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AUSTRIAN CHESS FEDERATION

Vienna, November 22 2026

A Fresh Start for European Chess

Dear Presidents and Delegates of the European Chess Federations,
Dear Chess Friends,

We have all received Malcolm Pein's email, and I would also like to share some thoughts on the future of European chess.

Over the past few weeks, I have met with many prominent figures in the chess world, including, of course, Malcolm. These discussions have left me in no doubt that there is a strong desire for lasting change in European chess among numerous federations.

Personally, I firmly believe that the European Chess Union still (!) has the greatest potential in the world of chess!

Despite the remarkable development of chess in Asia, Europe continues to benefit from excellent structures, a strong network of chess clubs, millions of dedicated members and officials, an extraordinary chess tradition, and a strong economic environment.

For many years, we have had all the necessary conditions to build a strong and dynamic European chess organization. Yet we all know what the reality of the ECU looks like:

Most of Europe's top players do not participate in European championships, and the title of "European Champion" carries relatively little prestige. We have limited professional office structures, hardly any sponsorship revenue, little media presence, and the conditions provided to players at our events are often simply unacceptable.

The work of numerous dedicated officials serving on our commissions is severely restricted by insufficient financial resources. Many people I have spoken to also feel excluded by the current leadership and point to a lack of transparent processes and open calls for applications and tenders.

We have all been aware of these shortcomings for years, and of course, we all want to see positive developments!

However, meaningful change requires substantial financial resources, at least in the initial phase, and realistically, a new leadership team as well. After so many years of stagnation, a fresh start is the only viable option.



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Many of the people I have spoken with – delegates, federation presidents, and even members of the current ECU Board – have encouraged me to take responsibility, work towards a solution, and bring together a team capable of delivering this fresh start!

In Malcolm Pein, I have found a partner who is undoubtedly one of Europe's most experienced chess officials. Together, we represent the broad spectrum of our movement.

Fortunately, there are still many highly committed individuals within European chess federations who are eager to contribute to a renewed ECU.

My vision is of a truly democratic ECU, where everyone's voice is heard regularly – not a kingdom ruled by one or two officials.

I am therefore not thinking in terms of a simple electoral ticket, but rather a much broader movement that brings together all, or realistically almost all, European federations around a common goal: to rebuild European chess into a truly outstanding organization.

A constructive fresh start, without dwelling on the past!

Just as important as organizational renewal is, of course, securing sufficient funding!

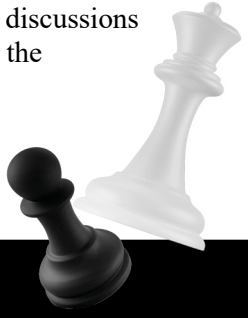
I have maintained a business relationship with Freedom Finance Europe for several years, and the Austrian Chess Federation has been sponsored by Freedom since 2025.

For a dynamic and rapidly growing company like Freedom, a Europe-wide commitment to chess makes perfect sense. I am therefore delighted to announce that I have already secured a binding sponsorship commitment of **EURO 4 (!) Million over the next four years to support a fresh start for European chess under our new leadership team!**

That is **1 Million Euro per year, with absolutely no conditions or restrictions attached** – the entire amount at our disposal to fundamentally transform European chess!

This extraordinary level of funding would allow us to:

- raise our European Championships to an entirely new level,
- significantly expand our administrative structures and media team,
- provide our commissions with substantially greater financial resources,
- ensure fair remuneration for our arbiters,
- bring our fair-play activities up to an appropriate standard,
- provide special support to our Small Nations and, of course, Ukraine,
- and, last but certainly not least, make European chess considerably more attractive to new sponsors and partners through all these improvements.
- I want to seize this extraordinary opportunity together with all of you. Following discussions with my family and the Austrian Chess Federation, I am also prepared to take on the responsibility required to make this happen!



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Allow me to add a personal note:
I am not involved in chess for the money :-). Nor am I a Grandmaster – unfortunately, not even close! ;-) Above all, chess is my great passion. It is as simple as that.

It costs me a tremendous amount of time, energy, and often money. And I know that this is exactly the same situation many of us find ourselves in, dedicating so much of ourselves to the sport we love. I expect nothing in return for this commitment. No honours, no salary, no fees. But there is one thing I genuinely want: I want my efforts to make a difference!

Whether on a small scale or, ideally, on a much larger one, this is how I approach my work within the Austrian Chess Federation, as a tournament organizer, at club level, in youth development, and through my charity activities.

And this is exactly how I would approach working for European chess: with a willingness to put in a great deal of effort, but always with the aim of making a positive impact and achieving continuous improvement!

For the sake of clarity, I would also like to emphasize the following: I am financially independent, and I guarantee my independence to all of you! I stand for a chess organization free from corruption, vote-buying, backroom deals, patronage, and kickback arrangements! The European Chess Union must be honest, transparent, and credible – not merely in words, but in practice. Furthermore, I want to make it clear that I am firmly committed to a strictly pro-Ukrainian policy.
And that is precisely what I stand for!

As President of the Austrian Chess Federation, I have today signed a formal request for an Extraordinary General Assembly (EGA), firmly convinced that a fresh start is the only viable way forward. To support this process, I am offering to host the EGA in Vienna – easily accessible for everyone and at no cost to the ECU!

I warmly invite all those who support a fresh start – federation presidents, delegates, and everyone committed to the future of European chess – to meet and discuss our ideas in person. Whether in Geneva during the World Championship, in London at the Chess Classic, or, of course, in Vienna, I look forward to exchanging ideas with you!

Together, we can build an outstanding European chess organization.
Let us seize this extraordinary opportunity and get started now!

Yours in chess,

Michael Stöttinger

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