

FIDE Chess Congress 1939: An Investigation

Richard Forster. Full report.

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Abstract

Should Augusto De Muro from Argentina be officially recognized as the second President of the World Chess Federation FIDE, following a controversial vote at the 1939 Congress of FIDE in Buenos Aires? The question was raised by an Argentinean motion submitted to the 2022 FIDE Congress, from where it was delegated to the FIDE Council and its History Committee, which published a preliminary report on 10 October 2022. The present text aims to answer this question by way of a more detailed and broader examination of the available sources and evidence.

In the first part, a picture of pre-war FIDE is painted, shedding light on the rules, structures, and processes that governed its business and its annual Congress, and examining the role of its long-term founding president, Alexander Rueb, who had given rise to some ire in the years leading up the 1939 events.

In the second part, the occurrences at the 1939 FIDE Congress itself are reconstructed. They culminated in a motion by Paraguay that essentially was a vote of no confidence in the incumbent president, outside the regular election cycle and without prior notice being given. A group of eight predominantly South American member nations voted to oust Rueb from office and move the headquarters to Buenos Aires. Four nations abstained. The great remainder of member nations did not attend the session.

In the third and final part, the legality and legitimacy of these actions are examined and assessed. It is found that under no reasonable interpretation can the controversial vote be considered lawful. It was a violation of FIDE's own Statutes and of the underlying law. Furthermore, with three-quarters of the members deprived of the opportunity to express their opinion or exercise their voting rights, it lacked any residual legitimacy. Finally, it is argued that, in substance, a transition of FIDE to Argentina never took place, and that outside South America the outcome was never truly accepted or implemented. In essence, the "De Muro Administration" existed only on paper and in speeches. It left no tangible marks in the world of chess.

In conclusion, the answer to the initial question must be in the negative. There is no sound reason to rewrite FIDE's presidential history. The great achievements of Augusto De Muro and the Argentinean chess organizers of 1939 can and should be recognized, but in other, different ways.

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Part 1: FIDE from 1924 to 1939

Introduction

The International Chess Federation (FIDE) proposes rewriting its presidential history by adding Augusto De Muro (1886?–1959) to its list of presidents for the years 1939 to 1946, based on the events of the 1939 FIDE Congress in Buenos Aires. The present text looks at the circumstances of that controversial FIDE Congress and considers whether rewriting that part of FIDE history is justified.

The long-accepted list of FIDE presidents contains seven names, starting with the Dutchman Alexander Rueb for the period 1924 to 1949 and ending with the present incumbent Arkady Dvorkovich, who has been in office since 2018. At the 2022 FIDE Congress in India, a motion by the Argentinean Chess Federation proposed rewriting the early part of FIDE's presidential history by adding Augusto De Muro, then President of the Argentinean Chess Federation, to the official list as FIDE president for the years 1939 to 1946 (instead of Rueb). The 2022 General Assembly referred the matter to the FIDE History Committee for investigation and to the FIDE Council for subsequent decision.¹ On 10 October 2022, the FIDE Office published the initial results of the investigation by the Committee and the documentation presented by the Argentinean Chess Federation. The majority of the Committee expressed itself in favour of approving the Argentinean motion and acknowledging Augusto De Muro as the second FIDE President.² The Committee largely followed the arguments set out in an article by Sergio Ernesto Negri and Juan Sebastián Morgado.³ A public invitation was made for the submission of additional documents or substantiated counter-opinions by 10 January 2023.

The documents considered by the FIDE History Committee were mostly collected from a Latin-American perspective. The present text aims to complete the picture and update the overall assessment by providing additional evidence and background information.

FIDE and its constitution

FIDE was founded on 20 July 1924 in Paris, France, by representatives from predominantly European nations, with Argentina and Canada the only two non-European signatories. A provisional committee ("Bureau") was appointed, to draw up a draft for the Federation's Statutes and Regulations, and to organize a Congress (General Assembly) the following year in Switzerland. For the time being, Switzerland was also declared the seat of the new organization.⁴ The following committee was appointed: President—Dr. Alexander Rueb (Holland); Vice-President—Leonard P. Rees (Great Britain); Treasurer—Prof. Marc Nicolet (Switzerland). At the next Congress, held in Zurich, Switzerland, from 22 to 26 July 1925, alongside the Swiss championship tournament, the committee's proposal for the Statutes and Regulations of FIDE was discussed, finalized, and ratified.⁵

¹ FIDE GA 2022, Decision GA-2022/23: "To task the FIDE Council to finalize the issue in respect of the missing FIDE President Mr. Augusto Muro (ARG) for a period 1939-1946." <https://www.fide.com/news/1943>. Details of the motion in [Annex 10.1b](#).

² "Missing FIDE President: Investigation by FIDE Historical Committee", FIDE website, 10 October 2022. <https://www.fide.com/news/2030>

³ Sergio Ernesto Negri and Juan Sebastián Morgado. "Augusto De Muro, the unquestionable President of FIDE (1939-1946) / Buenos Aires headquarters of the world entity from 1939 to 1946" (undated, ca. May 2022). <https://www.fide.com/docs/presentations/FIDE%20President/Investigation%20by%20Sergio%20Ernesto%20Negri%20and%20Juan%20Sebasti%C3%A1n%20Morgado.docx>

⁴ FIDE GA 1924 meeting minutes (published in the *Schweizerische Schachzeitung*, August 1924, pp. 151–152, and in the *Bulletin de la Fédération Belge des Echecs*, December 1924, pp. 56–57).

⁵ FIDE GA 1925 meeting minutes ("procès-verbal"), pp. 8–19.

Among other matters the Statutes defined the obligations and rights of the Central Committee (*Comité Central*) which directed FIDE's affairs, a forerunner of today's FIDE Council. The Committee consisted of three members of different nationalities (art. 6.1), and it was to deal with all day-to-day business and present a detailed annual report on its activities (art. 6.3). The Committee was elected every four years (art. 6.6), and it was possible to re-elect the previous members (art. 6.7). The Committee was responsible for drawing up the agenda for the General Assemblies and executing its decisions (art. 6.5).

Meanwhile, the General Assembly consisted of the delegates of the member federations (art. 7.2). It had supreme power (art. 7.1), and it was required to approve the balance sheet and budget (art. 7.3).⁶

The provisional Central Committee, consisting of Rueb, Rees, and Nicolet, was confirmed by the 1925 General Assembly for the remainder of the period 1924 to 1928.

Incidentally, the 1925 Congress also defined the "one country, one vote" principle that later became a discussion point in connection with important elections. Contrary to the draft proposal by the Central Committee, it was decided that each federation should pay the same flat annual dues and that they should have equal voting rights (as opposed to a system where voting rights would have been proportional to the annual fees paid by each federation on the basis of its individual members). Moreover, following a British proposal, a "Permanent Fund" was established, the annual interest from which was to be made available for the Federation's activities. Finally, it was decided to make the Swiss Franc the Federation's currency, rather than the originally envisioned French Franc.

FIDE's activities and annual Congresses up to 1939

The Federation's pre-war activities revolved primarily around attempts to take responsibility for the World Championship, defining the exact rules of the game, promoting and organizing the Hamilton Russell Cup (a.k.a. "Chess Olympiad") and later also the Women's World Championship, exploring intellectual property in chess, creating an official master title, standardizing opening names, establishing a security fund for ailing masters, resolving the status question "amateurs vs. professionals", and arbitrating various conflicts.⁷

In the fifteen years between its foundation and the 1939 Congress in Argentina, the development of FIDE was relatively steady although unspectacular. It had had thirteen paying member nations in 1925 and increased this number to thirty-three in 1938. In that year, as many as twelve new federations applied, most of them allured by the prospect of the forthcoming Tournament of Nations in Buenos Aires, 1939, where the Argentinean hosts had generously promised to pay the travel and accommodation costs of all the participants (!).

Much of the day-to-day activity of FIDE was conducted by the Central Committee and a few subcommittees. Most of the power rested in the hands of the President as the limited communication means of the pre-war years made extensive consultation impractical. In 1930, it was recognized that a larger Committee with three additional rotating members and two or three meetings per year would be desirable. Articles for such an extension were conditionally approved by the delegates, pending the availability of the necessary financial means, for which separate, future

⁶ *Fédération Internationale des Echecs: Status et règlements*. Paris (1925).

<https://www.fide.com/docs/presentations/FIDE%20President/FIDE%20Statutes%201925.pdf>

⁷ For an overview of FIDE's beginnings, see also Edward Winter, "Chess: The History of FIDE", <https://www.chesshistory.com/winter/extra/fidehistory.html>

budget approval by the General Assembly was required.⁸ Those funds did not materialize, and the Committee enlargement was thus never implemented. These articles were therefore never added to the Statutes.

The three-man Committee itself was very stable and saw only one change in the pre-war years: The British Vice-president Rees retired after one term of office in 1928 and was replaced by the American representative Maurice S. Kuhns. In 1932 and 1936 the Committee, consisting of Rueb, Kuhns, and Nicolet, was re-elected.

The General Assembly was held every year between 1925 and 1939, then again from 1946 onwards. The pre-war Assemblies took place in Switzerland (3), France (2), England (2), Holland, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the last one, to be discussed further below, in Argentina. The number of nations represented as well as the number of delegates fluctuated between 6 and 30. Not surprisingly, attendance was much stronger when the Congress was held alongside the flagship tournament, the Olympiad.⁹ At the other end of the scale were the Paris 1932 and Lucerne 1936 General Assemblies, which saw only half a dozen nations represented. Somewhat unfortunately, as will be seen, 1932 and 1936 were re-election years. Unlike in the earlier elections in 1925 and 1928, only a handful of member nations thus participated, and there never were any counter-candidates.

