that without this agreement and the brave final attack of Grace O'Malley and her fleet the history of the Armada and Europe would have been a totally different one.

The change in the gender and the power of the piece now called „Chess Queen“ or as we say in Germany „Dame“ is still the best symbol to remind all of us on this critical moment for the history in Europe. Today, we all are once again facing such a critical moment. Maybe the famous Shakespeare have come

to the same conclusion back in 1623 because tempest is only another word for storm.

So today we do not only step in the footprints of Bobby Fischer and William Shakespeare, but with every move of the chess queen we will remember the brave- and cleverness of two real queens who left us with the message that the combined fighting spirits of strong woman could succeed against any agressor -no matter how strong his army ever might be.

Now let us handover the prizes, first five „Vera 2022“.

Please let me explain the name „**Vera 2022**“. The prize was named after Vera Menchik, the first World Champion of Women Chess. She was born to a czech father and an half-englisch mother. She won the World Champion title in 1927 and often played against the best male players of her time with great success. She hold the title til 1944 when she was killed by an air bombing attack of german missiles on London. Not long afterwards the German Nazi-Regime was defeated. So in

our times for a german non-profit organisation like ELG which is dedicated to the memory and fate of a german jew who has to flee for the Nazi-Regime and later on for the Terror under Stalin to New York it is more or less self-explaining that in the „Year-of-women-in chess“ we are proud to memorize the achievements and fate of Vera Menchik with such a prize.

The personal present to Anna and Mariya may be a big surprise for two sport professionals, but has a strong reference to the before mentioned history and, moreover, includes a proposal and a promise of ELG for the future.

Anna and Mariya are among the best players in the world. They both are under the top ten female players for a long time and also active in promoting female chess in a still male dominated chess world on the basis of the values of chess I have already mentioned.

The success of the Ukrainian Women Team reminds me on the fighting spirit of the freedom-loving Grace O`Malley. So I am

happy to hand over to both of you a little „talisman“ which -to my mind- incorporates her spirit very well. It is a bottle of 18 year old and very exclusive irish whiskey with the name Grace O'Malley.

Now you may ask where the proposal and promise are hidden. That is easily explained by the fact that this bottle should not only be understood as a talisman, but also as an investment.

The former selling prize of this whiskey have been 500,- € which has a reference to the ages when the rise of the chess queen has begun.

Today, among collectors the value of this whiskey is appr. 6.400,- € which reminds us on the squares of the chess board and the direct losses of the Armada.

The value of this little bottle will surely be increase in the near future. Normally, the value of such a bottle will appr. be

doubled in each following year which will remind us on the famous rice-corn-tale also connected with the chess board.

The only small disadvantage is that the bottle have to stay unopened and undamaged which, of Course, should not be a problem for professional sport women. So I am asking Anna and Mariya to keep this little bottle safe for some more years and then use its hopefully attractive and reasonable selling price to establish an European Chess School for girls and women in Kyiv together with the help of ELG. That is our proposal and promise. I hope both of them are appreciated and welcomed.

In order to push this investment a little bit I have allready branded the bottle with our support sticker for Ukraine „Share the Values of Chess with us -Chess for Peace- Solidarity with Ukraine“. I am sure if both of you and all other elite players from Ukraine will add their signatures on that sticker the value of this little bottle will even more than double in each following year.

May this five well deserved awards, that little present and the spirit of Bobby Fischer, William Shakespeare, Isabella, Elisabeth and Grace and the solidarity we all show to Ukraine with this event will always remember the Ukrainian Women Team and both of you Anna and Mariya that in chess and perhaps not only in chess for two, five or even more Queens everything is possible, especially against anyone who do not share the values of chess -namely tolerance, fairness and respect - with all of us.

Thank you all for listening.