On some occasions, FIDE's decisions could lead to animated discussion. Perhaps never more so than during and after the 1937 Congress in Stockholm. A Dutch proposal to organize a World Championship candidates tournament was rejected by the delegates, who instead hand-picked a rather unexpected challenger for the World Championship, to be held in 1940: Salo Flohr. This drew a storm of criticism, for various reasons, and Rueb was universally blamed for having steered the FIDE Congress into making bad decisions. Reuben Fine called him an "autocratic dictator in the chess world," and Baruch H. Wood concluded: "The present FIDE is obviously incompetent. We should sack the lot!"¹⁰

Chess in Argentina and South America in the 1930s

It was no accident that the first Olympiad outside Europe took place in Argentina. Buenos Aires had been the venue for the 1927 World Championship match between Capablanca and Alekhine, and already much earlier had attracted visits by Lasker, Capablanca, and others. In fact, Argentina was one of the world's richest countries in the early 20th century.

For many decades, Argentina was also the leading chess nation outside Europe and North America. Right up to the 1939 Olympiad, it was the only Latin American country ever to take part in the FIDE tournaments. Moreover, despite the long distances it did so quite regularly (Paris 1924, London 1927, The Hague 1928, Warsaw 1935, Stockholm 1937).

The leading figure in Argentinean chess was Roberto Grau (1900–1944). He was both strong and influential. He represented his country in all the events listed above, and he also signed the original FIDE charter in 1924 for his homeland.

⁸ FIDE GA 1930 meeting minutes ("procès-verbal"), pp. 12–14, 18.

⁹ The Chess Olympiad received its current name only in later years. Before the War, it was usually referred to as "Tournament of Nations" or "Hamilton Russell Cup".

¹⁰ *CHESS*, 14 September 1937, pp. 3–4. For a detailed account of the turmoil after the 1937 congress, see Edward Winter, "World Championship Disorder," <https://www.chesshistory.com/winter/extra/disorder.html>

In 1939, alongside the President of the Argentinean Chess Federation (FADA), Augusto De Muro, Roberto Grau was also one of the main promoters of the Olympiad in Buenos Aires. At great personal cost, he helped save the event when it was on the verge of collapse after the Argentinean state had withdrawn its financial guarantees at short notice.

In contrast, chess was not much developed in the other Latin American nations. No country apart from Argentina had ever attended a FIDE tournament, and the few nations that had joined FIDE in the years 1926 to 1928 (Uruguay, Brazil, Mexico) were excluded again in 1936 for not paying their membership fees for several years in a row. The only other country outside of Europe and North America that was a relatively stable member was Cuba, although its former glory and riches had evaporated by that time, and in 1939 it was even suffering from having two rival national federations.

If it had not been for the geographic distance, Argentina by virtue of its chess culture and standing in the chess world would have rather belonged to the Old World. It is natural that the country took a much stronger interest in the essentially European organization that FIDE was, and when it offered to host the Nations Tournament and the Congress of 1939 in its capital, the proposal was warmly applauded by all other old members of FIDE as well as the Central Committee. The Olympiad in South America was seen as a chance for FIDE to become a truly global organization, and the interest taken by other Latin American countries, as expressed in their membership applications in 1938/39 and their subsequent participation in Buenos Aires, was warmly applauded. In the end, over a third of the participants in the 1939 tournament (10 of 27) were Latin American, helping set a new record.

Part 2: The 1939 FIDE Congress

The controversial motion

The “Torneo de las Naciones” in Buenos Aires was held from 23 August to 19 September 1939. It was a remarkable achievement by the Argentinean organizers and has been covered in detail in various books, including two splendid recent publications by Justin Corfield and Juan Sebastián Morgado.¹¹

Except for Guatemala, every country was represented by four players and one reserve. In addition, the women’s individual World Championship was held, in which twenty nations were represented by one player each. The events were overshadowed by the outbreak of World War II, one third of the way into the tournament on 1 September 1939. Except for the English, a majority of whom immediately returned home to serve, all teams played until the end, although the state of war led to various complications, and several matches were agreed drawn without play.

The 16th Congress of FIDE took place in the last week of the event, starting on 13 September.

The action central to the current discussion took place in the General Assembly’s fifth and last regular session, on Monday, 18 September 1939. This was also the day of the last round of the tournament, but play only started late in the evening, while the meeting took place in the morning and was opened by Alexander Rueb at 11.15 a.m.

First a report was received from the subcommittee given the task of investigating the membership claims of the two competing Cuban Federations. After discussion, the General Assembly decided to accept the “Federación Cubana de Ajedrez” as the island’s official representative.

¹¹ Justin Corfield, *Pawns in a Greater Gambit*, Lara, 2015, and Juan S. Morgado, *El impresionante Torneo de Ajedrez de las Naciones de 1939*, 3 vols., Buenos Aires 2018–2019.

After this last open official agenda item was resolved, Rueb gave the floor to the delegate from Paraguay, Dr. Luis Oscar Boettner (1900–1972), who had already previously asked to be able to bring up an important topic for discussion. In Spanish he presented his proposal, which was translated into the FIDE’s official language, French, as follows:

Considérant que la situation de guerre, existant en Europe entraîne un arrêt dans le développement normal des activités de la F.I.D.E.,

que le siège actuel de la F.I.D.E. est situé en Hollande, pays qui se trouve au foyer de la guerre et que cela empêche le développement des dites activités,

qu’il est impossible de prévoir la durée de l’état de guerre et que les pays affiliés sont dans l’obligation de veiller à ce que les activités de la F.I.D.E. ne subissent aucune interruption;

l’Assemblée Générale du XVIe Congrès de la F.I.D.E., décide :

- 1) de transférer à titre transitoire le siège de la F.I.D.E. à Buenos-Aires,*
- 2) de désigner comme Président Honoraire de la F.I.D.E. le Dr. A. Rueb,*
- 3) de nommer Président actif Monsieur le Président de la Fédération Argentine des Echecs,*
- 4) que le mandat du Président actif durera jusqu’à [ce que] se tienne le prochain congrès.¹²*

Thus, the signatories requested that, in view of the war in Europe, the seat of FIDE be moved temporarily to Buenos Aires so that FIDE could continue its operations, that Rueb be elected Honorary President, and that the President of the Argentinean Chess Federation, Augusto De Muro, be the new head of FIDE until the next General Assembly.

Apart from its Paraguayan originator, the delegates from Uruguay, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Costa Rica, and Guatemala also signed the motion.

The debate

There followed an animated discussion, of which, unfortunately, only a few sketchy details have been preserved.

The “official” Argentinean version, i.e., the minutes taken by the Congress secretary, R.A. Tassier, and published by the Argentinean Chess Federation did not mention any discussion.¹³ They consisted of just two brief paragraphs: The Argentinean delegate, Luciano Long Vidal, announced his federation’s abstention from the vote as a matter of “délicatesse,” but he felt honoured by the motion and favoured it. Furthermore, according to that report the French and German delegates had expressed their support for the motion in writing.

The meeting minutes published by Alexander Rueb were more detailed. They repeat the remarks by Vidal but make no mention of any written support by Germany or France. Instead, the French delegate, Commander Edmond-Henri Dez (1871–c1952), is quoted as announcing his federation’s abstention and favouring a split of FIDE into two parts. It does not seem that this latter suggestion was taken up in the discussion, although with hindsight it might have spared FIDE much trouble.

¹² FIDE GA 1939 meeting minutes (“procès-verbal”), p. 13. These minutes are also referred to as Rueb’s minutes in the rest of the article.

¹³ *Torneo de las Naciones 1939: ... XVI Congreso de la F.I.D.E.*, Buenos Aires 1940, pp. 9–26. This is referred to as the Argentinean or FADA minutes in the rest of the article. For details of the different publications of the GA minutes, see the Appendix.

Rueb also gave this account of his arguments in the debate:

- The motion contradicted the FIDE Statutes and also article 11 of the FIDE General Regulations, according to which federations needed to send any motions for the General Assembly in writing to the secretariat four months before the Congress. Moreover, under article 6.6 of the Statutes, the Central Committee was elected for terms of four years, and given the elections of 1936, he and the Committee were in office until the next General Assembly, in 1940.
- He admitted his concern about the impact of the war on chess in Europe, but that was no reason to remove FIDE's seat from Europe, where it had been founded and developed with great sacrifices by the federations, supporters, and masters.
- He appreciated the recent surge in activities by the Latin American countries and encouraged them to develop them further. He was willing to collaborate on a revision of the Statutes if that was deemed necessary.
- Finally, he recommended that the proposal be modified into a motion for further study of the proposed changes, so that an actual decision could be taken at the next Congress, in 1940. In its present form, the motion was not acceptable to him.

It was later claimed that Rueb only made his objections known after returning to Europe.¹⁴ This is an obvious exaggeration as Rueb definitely opposed the motion in the very session where it was discussed, as demonstrated by contemporary news reports:

- A debate was prompted on whether the motion could be accepted without prior modification of the Statutes, and “the delegates presented their different points of view, as did the president, doctor Rueb, which led to some delegates censuring him for disrupting the debate.” (*La Razón*, [18] September 1939)¹⁵
- “Dr. Rueb opposed this proposal, stating that the mandate had been conferred on him for a term of four years, and that it would expire in 1941 [*sic*].” (*La Prensa*, 20 September 1939).¹⁶

The latter article provides some additional insights: The Peruvian delegate, consul Dr. José Jacinto Rada (in the article and in some later publications apparently mixed up with Dr. Ayala, the delegate from Ecuador), claimed that “according to the letter and the spirit of the Statutes, the General Assembly was the supreme authority of FIDE, and that it could thus adopt any resolution.”¹⁷ A very similar passage appeared in the Argentinean chess magazine *Caissa*, October 1939, which wrote that Rueb made some statements on statutory provisions and withdrew from the Assembly as a sign of

¹⁴ See the article by Roberto Grau in *¡Aquí Está!*, 18 May 1940, quoted by Negri and Morgado, *op. cit.*, Addendum 1.

¹⁵ Negri and Morgado, who reproduce the newspaper article (unsigned, but presumably by chess editor Arnaldo Ellerman) in Addendum 6 of their article, give the date as 16 September, but that seems to be a clerical error. The passage in the original reads: “Sobre si impo[...] no una modificación a los estatutos el hecho de prese[...] una moción así, sin previo estudio de la asamblea, se promovió un debate, exponiendo los delegados presentes sus diferentes puntos de vista, haciendo lo propio el presidente, doctor Rueb, cosa que motivó censuras de parte de los delegados, por contribuir a perturbar el debate.

¹⁶ “El doctor Rueb se opuso a esta proposición, manifestando que el mandato le había sido conferido por el término de cuatro años, y que vencía en 1941.” The article, presumably by Carlos M. Portela, in *La Prensa*, 20 September 1939, was reproduced in Juan S. Morgado, *Luce y Sombras*, part I, Buenos Aires 2014, pp. 256–257

¹⁷ The contribution of José Jacinto Rada Benavides (1898–1987) to the success of the Paraguayan motion is also discussed briefly in F. Pinzón Sánchez, *El Ajedrez en el Perú*, Lima 2010, p. 21.

protest.¹⁸ And from *La Prensa* we learn that Dr. Rafael Mieres (Uruguay) and Jens Enevoldsen (Denmark) spoke in favour of the proposal.¹⁹

The actual vote

After the debate, the motion was put to a vote, without any modifications, and it was accepted by the majority of delegates in attendance. The meeting minutes again differ in some telling details:

- In the Argentinean version, the motion was accepted “unanimously, except for the abstentions of Argentina, France, Latvia, and Germany.” Strangely, when the Argentinean Chess Federation reprinted these minutes in its official Congress publication (headed “Federación Internacional de Ajedrez”) in 1940, the list of abstentions was further reduced to just Argentina and Latvia. These minutes also omitted to indicate how small the number of votes cast was.
- Rueb’s version was much more specific. He reported altogether twelve votes, of which eight were in favour (Bolivia, Chile, Denmark, Ecuador, Lithuania, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay) and four abstained (Argentina, Estonia, France, and Germany). Rueb also mentioned that Long Vidal requested that the signatories of the motion who were not attending the present session be included on the list of “yes” votes.

It is notable that the Argentineans mentioned Latvia among the abstentions (also copied in most subsequent reports), while Rueb had Estonia. Of course, both in Spanish and in French, the names Lettonie/L’Estonie or Letonia/Estonia are quite easily mixed up, and it is difficult to know for sure which it was since both were present at the Olympiad. The list of “countries and delegates at the 16th Congress” published in the Argentinean meeting minutes, p. 9, only includes Estonia, so presumably the latter is correct here. Curiously, the Argentinean meeting minutes also stated that at the beginning of that session both Estonia and Latvia were present. Moreover, the minutes also list Bulgaria and Iceland, whose representatives presumably either left before the vote or did not have voting rights.

As to the remainder of the session, the accounts also differ significantly:

- According to Rueb, he stated that he reserved all rights regarding the illegal decisions just taken by the General Assembly and would not accept them. Since all items on the agenda were dealt with, he then declared the 16th General Assembly of FIDE closed.
- According to the Argentinean minutes (and similarly in *La Prensa* of the next day), the events were as follows:
 - The Argentinean delegate (Long Vidal) thanked the General Assembly for the decision, praised Rueb for his work and congratulated him on the honorary presidency.
 - Subsequently the Peruvian delegate demanded the floor, at which moment Rueb left the Assembly “en una forma un tanto intempestiva” (“in a somewhat intemperate manner”)—a qualification later removed from the minutes at the request of Long Vidal.²⁰

¹⁸ *Caissa*, October 1939, cited after Copié, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹⁹ *La Prensa*, 20 September 1939 (*op. cit.*).

²⁰ The discrepancy between the original minutes and the later publication by FADA was (first?) pointed out by José Antonio Copié, *Remember 1939*, Buenos Aires, 2009, p. 44. The minutes of the following day recorded that Long Vidal requested the modification of certain passages. Curiously, the book by De Maria and Puiggrós then left out not only the phrase in question but the entire sentence about Rueb leaving.

- The session was not closed but continued, with Rafael Mieres, the delegate from Uruguay, presiding over it ad hoc.
- It was decided to communicate the decisions taken to the absent delegates in writing and to call another session on the following day, so that Augusto De Muro could be introduced as President.

The ratification

As a result of the last point above, another meeting took place on the morning of Tuesday, 19 September 1939. Rueb did not attend. For him it was not part of the Congress, and no mention is made of this gathering in his version of the minutes. From the Argentinean version we learn the following:

- Overall, attendance was more numerous than on the previous day, with 19 nations being represented (Argentine, Uruguay, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, Lithuania, Poland, Bolivia, Canada, France, Germany, Bohemia-Moravia, Hungary, Estonia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Brazil, Guatemala, and Ecuador).
- Augusto De Muro was welcomed as the new President of FIDE. He thanked the Assembly for this proof of confidence and pledged to continue FIDE's work for the benefit and good of chess.
- The Paraguayan representative, Luis Oscar Boettner, demanded that the Assembly ratify the decisions taken the previous day.
- Except for Argentina, which abstained for the same reason as on the previous day, the delegates of all other 18 nations approved them. Furthermore, a proposal by Long Vidal was accepted that all the delegates in attendance should sign the list of presence (and thereby, presumably, the ratification; the document itself does not seem to have survived).

The session lasted from 11.00 to 12.15. Given the various speeches it entailed and the need for translations, it seems that no further debate actually took place before the ratification.

Various newspapers immediately reported on the events. Especially in the local press, FIDE's move to Argentina was warmly welcomed (and the temporary nature of the intended move was often omitted).²¹ European sources only reported much later and usually quite briefly. The war had made communications difficult, and the sporting outcome of Buenos Aires was of much greater interest to readers than any FIDE news.

The motives for the “revolt”

What were the motives for moving FIDE so suddenly to Buenos Aires? The formal reason was the war in Europe and its expected detrimental effect on the future activities of FIDE. Although it was just two weeks into the war and nobody could anticipate what it would mean, it was certainly legitimate to expect quite a strong negative impact on European chess.

But was that all? A perusal of the contemporary sources suggests otherwise. Several key proponents of Argentinean chess were not happy with Rueb and the way he led FIDE.

From the meeting minutes alone, it is clear that some tension had been building up, mainly between Rueb and Long Vidal:

²¹ See, e.g., the documentation by Negri and Morgado, *op. cit.*

- On the first day, the two disagreed on how to handle the “Cuban problem” with its two competing national federations. Rueb suggested admitting both entities to FIDE and having them sort out their internal differences between themselves. Long Vidal objected and requested a committee to investigate the issue. He prevailed, and Rueb appointed a committee consisting of Argentina, Ecuador, and Uruguay, which was to report back in a later session with a recommendation.
- On the second day, Rueb proposed electing Augusto De Muro, the President of the Argentinean Chess Federation and head of the Olympiad, as an honorary member of FIDE. This may have had perfectly sincere motives, but it may also have been a move by which Rueb hoped to squash the opposition building up against him. The motion was accepted with applause according to Rueb’s notes. Curiously, the tournament bulletin withheld the minutes from this short session entirely, giving instead in issue no. 20 of 15 September just a brief note saying that “the session was postponed ... due to lack of quorum”). Later, when the Argentinean version of the minutes was printed in May 1940, the session was listed. Word for word the same minutes were given as by Rueb—except that the paragraph about De Muro’s honorary presidency was skipped entirely (as well as the sentence preceding it). Evidently, it did not go well with the later narrative of making Rueb the honorary president, and so it may be suspected that this episode was forgotten quite deliberately.
- On the third day, discussing part of a longer motion by Costa Rica, Long Vidal criticized the fact that FIDE and its members did not have sufficiently close ties and that the central committee was not up-to-date regarding what happened in the federations. He demanded that more information about the members (in particular national champions and masters) should be included in the annual report. Rueb promised to do his best but pointed out the many practical difficulties and the frequent lack of response from many member nations to any circulars. Long Vidal then invited all the delegations to visit the headquarters of the Argentine Chess Federation to see for themselves how perfectly they were organized and managed their documentation.
- On the fourth day, a Costa Rican proposal regarding the World Championship was discussed and the moderate motion was adopted. Just after the vote, a number of delegates arrived late and the Uruguayan representative, Rafael Mieres, demanded that the topic be opened again for discussion. His request was approved by 8 votes to 4. Ultimately, a Peruvian motion was passed which declared that the World Championship was not the titleholder’s property, and that FIDE needed to confer the title. Although the World Championship had been a hot topic in FIDE since the beginning, Rueb had been reluctant to make such a definitive assertion. He felt that FIDE should work on the “World Championship question” and facilitate a solution, but he was also disillusioned by all the earlier attempts, especially after the 1937 nomination of Flohr had fallen through (see also further below). He thus preferred now to leave the question to the affiliated nations and concentrate FIDE’s forces on the Olympiad, a standpoint obviously not shared by many at the Congress. Fittingly, immediately after the Olympiad, Buenos Aires entered into negotiations with Alekhine to organize a rematch with Capablanca, but Alekhine was not particularly eager, and ultimately he found the offer inadequate. Alekhine also expressed his dissatisfaction with Rueb in a letter to De Muro dated 28 October 1939.²²

²² Reproduced (including the original postcard in French) in Morgado, *Buenos Aires 1939*, part 1, p. 366. This is part of a longer section illustrating the negotiations for a match with Alekhine (which had started prior to the Olympiad and lasted for half a year). Ironically, it seems that Alekhine opposed Rueb and flattered De Muro (letter to De Muro of 28 October 1939, quoted by Morgado on p. 366) because he held Rueb responsible for

- At the end of the fourth day, Boettner requested that another session be held to “discuss a proposal,” after Long Vidal had already announced on the previous day that a motion from Paraguay was upcoming. On this occasion, Long Vidal also ominously remarked that the General Assembly had the right to take any decision necessary for the development of FIDE. Rueb, presumably anticipating where this was going to lead, expressed his support for Long Vidal’s point, but also pointed out that any decisions still had to respect the Statutes and Regulations of FIDE.²³ He then closed that session and announced a fifth and final session for the following Monday—the one that has been discussed in detail above and where the events crucial to this story played out.

In short, throughout the Congress week there had been repeated differences of opinion between Rueb and the South American opinion leaders.

An even fiercer critic of the Rueb presidency was Roberto Grau, who was not only a co-founder of FIDE but also the “father of the 1939 Olympiad” and the top board of the Argentinean team. A revealing article by Grau in the weekly *¡Aquí Está!*, 18 May 1940, strongly suggests that the war in Europe was primarily a pretext for disposing of Rueb. The full text in Spanish and a partial translation was given in the report by Negri and Morgado. Here is an excerpt:

...But as soon as he returned to Europe, Dr. Rueb denied the legality to the aforementioned resolution, and against all the federations in the world, he proclaimed himself the only true president. ... At the start of the Tournament of Nations, Dr. Rueb addressed the Argentinean fans, the only task he has reserved for himself every two years when he goes sightseeing with his wife. ...

[N]otable federation and club directors, who in the first hour were indispensable elements for success, unfortunately fail later on, and they have to be violently ousted from the positions they consider their own property. For many years, FIDE has been a prime example of this. Elected President of FIDE at the Paris Congress in 1925, Dr. Rueb [was] ... effective at continuing the work begun. He became the nerve of it, and his wisdom was applauded on more than one occasion. But he gradually lost sight of the fundamental problems. He ran the administration of FIDE from his home and there was never any order in FIDE, no archive to keep the real history of FIDE.

FIDE was himself and his memory, and the fundamental problems of world chess, including the championship, were never addressed with the necessary energy and authority. Dr. Rueb could not do this for two reasons. First, because of his lack of relationship with most of the masters. Then, because of his connection with Dr. Euwe, who [...] is the Black Pope of FIDE.

... FIDE Congresses were always held during the Tournaments of Nations, but the agenda for them, as well as the appointment of authorities, took place in small meetings held in some European city by members of the executive committee and a few delegates who were empowered to act in them.

FIDE’s openly stated claim to the world championship title when in fact the opposite was the case. It was not Rueb but his critics who insisted on the wording that so displeased Alekhine. It must be wondered whether Alekhine really did not know or whether it simply suited his agenda better at the time. The relevant previous letter from Alekhine to the Club Argentino of 18 October 1939 is only referenced indirectly in the book by Morgado (p. 367) and also seems to be missing from other standard works. Its text, however, was given in a Dutch paper (with a correspondent in Buenos Aires): see the *Bredasche Courant*, 30 October 1939 (<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMSAB03:000067580:mpeg21:a0110>).

²³ The two declarations by Long Vidal and Rueb were not mentioned in the Argentinean meeting minutes.

Thus, at the great Congresses, there was no opportunity to remove the board of directors and deal with matters of real importance, such as sanctioning attitude and efficiency.

Dr. Rueb became, little by little, the dictator of FIDE, and a traveller who every year had his wife's expenses paid to attend the Congresses, which had to work through dumb agendas, and to solemnly inaugurate the big team tournaments, FIDE's only effective activity. It was necessary to put an end to such an abnormal state of affairs. Rueb had turned the FIDE presidency into an asset of his own; in the debates he respected the agenda when it suited him, and incorporated matters when they were brought up by him or by the Swiss Federation, which followed him faithfully. ...

This was understood by the delegates in Buenos Aires, who were puzzled by the way the debates were conducted, the absence of a programme, and the lack of concrete data on the administration of FIDE, on top of which came the problem of the moment posed by the war—which further aggravated the inertia. They decided to designate Buenos Aires the provisional headquarters of FIDE, due to its great distance from the conflict; and the President of FADA, Mr. Augusto De Muro, President of FIDE, thus rewarding his most extraordinary effort in the history of world chess in all its development. The resolution was adopted by absolute unanimity of votes. There were some abstentions, which at the final meeting at the close of the Congress disappeared, as the minutes were signed by all the delegates.

This means that there was perfect agreement and that the desire was evident to remove Dr. Rueb from the post which he had retained by always evading responsibility for his actions and by having resolved that re-elections should not take place at the great Congresses to which the Tournaments of Nations give rise. But Dr. Rueb did not resign himself, and once in Europe, he dedicated himself to writing letters denying the legality of the Buenos Aires resolution ... It is a puerile and somewhat ridiculous stance, but one that could damage world chess, as there would be no shortage of federations who would prefer to stay away until the conflict is resolved. ...²⁴

Let us look at the factual aspects of that criticism. Whether Rueb's administration was ineffective and self-serving, as Grau claimed, is not easy to judge and is outside the scope of this article.

As for the timing of the elections, it is true and has also been noted above that the previous two elections had fallen in non-Olympiad years (1932 and 1936), which was definitely unfortunate. It is a bold suggestion, however, that this was all part of a larger scheme, and is certainly not borne out by the minutes of earlier Congresses. In 1931 it was noted that no federation had offered to organize the Congress in the following year, while in 1935 it was noted that the Swedish Federation was preparing to organize the Olympiad in 1937.²⁵ It may also be remembered that Budapest was planning to hold the Olympiad in 1940, the next election year. (Also, if so much importance was attached to the timing and place of the elections, it may be wondered why Buenos Aires had made a bid for 1939 instead of 1940.)

Grau claimed that the agenda was set arbitrarily and that members were not able to bring up important matters. This is a rather questionable assertion in view of the far-ranging six-point proposal from Costa Rica that dominated much of the 1939 agenda, after having been correctly

²⁴ *¡Aquí Está!*, 18 May 1940, translated from the full text in Spanish given by Negri and Morgado, *op. cit.*, Addendum 1.

²⁵ FIDE GA minutes 1931, p. 12, and 1935, pp. 13–14.

submitted in writing in advance. By a similar procedure Argentina (or any other member) could have made a proposal for alternative election methods—or, indeed, a term limit—which then could have been discussed properly during the Stockholm 1937 or Buenos Aires 1939 Olympiads.

It is easy to understand that for a country so far away from Europe as Argentina, FIDE was an elusive body and acquiring influence or bringing about change was next to impossible and very frustrating. The Congress in Buenos Aires, with relatively few of the European nations represented (and most of the representatives being absorbed by playing in the tournament), offered the “once in a lifetime” opportunity to oust Rueb. The outbreak of the war provided a perfect pretext in addition.

How the FIDE Congress worked

Let us try to understand rather more clearly how the FIDE Congresses worked. Customarily, sessions were held on three or four consecutive days, following an agenda with standard items (annual report, finances, new members), followed by reports and discussion of various ongoing topics (such as the World Championship question), specific motions submitted by members in advance (such as the Costa Rica proposals), and, finally, some open discussions and remarks from various delegates.

The present writer has not been able to determine exactly how detailed the published agenda was and how far in advance it was sent to the federations. The Regulations required publication three months before the General Assembly. Afterwards, the minutes—which, by the way, included a list of all members, representatives, and addresses—had to be sent out to the members within three months of the Assembly (article 13 of the General Regulations of FIDE). Also, any written proposals for the General Assembly by the member nations had to be sent four months in advance to the secretariat, which had to announce them, without modification, in the agenda (article 11).

Attendance varied considerably from one Congress to another but also during the individual sessions. In Buenos Aires it seems that between about ten and thirty people participated in the different sessions. The following list attempts to reconstruct who attended the historic session of Monday, 18 September 1939.

- FIDE president: Alexander Rueb
- Congress secretary: R.A. Tassier (Argentina?)
- Argentina: Luciano Long Vidal (Vice-President of the Argentinean Chess Federation)
- Bolivia: Jorge Rodríguez Hurtado [?]
- Chile: José Valenzuela Correa [?]
- Denmark: Jens Enevoldsen
- Ecuador: Dr. Carlos Ayala
- Estonia: Paul Keres [?]
- France: Edmond-Henri Dez
- Germany: Karl Miehe [?] (treasurer of the German Chess Federation and official delegate; in some earlier sessions the team captain Albert Becker was also present)
- Lithuania: Ksaveras Andrašiūnas [?]
- Paraguay: Dr. Luis Oscar Boettner
- Peru: Dr. José Jacinto Rada
- Uruguay: Dr. Rafael J. Mieres

Plus, possibly, a few translators and consulting colleagues. Voting rights rested exclusively with the official delegates. If a delegate represented more than one nation, he still had only one single vote.²⁶

Question marks indicate that these were the official delegates according to the list published in the Argentinean 1940 brochure on the Congress, but it does not necessarily mean these people also attended the session in question. Most of these delegates were also playing and captaining their team later the same day. Among the delegates listed, only Long Vidal, Miehé, Valenzuela Correa, Rada, and Mieres were not also players.

It is also notable which nations were represented at the Olympiad, but not in this key session of the Congress:

- England (delegate Thomas Henry Acton, already returned to Europe because of the war)
- Bohemia-Moravia (represented by the German delegate)
- Brazil (Trompowsky)
- Bulgaria (Tsvetkov)
- Canada (Morrison)
- Costa Rica (Gutiérrez Mangel)
- Guatemala (Vassaux)
- Netherlands (Cortlever)
- Hungary (represented by the German delegate)
- Ireland (Kerlin)
- Iceland (Møller)
- Latvia (no delegate)
- Norway (Austbø)
- Palestine (Czerniak)
- Poland (Tartakower)
- Puerto Rico (represented by De Muro)

Thus, only slightly less than half the delegations present at Buenos Aires participated in the disputed vote.

The official language of FIDE was French, which is also the language of the agenda, minutes, and annual reports. Furthermore, article 14 of the Regulations stipulated that French was the preferred language also in the General Assembly; however, other languages were admissible if it served the discussion.

The difficulties with this linguistic plurality had already been admonished by Swiss delegate Erwin Voellmy in his report on the 1937 Congress in Stockholm:

The diversity of languages used on these occasions is a cause of fatigue and loss of time; the proposals and the reasons, presented in French, in German, and in English, must be translated and re-translated, which does not exclude misunderstandings.²⁷

In Buenos Aires, Spanish entered the mix, and much of the discussion took place in that language. Proceedings even had to be suspended for a quarter of an hour at some point, as Boettner's motion was put forward only in Spanish and a proper French version first had to be made.

²⁶ The latter limitation, not found in the original FIDE Statutes of 1925, was an amendment to article 13.2 by the 1932 FIDE Congress.

²⁷ *Schweizerische Schachzeitung*, October 1938, p. 146.

In an article in the *Deutsche Schachzeitung*, Heinrich Ranneforth made the following observations:

The postal service has been interrupted since the outbreak of the war. The Dutch players, not to mention the Germans, did not receive a single letter over there, and of all the letters they sent home, usually in duplicate, very few have arrived. Most of the European teams arrived in Holland via England in the first days of November.

From them we also heard about the main Assembly of FIDE. What was reported sounds strange. During the meeting, the representatives of the South American states made long speeches in Spanish that no one understood; this in turn meant that many stayed away from the meetings. So, there was a great surprise at the last session. The Argentine representative Vidal sharply criticized the bureaucratic activities of FIDE and asked the delegates to see for themselves the very different nature of the activities of the Argentinean Chess Federation, and then came a motion from Paraguay, with the support of eight South American countries, to have the seat of the FIDE relocated to Buenos Aires in view of the war conditions and to elect Dr. Aug. De Muro, the head of the Argentinean Federation, as President of FIDE and appoint the previous president, Dr. Rueb, honorary president. This motion was adopted, with Argentina, Germany, France, and Latvia [*sic*] abstaining.²⁸

Obviously, it is not true that “no one” understood the speeches in Spanish, but it can easily be seen how non-Spanish speaking delegates were losing interest in the Congress, especially when they also had playing duties. Of course, during the earlier Congresses in Europe, the situation was probably often reversed, although the effect had less impact as the Argentinean and North American representatives were usually the only ones from overseas.

Part 3: The interpretation

With the scene and facts set out, let us try to assess the 1939 decision in the following terms:

- Was the decision legal?
- Was it legitimate at the time?
- Was it legitimate *ex-post*?

The legal situation

As shown above, Alexander Rueb, himself a lawyer, considered the decision by the 1939 General Assembly illegal and hence void. The counter-argument brought forward by the Peruvian representative was that the General Assembly had absolute power in FIDE matters.

The relevant articles in the FIDE Statutes of 1925 were the following (with free translations):

- Article 6.6: *Le Comité Central est élu en 1925 pour 3 ans et ensuite pour 4 ans par l'Assemblée Générale à la majorité des voix émises.*
(The Central Committee is elected ... every four years by the majority of votes cast.)
- Article 7.3: *L'Assemblée Générale a le pouvoir absolu ; elle arrête le bilan de l'exercice écoulé et le budget de l'année en cours.*
(The General Assembly has the absolute power; it approves the balance sheet of the previous period and the budget for the current period.)

²⁸ *Deutsche Schachzeitung*, December 1939, p. 306. As shown below, the report was probably based on an earlier report in the Dutch paper *De Telegraaf*.

- Article 9.1: *Les Statuts de la F.I.D.E. seront élaborés par l'Assemblée Générale.*
(The Statutes of FIDE shall be drawn up by the General Assembly.)
- Article 10: *Les Statuts ne pourront être modifiés que par l'Assemblée Générale avec une majorité de deux tiers des voix émises.*
(The Statutes may only be amended by the General Assembly by a two-thirds majority of the votes cast.)

Furthermore, the General Regulations stated:

- Article 11: *Les propositions des membres des Unités affiliées à l'Assemblée doivent être renvoyées au Secrétariat quatre mois avant la date du congrès. Le Secrétariat les annonce, sans modifications, dans l'ordre du jour.*
(Proposals by the member federations to the General Assembly must be sent to the Secretariat four months prior to the date of the Congress. ...)
- Article 15: *L'ordre du jour sera publié par le Comité Central trois mois avant le Congrès.*
(The agenda is published by the Central Committee three months prior to the Congress.)

It is undisputed that in 1939 no regular elections were on the agenda, that the proposal to replace Rueb and move FIDE to Buenos Aires was not announced before the Congress, and that it did not figure as an item on the Congress agenda.

The vote thus clearly contradicted various clauses in the FIDE Statutes and Regulations. It is also evident from the reports that the General Assembly did not discuss or make any changes to the Statutes or Regulations (which also had not been on the agenda).

Any argument for considering the decision legal thus rests on article 7.3 of the Statutes, which stated that the General Assembly had “absolute power.” As will be noted, the very same sentence continues by referring to past and future financial transactions by the Federation. Clearly, the “absolute power” was thus primarily intended to relate to financial aspects.

It is inconceivable that the writers and signatories of the 1925 FIDE Statutes intended that the General Assembly could freely disregard its own Statutes and Regulations by virtue of article 7.3. If that had been the case, article 7.3 would have rendered various other clauses irrelevant. For instance, if the General Assembly was free to decide anything, there was no point in stipulating a two-thirds majority for a change to the Statutes (article 10).

What if the case had been taken to court? Nowadays, article 1.2 of the FIDE Statutes clearly states:

FIDE is an association of unlimited duration, with the status of a legal person, founded on 20th July 1924 in Paris, France, then recognized in Switzerland and registered in the Commercial Register, in accordance with the Swiss Civil Code.²⁹

Further on, article 36.2 specifies that courts in Lausanne, Switzerland, should rule on any conflicts regarding the FIDE Charter and Regulations.

In the original FIDE Statutes of 1925, no explicit statement was made regarding the jurisdiction applying to FIDE. However, the Statutes were signed in Switzerland, the Swiss currency was chosen as the official currency, and the bank accounts were opened in Switzerland. This suggests that also in 1939 FIDE fell under Swiss law. Incidentally, Switzerland, unlike Germany or France, did not require an association to be registered unless it conducted commercial operations.

²⁹ FIDE Charter, 2020, p. 8. See <https://handbook.fide.com/files/handbook/FIDECharter2020.pdf>

The Swiss Civil Code of 1907 contained detailed regulations for associations such as FIDE, including the following clauses relevant to the question at hand:

- Article 63.1: Where the articles of association do not provide rules for the association's organization or its relationship with its members, the following provisions apply.
- Article 64.1: The general meeting of members is the supreme governing body of the association.
- Article 65.2: [The general meeting of members] supervises the activities of the governing bodies and may at any time dismiss the latter without prejudice to any contractual rights of those dismissed.
- Article 66.1: Resolutions are passed by the general meeting.
- Article 66.2: The written consent of all members to a proposal is equivalent to a resolution of the general meeting.
- Article 67.3: Resolutions may be taken on matters for which proper notice has not been given only where this is expressly permitted by the articles of association.³⁰

Thus, on the one hand the law confirms that the governing body (the Central Committee) could be replaced by the General Assembly "at any time", i.e. also outside the regular election cycle. On the other hand, it also indicates that resolutions cannot be taken without proper prior notice.

The Swiss Civil Code also suggests that even if in 1940 no Congress was held, the members could have resolved to amend the Statutes unanimously in writing. For instance, the members could have agreed by correspondence to allow a vote or election to be held in writing and then conducted the vote by majority. A complicated process, but not entirely impossible.

As was the case with the FIDE Statutes, article 64.1 of the Code designated the General Assembly as the supreme governing body, while article 67.3. clearly indicated that any resolutions needed proper prior announcement.

To the present writer (who does not claim to be a legal expert), it seems highly unlikely that the Argentinean case would have been upheld by a court as both FIDE Statutes and legal articles had been violated. Allowing a General Assembly to take such important decisions as replacing its leadership spontaneously, without prior announcement and with only a small portion of members present, would set a fearsome precedent and open up a true Pandora's box.

Was the vote legitimate at the time?

There are situations where actions violate the letter of the law but may still be legitimate. Such a condition could arise if, for example, the Federation's assets were in acute danger.

However, not only the legality but also the legitimacy of the decision at the time seems very questionable, for several reasons:

- 1) At least for some of the parties signing the motion, the War was a pretext and at best a secondary motive. Their actual purpose—replacing the allegedly ineffective Rueb administration—could have been achieved through an established and well-defined legal procedure (i.e., the elections due the following year). It was not a matter of the utmost urgency. Such extraordinary measures as violating the Statutes were not warranted.

³⁰ Current, non-binding English translation available from https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/24/233_245_233/en#book_1/tit_2/chap_2/lvl_A/lvl_II_I. Note that the articles in question have not changed since 1907 and thus were the same in 1939.

- 2) In September 1939, the War had just broken out. It was impossible to know where it was heading. Holland was still a free country and neutral, as was Switzerland, where the Federation's monetary assets were held. There was no immediate danger to the assets of FIDE, and a modus operandi was still imaginable (as is illustrated by the fact that during the 1939 Congress the idea of a Budapest 1940 Congress was still alive and confirmed).
- 3) Out of 45 member nations, it was just eight countries which voted for Rueb's replacement by De Muro. To claim, as Grau did, that the FIDE members were unanimously against Rueb was blatantly wrong and disingenuous. At least half the member nations did not even know that such a vote was taking place, and three-quarters were not present.
- 4) Having a final gathering of delegates formally ratify the results of the Congress was an attempt to broaden the support for the decision. However, those delegates who signed the final list still represented less than half of the FIDE members. Furthermore, it is questionable whether all of them were aware of the implications of the ratification and of the preceding violation of statutes and procedures.
- 5) In its fifteen-year history FIDE had accumulated savings of about 9,000 Swiss Francs (including the permanent fund). These funds stemmed from federations and individual donors ("life members"). At least 95% came from European sources. To relocate FIDE and its funds to South America without firm support for such a move from the European countries (and, in fact, essentially behind their back) was hardly a *bona fide* move or in the legitimate interests of FIDE. No fewer than five of the eight nations voting against Rueb had just been admitted to FIDE that very same year (Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru), and while every nation's vote ought to count the same, regardless of size and age of membership, it was a very brazen move.
- 6) Finally, even if FIDE could no longer be governed from Europe for the duration of the war, as was claimed by the South American delegates, there was no need for the "revolt." FIDE's Vice-President Maurice S. Kuhns was American and perfectly qualified and legitimized to step in, should the President no longer be able to carry out his duties. After all, this was one of the main reasons the Federation had a Vice-President.

From the above it seems clear that the legitimacy of the action left much to be desired. If the Argentinean Chess Federation believed that Rueb had to be replaced because he was not leading FIDE properly—and from their *lamentos* it seems clear that such discontent had taken root much earlier than summer 1939—they could have filed well in advance a motion to have Rueb removed from office at the Congress. The European nations could then have made up their minds regarding the motion, instructed their delegates accordingly, or, if they did not attend the Congress, delegate their voting right to another representative. This would have resulted in a fair and representative vote on the suitability (or otherwise) of Rueb for the presidency.

If, however, the outbreak of the war was the only true reason, there were various less drastic ways in which the problem could have been addressed within the legal framework of FIDE, such as making provisions for the Vice-President to step in.

Was the vote legitimate *in hindsight*?

Even if the vote was illegal and illegitimate, the "De Muro Presidency" could be legitimized, or at least acknowledged, in hindsight if, as a matter of fact, Augusto De Muro conducted FIDE's business in the years between 1939 and 1946, the year of the next Congress, or if he was widely accepted as FIDE President at the time.

The documentation by Negri and Morgado lists a few activities by De Muro as FIDE president in the years 1940 to 1945, such as recognizing world record exhibitions by Miguel Najdorf and inaugurating certain South American tournaments.

However, there appears to be no sign of any actions with a real impact. Nothing is known of any attempts to organize a gathering of FIDE nations or circulars to work on open issues. No annual reports or financial statements were published. If any attempt was made to collect information from the members and publish it in an annual report, as had been so vigorously demanded, no trace thereof seems to have survived. Nor does it appear that any progress was made regarding the World championship once the negotiations immediately following the Congress had come to nought in late 1939. All in all, it seems that the “De Muro Presidency” existed primarily on paper.

Of course, the same can be said about Rueb and the years 1940 to 1945. But the very justification for taking the presidency from Rueb was that far away from Europe FIDE’s activities could prosper better. They did not. Even though Rueb became essentially inactive after Germany’s assault on Holland in May 1940, thus retrospectively justifying the fears expressed in Argentina, the situation had not become any better by the Argentinean Federation’s move.

Of course, De Muro’s possibilities were also limited because Rueb refused to play along, and De Muro lacked the financial means. The Olympiad had been very expensive, and the Swiss Treasurer of FIDE refused to transfer the FIDE funds to Argentina. Nevertheless, if De Muro was recognized as FIDE President in the Americas, he could have collected FIDE membership fees in those countries. The fact that he either did not really try or did not succeed shows that the acceptance of his presidency was always limited.

It could even be argued that the South American motion of 1939 was directly detrimental to FIDE, because in the resulting schism all federations hesitated to support FIDE or pay fees, not knowing which was the true administration. Had it not been for the Buenos Aires events, the Vice-President Kuhns might have been in a position to take over command during the war years with unanimous support.

Incidentally, Grau, in his article in *¡Aquí Está!*, 18 May 1940, blamed Rueb (and the latter’s refusal to abdicate) for the schism and the discouraging effect it had on the FIDE members. According to Grau, it was “an unfortunate affair that could shake the foundations of FIDE.” The observation was probably correct, but was he not perhaps as much to blame for the schism as Rueb?

Reactions to the Congress in Europe and elsewhere

As we saw earlier, in his article in *¡Aquí Está!*, 18 May 1940, Grau also claimed that “all” the federations desired to see Rueb removed from office:

Only two federations in the world, Costa Rica and Switzerland, seem to support Dr. Rueb in his attitude. The former, no doubt, because it is misinformed about the problem, and the latter because Mr. Nicolet refuses to hand over the pesos in his possession and the position that the ousted president assigned to him, also in perpetuity.

Of course, the former statement is an empty assumption, while the second was untrue insofar as the Treasurer underwent the same election procedure every four years as the rest of the Committee, and in all those years no fault had ever been found regarding the way he handled the financial assets of FIDE. Curiously, the Argentinean Chess Federation’s official report on the Congress, published around the same time as Grau’s article, continues to list Marc Nicolet (1876–1942) as treasurer (and Kuhns as Vice-President).

If Grau believed that in Europe the ousting of Rueb was unanimously supported, he was definitely mistaken. Below follows an account of the European and North American reception of the events. Not every chess outlet in existence at the time has been available to the present writer, but all those consulted are faithfully mentioned below.

Switzerland—The official organ, the *Schweizerische Schachzeitung*, reported on the tournament but did not have a single line on the General Assembly or the Presidency. Instead, in his influential column in the *Basler Nachrichten*, 16 December 1939, the Swiss delegate of previous years, Dr. Erwin Voellmy, printed a long report. It essentially reproduced Rueb's point of view, based on the official meeting minutes which Rueb had had printed and circulated to all member nations in November 1939, and whereby he requested each member federation to declare its allegiance.

In his next column for the *Basler Nachrichten*, dated 23 December 1939, Voellmy printed the official position of the Swiss Chess Federation. It had decided to side with Rueb since "first comes the respect for the Statutes, and only afterwards the adjustment to the political situation. The [Swiss] Central Committee regrets it if this should cause a rift in the chess world; but it is the fault of those who transgress the laws, and not those who keep to them."

Germany—The report in the December issue of *Deutsche Schachzeitung* by Ranneforth, dealing with the "strange events" has already been mentioned. It stressed the earlier sharp criticism of Rueb by Long Vidal and referred to the War as just an additional reason. In the following issue, January 1940, a long letter from Buenos Aires by the German team captain, Albert Becker, was quoted, dated 5 October 1939. On page 4 he reported as follows: "The FIDE Congress brought surprises; the South and Middle Americans staged a coup. Surprisingly and improperly (*ordnungswidrig*) they put elections on the agenda ... Even though all of this is allegedly only for the time being until the next Congress (as a reason the War in Europe was cited), all of this is very dubious. Dr. Rueb initially fought back with determination against the assault, but in the end, he allowed the decisive vote."

Of course, Rueb could have just attempted to close the session, but in all likelihood the delegates would have continued anyway (as they did later on). By bringing the motion to a vote in his presence, he at least ensured that there was a proper record of it, even if he did not recognize it as legal or binding.

It seems obvious that Becker, who stayed in South America, did not support the coup (*Handstreich*). He also wrote on the tournament for the *Deutsche Schachblätter* but without any mention of the Congress. The latter also contained an adventurous travel report by the official German FIDE delegate, Karl Miehe, who was also the Treasurer of Nazi Germany's Chess Federation (*Grossdeutscher Schachbund*).³¹ Curiously, the Congress—the very reason he was in Buenos Aires—is not mentioned once.

The Netherlands—The magazine *De Schaakwereld*, 10 November 1939, page 147, reported on the "serious conflict in the World Chess Federation." It briefly reported on the far-reaching decisions taken and that Rueb contested them. "According to Dr. Rueb the decisions are invalid, and therefore he will not execute them. If the South Americans maintain their position, a split in the union is not impossible." Meanwhile, the official organ, the *Tijdschrift van den Koninklijken Nederlandschen Schaakbond*, apparently did not report on the FIDE Congress at all. It is evident that Rueb could not count on the unanimous support of his compatriots.

³¹ *Deutsche Schachblätter*, no. 1-2, January 1940, pp. 3–5.

The Dutch daily press had some coverage. In addition to the above statement in *De Schaakwereld*, the following stood out:

- The *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 1 November 1939, pointed out that most European delegates had also been players and were unable to attend all the sessions or had to leave them early. “As a result, the South American states had a majority in the votes. ... The consequence of some of these decisions will be that FIDE as such and as far as European countries are concerned, will cease to exist. We hear that several federations plan to suspend their membership in FIDE.”
- *Het Volksdagblad*, 3 November 1939, announced that Rueb had resigned the presidency, adding that “much has changed with that. ... We have to wait and see what the new FIDE does. Much also depends on the course of political events in Europe. One may think whatever one wants of Dr. Rueb’s policies—for *he alone* was the old World Chess Federation—but if not the result of his work, at least his work itself must be admired. But with a man like Dr. Alekhine against him, it was difficult, and the Soviet chess masters did not agree with his policies either.”
- *De Telegraaf*, 4 November 1939, had a longer report. The correspondent had talked to some of the players, and regarding the Congress he noted the following: “The way in which Dr. Rueb ... had been forced from his seat, was truly South American. It went like this: During the sessions of FIDE, the delegates of the South American chess federations gave long speeches in the Spanish language, of which none of the other countries understood anything. As a result, the delegates of the European countries gradually avoided these sessions, especially since, according to the Statutes of FIDE, Argentina’s proposals, owing to the majority of its 44 member countries not being represented, could not take effect in that session. At a time when only the representatives of the 11 South American countries [*sic*] were present at the session, Argentina now proposed appointing the President of the Argentinean Chess Federation as President of FIDE. Even before Dr. Rueb understood what was going on, he was appointed honorary president. When the delegates of the other countries heard what had happened, they were told that since most European countries were at war, it would be better if the office of FIDE was located in a quiet country like Argentina. However, the real reason for this action was probably that, now that the FIDE was domiciled in Argentina, they hoped to obtain financial support from the government sooner. According to the Dutch players, the Argentinean Chess Federation was still facing significant deficits, despite the busy attendance at the matches. Moreover, FIDE has a small sum, kept in Switzerland, which could be put to excellent use in Buenos Aires, for example, for the match Alekhine–Capablanca. In the opinion of the Dutch players, Dr. Rueb will not resign himself to the course of events, so there will probably be a split in FIDE, a European section and an American one.”

England—The *British Chess Magazine* limited itself to a very brief and neutral note: “The more serious side of the Congress—the deliberations of the 16th Congress of FIDE—were naturally very provisional in view of the unsettled circumstances. The President of the Argentine Chess Federation, Dr. Augusto De Muro, was appointed acting President of FIDE in succession to Dr. Rueb of Holland; the latter was designated honorary President of FIDE.”

The rival magazine *CHESS*, edited by England’s reserve player Baruch H. Wood, did not report on the Congress at all. However, it took up the matter in its May 1941 (!) issue, in the form of a letter from George Sturgis, the President of the United States Chess Federation. He wrote:

... I think it is extremely unfortunate that any player can apparently hold the world's championship indefinitely, and that there is no organization in the chess world with enough power or influence to bring the title back into circulation. ... The International Federation is the body which should control the situation. It is an unfortunate fact, however, that due to war and internal dissension FIDE is impotent today with little influence and no power. ...

I enclose a report which was made to me at my request by the Judiciary Committee of the United States Chess Federation, who were asked to make recommendations of policy with respect to our relationship with FIDE. This report of the Judiciary Committee, signed by Messrs. Elbert A. Wagner, Jr., and M. S. Kuhns, has been adopted and now represents the settled policy of the USCF in its relations with FIDE.

Sturgis then gave the report by Wagner and Kuhns:

Relative to the matter of FIDE ... laid before the judiciary Committee, the undersigned as members of such Committee report as follows:

A Congress of FIDE was called for 13 September 1939 at Buenos Aires, Argentina. An agenda of the business to be transacted at such Congress had been submitted in advance by Dr. A. Rueb, the President of FIDE, inasmuch as he could not be in personal attendance [*this was obviously a misunderstanding and corrected by Wood in his editorial postscript*]. Such agenda made no provision for an election of officers, and under the existing circumstances there was no occasion for an election as the terms of the acting officers would not expire until 1941 [*sic*]. Notwithstanding that no election of officers was scheduled to be held and that there were no offices to be filled, the delegates in attendance at the Buenos Aires Congress proceeded to hold an election of officers. They thereupon elected Señor Augusto De Muro as President, Mr. M. S. Kuhns as Vice-President, and Senor Joaquín Gómez Masía as Secretary-Treasurer.

The United States of America was not represented at such Congress, having no delegates in attendance, although Miss Mary Karff, of Boston, Massachusetts, was there in the capacity of a contestant in the Women's Tournament which was held in conjunction with the International Team Tournament. Miss Karff, however, was in no sense a representative of the United States unit of the FIDE with respect to the business of the Congress ...

A written report which was later circulated by the De Muro Administration stated, however, that the United States had participated in the business of the Congress including the election of officers.

The first information received by Mr. M. S. Kuhns, the Vice-President of the FIDE and the President of the National Chess Federation, was a letter from Señor De Muro stating that he had been elected as President of FIDE. Mr. Kuhns thereupon wrote a congratulatory letter to Señor De Muro, stating that he had not known an election was to be held and that he assumed that Dr. Rueb had overlooked writing him about it. Mr. Kuhns was later informed by Dr. Rueb that the election had not been authorized and that he, Dr. Rueb, was still the President of FIDE. Upon receiving this word from Dr. Rueb, Mr. Kuhns wrote a further letter to Señor De Muro, disavowing his earlier letter of congratulations.

This is an important point. In the brochure from the Argentinean Chess Federation, published in May 1940, the first letter from Kuhns was given, serving as evidence for the legitimacy of the election. It is also cited by Negri and Morgado as an argument to bolster De Muro's claim to the presidency. From

the above lines it is evident that Kuhns had written that congratulatory letter under a false impression and that he later fully retracted it.

The report by Wagner and Kuhns contained some further pertinent points:

The newly elected Secretary-Treasurer has called upon Prof. M. Nicolet, the old Secretary-Treasurer, to turn over the records and funds of FIDE. This Dr. Rueb has refused to permit, not recognizing the De Muro Administration as having any authority to receive them. The matter now stands with conflicting claims of authority between the old administration, whose terms of office will not expire for another year, and the De Muro Administration, who were elected at the Buenos Aires Congress.

An official printed report of the business transacted at the various sessions of the Buenos Aires Congress has been published by Dr. Rueb over his signature and in his capacity as President. In such report no mention is made of any election and the old officers still appear. ... [The newly formed] United States Chess Federation is now recognized as the official United States unit by both the Rueb and the De Muro Administrations. Both of whom incidentally have requested payment of dues from the USCF.

A factual situation which must be recognized irrespective of the question of who are the legal officers of FIDE is that that organization is a decimated body. Many of the strongest and most active units are no longer independent nations by reason of the war. ...

Without expressing any opinion as to which set of officers are entitled to be legally recognized, it is the opinion of your Judiciary Committee:

- (1) That the entire question of action by the United States Chess Federation with respect to FIDE be held in abeyance;
- (2) That until the affairs of FIDE are determined, no dues be paid by the United States Chess Federation to either Treasurer.³²

Evidently, once Kuhns realized what had really happened in Buenos Aires, he was not willing to commit himself unnecessarily to either side.

In a brief postscript Wood only noted that Rueb had indeed been in Buenos Aires, adding: "He travelled to Buenos Aires expressly to attend the Congress. It might have cleared the situation a little had he lodged a vigorous protest at the time, instead of saying little or nothing until he had returned to Europe. The remainder of the paragraph containing this statement is perfectly correct."

The following month, *CHESS* printed a follow-up letter from Kuhns to Sturgis, which the latter had forwarded to Wood. The correspondence primarily concerned the World championship, but also brought further clarification as to Kuhns' position regarding the FIDE conflict:

... As Vice-President of the "Rueb FIDE" (the Buenos Aires FIDE being spurious) I stand ready to authorize the USCF to hold an International Tournament ... for the World Championship. ... If Dr. Rueb be alive (which I doubt, as he was an invalid) he would immediately sanction my assumption of authority; if he be not alive, I can assume it by virtue of the power conferred

³² *CHESS*, May 1941, pp. 114–115.

on me by the laws governing FIDE, *and* all the European units would sanction my actions; *of this I assure you.*³³

It is curious that *CHESS* only covered the issue from the American standpoint and did not have a single word to say about the English position. Of course, having himself been a fierce critic of Rueb four years earlier and calling for his resignation, Wood may have wished to remain silent because on the one hand he was glad to see Rueb replaced, while on the other he was convinced that the way it was done was not right. Incidentally, Savielly Tartakower, Poland's official delegate for the 1939 Congress, also counted among the open Rueb critics in 1937 and seems to have largely kept away from the 1939 proceedings.

United States—In the U.S. press the FIDE events found little echo; it should be remembered that no team or delegate had been sent to Argentina, with Mary Karff being the only American citizen present. The *American Chess Bulletin* does not seem to have reported on the FIDE events at all. And in the *Chess Review* it was only in November 1940 that the letter from Wagner and Kuhns (quoted above) was printed under the title “Backwash from Buenos Aires.”³⁴ The editors only added that the report was “self-explanatory,” and that the U.S. team had not only missed the nations' tournament, but also some “stormy developments at the FIDE meeting.”

In April 1941, *Chess Review* also reprinted the additional correspondence but in shortened form. The parenthetical remark that “the Buenos Aires FIDE [was] spurious” and that “all the European units would sanction my actions; of this I assure you” were left out. Probably nothing should be read into these omissions, as other parts were even more severely curtailed by the editors.³⁵

Scandinavia—Let us turn to Scandinavia. It will be remembered that **Denmark** was one of the two European countries which, in the person of Jens Enevoldsen, had voted for the Paraguayan motion. Incidentally, though, Denmark—along with the Netherlands, Norway, Latvia, Iceland, Ireland, Palestine, and Bulgaria—was also one of the countries *not* signing the ratification initiated on the day after the actual vote. Whether this was an accidental or deliberate omission, we do not know.

The official organ of the Danish Chess Union, the *Skakbladet*, took a clear stance. Its editor, Alfred Christensen, was well-informed. He had been Denmark's board three and he wrote:

FIDE held its 16th Congress in the Teatro “Politeama,” where sessions were held every morning from 13 to 19 September. The proceedings were held in Spanish and then translated into French, English, and German. After a detailed report of the year by the President, Dr. A. Rueb, a few internal matters were discussed. ...

The Argentinean delegate Luciano Long Vidal sharply criticized the FIDE correspondence and organizational work, which he called bureaucratic and cumbersome. He invited the delegates to visit the “Federación Argentina de Ajedrez” offices and see how that organization worked.

And then the purpose of this criticism suddenly became apparent on the last day of the Congress during the elections. Paraguay, supported by eight South [*sic*] American countries, proposed that the headquarters of FIDE should be transferred to Buenos Aires, that Dr. Augusto De Muro—the President of the “Federación Argentina de Ajedrez”—should be elected President, and his term of office should last until the next Congress, and that Dr. Rueb should be appointed President Emeritus.

³³ *CHESS*, June 1941, p. 131.

³⁴ *Chess Review*, November 1940, p. 174.

³⁵ *Chess Review*, April 1941, pp. 84–85.

The surprising bill was passed unanimously, but Argentina, France, Latvia [*sic*] and Germany did not vote. ...

But the treatment meted out to the old founder and leader of the World Chess Federation, Dr. A. Rueb of The Hague, was, in my opinion, a senseless injustice. He was already the object of the sharpest criticism from the South Americans during the congressional proceedings, and the proposal which overthrew him, and which was motivated by the fact that Europe was now so busy in slaughtering that South America could better carry on the peaceful work of the chess organization, had been prepared behind his back. Felled by the sudden onslaught, he took his leave with some bitterness—not without reason, indeed—but the Argentines wrote that he behaved in an unruly and stormy manner during the election. Dr. Rueb—unruly!!

The empty honorary title does not explain away the fact that a good and well-deserved chess organizer has been wronged. No, it is not only good and beautiful memories that we have of Argentina.³⁶

What is curious, of course, is that no mention is made of the fact that Denmark had been one of the only two European countries that voted in favour of the controversial proposal.

In **Sweden**, the *Tidskrift för Schack* reported in a neutral tone:

The World Chess Federation (FIDE) Congress proceedings were held from 13 to 19 September under Dr. Rueb's management. The Paraguayan delegate L. O. Boettner presented a proposal, signed by eight South American countries, stating that there was in fact a state of war in Europe and that it was impossible to foresee its duration. Since the seat of FIDE is in Holland, the focal point of the European conflict, it was motioned that the Congress approve the following ... The motion was adopted. Argentina, France, Latvia, and Germany abstained from voting.

The next Congress is intended to be held in Budapest next year. A pious hope!³⁷

Apart from Latvia, Sweden was the only participating country which did not nominate a delegate and thus was not involved in the proceedings at any stage.³⁸

The *Norsk Sjakkblad* of **Norway** had a report that went along the same lines as that of the *Deutsche Schachzeitung*, but with a few additional references, among them an explanation of the differences of opinion among the Danes:

... And then, on the last day of the Congress, a representative of Paraguay proposed that FIDE's headquarters be moved to Buenos Aires, that the President of the Argentinean Chess Federation become FIDE's President instead of the hotly contested Dr. Rueb, and that the latter be inaugurated as the Federation's Honorary President. The proposal was adopted unanimously, with Argentina, France, Latvia, and Germany abstaining.

Among those who voted in favour was the Danish representative Jens Enevoldsen, which seems not to be to the taste of all Danish players.

³⁶ *Skakbladet*, December 1939, pp. 215–216 and 219.

³⁷ *Tidskrift för Schack*, no. 9-12, September-December 1939, p. 180.

³⁸ At least if the list of delegates printed in the FADA congress booklet, p. 9, is correct.

Dr. Rueb was elected president for 4 years, and this term did not expire until 1940. The decision therefore seems to be illegal, and it will probably in reality lead to the creation of a South American chess union. ... *Deutsche Schachzeitung* suggests that the request to relocate FIDE's offices to South America may be linked to attempts to realise the Capablanca vs. Alekhine match, as it would be easier to obtain state funding if money is tight.³⁹

Eastern Europe—The Eastern European chess magazines also carried some critical remarks. The **Czechoslovakian** magazine *Šach* reported under the headline "A serious rift in FIDE" essentially along Rueb's lines and his meeting minutes sent out in November:

As always, the FIDE General Assembly, held in Buenos Aires from 13 to 18 September 1939, was connected with the Tournament of Nations. Twenty-three countries were represented (only 21 had direct delegates, since this year Germany also represented Hungary and Czechoslovakia), of which 12 were non-European. ... A characteristic feature of this year's FIDE session was the serious influence of the Latin American countries, apparently against the previous president Dr. Rueb. This was most evident in the last session on 18 September, when the delegate of Paraguay proposed to the General Assembly that ... [etc.]

Five of these countries (Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay and Peru) were only accepted as FIDE members in the first session of this year's General Assembly. President Rueb declared already at the meeting that he could not consider the acceptance of this proposal as valid and consequently had a letter sent to all affiliated associations. In this letter, he asked those associations which were in favour of the proposal to declare whether they still considered themselves members of FIDE, and he asked the other associations which did not agree with this resolution to inform the FIDE International Bureau of their position without delay. ...⁴⁰

Ferenc Chalupetzky in the **Hungarian** chess magazine followed mostly the German reports and Rueb's account. We give only an excerpt:

Back home, it was reported that the Germans' very reasonable victory under difficult circumstances was met with unanimous approval by their hosts and chess players. Argentina, unlike Uruguay, was not anti-German after the declaration of war. ...

Not only did the final of the team championship reflect the distorted nature of the world, but the FIDE General Assembly also degenerated into a series of coups and violence. From the extremely objective report by President Dr. A. Rueb, we extract the following edifying details. They fully confirm Abonyi's concerns expressed in Stockholm that FIDE could not aim to organize Olympiads and General Assemblies in foreign parts of the world; unfortunately, the promising offer of Buenos Aires and the travel and subsistence concessions promised to FIDE delegates in Stockholm had already had their effect. ...

Second day of the session, 14 September: The soul of the Olympiad, Augusto De Muro, was elected an honorary member; other business could not be transacted owing to the scant interest. ...

Fourth day of the session, 16 September: A very moderate decision on the World Championship issue was taken when, at 11.30 a.m., several delegates entered the chamber, forced the resumption of the debate by majority vote and pushed through the following sharp resolution: "The World Cup is not the personal property of the defender. FIDE, as the

³⁹ *Norsk Sjakkblad*, no. 4-7, July-October 1939, p. 45.

⁴⁰ *Šach*, December 1939, p. 183

supreme and world-wide federation, will organize the matches and award the title.” Through the French delegate, Dr. Alekhine protested and said that he reserved the right to seek judicial redress against the decision.

The German delegate presented his Federation’s position on the inclusion of foreign masters in national competitions and announced that Hungary was ready to take over the international team championship for the Hamilton Russell Cup in 1940. (Applause.) ...⁴¹

There followed a more detailed description of the event based on the minutes circulated by Rueb.

In Romania, a brief sentence appeared in the national magazine indicating the change in the FIDE presidency, followed by a remark that “this change has created an upset in Holland, where it is demanded that the headquarters stay in The Hague.”⁴²

In contrast, the **Estonian** magazine only carried two sentences: “Señor De Muro of the Argentinean Chess Federation was elected as the new FIDE (International Chess Federation) President at the last Congress. The former President was the Dutchman Dr. Rueb.”⁴³

The **Soviet** press had even less on the “affair,” which is not so surprising as the country was not part of FIDE. *Shakhmaty v SSSR* does not seem to have mentioned it at all, while “64” just stated that “in connection with the war the seat of FIDE was moved from Belgium [sic] to Argentina.”⁴⁴

To sum up this rather extensive (but of course still incomplete) press review of the reactions outside South America: A majority of commentators took issue with, or outright condemned, the attempt to take FIDE to Buenos Aires by surprise. The rest of the voices were more or less neutral. None of the periodicals outside South America that have been consulted here welcomed the news. Most importantly, Maurice S. Kuhns of the United States, who was claimed by both sides as their Vice-President, came out on Rueb’s side, declaring the De Muro Administration “spurious.”

Conclusions

In summary, the 2022 motion to rewrite FIDE’s presidential history and recognize Augusto De Muro as the second FIDE President, based on the events of the 1939 FIDE Congress in Buenos Aires, has a shaky basis:

- By any reasonable interpretation, the 1939 vote to replace Rueb by De Muro violated the FIDE Statutes as well as applicable articles of Swiss law.
- The European War, quoted as the urgent motivation for the Paraguayan motion, was more of a pretext than anything else. With three-quarters of all member nations not even knowing about the “election,” its legitimacy was extremely dubious. The fact that some more countries signed a ratification document the following day does not make a substantial difference.
- Finally, the “De Muro FIDE” existed primarily on paper. It did not have any impact on the course of world chess or FIDE. It failed to do any substantial business. Moreover, as the extensive press review has shown, outside South America it never really had any traction or acceptance.

⁴¹ *Magyar Sakkvilág*, April 1940, pp. 73–76.

⁴² *Revista Română de Șah*, November 1939, p. 224.

⁴³ *Eesti Male*, November-December 1939, p. 171.

⁴⁴ “64”, 10 October 1939, p. [4].

The chances for FIDE to function properly during World War II were slim under any circumstances, but the schism induced by the 1939 events further increased the paralysis. Today it cannot be in the interests of FIDE to endorse retroactively a dubious power grab and set a precedent for all kinds of unconstitutional future machinations.

That being said, the Buenos Aires 1939 Chess Olympiad was, without doubt, a magnificent, heroic achievement by the Argentinean Chess Federation and its leading proponents. Rather than rewriting history, a better way for FIDE to acknowledge these extraordinary feats would be to recognize properly its honorary members and their frequently neglected and forgotten contributions to chess. Augusto De Muro was one of those honorary members, properly elected in the second session of the 1939 Congress, and the tenth person in fifteen years to be so extinguished.

In the *FIDE Golden Book 1924–1996*, the honorary member list is hidden away on page 23, after sections listing the “Grand Commanders of the Legion of Grandmasters” and a bunch of other bombastic and nonsensical special awards, handed out to political friends of the earlier presidents Florencio Campomanes and Kirsan Ilyumzhinov in the 1990s. On the FIDE website, one currently looks in vain even for a bare list of honorary members.

Why not start with a prominent gallery of the FIDE honorary members? Add a picture, a brief biography, and an account of their often great and unique merits on the FIDE website (and, it may be suggested, tidy up the long list of honorary awards in later years). This would be a true and proper way of recognizing the very real achievements of Augusto De Muro in connection with the fascinating Chess Olympiad of 1939.

Appendix: A note on the meeting minutes

Usually, meeting minutes of the FIDE Congresses were produced by the secretariat under Rueb’s direction and sent as a small booklet to all member nations. The situation in 1939 was exceptional and below is an overview of the different versions of the General Assembly minutes that were produced, in chronological order.

- The daily bulletin of the tournament (*Boletín del Torneo de las Naciones*) printed in its numbers 20 to 24 (of 15, 16, 17, 19, and 20 September 1939) the GA minutes as the Congress evolved. The minutes were printed in **Spanish** and **French**, as recorded by the Congress secretary R.A. Tassier. This was the “original” but unofficial and unapproved version. It did not contain the minutes of the relatively brief second session.
- The *Compte-rendu du XVIe Congrès, Buenos Aires 1939*, by FIDE was published in November 1939, and contained the official minutes as edited by Rueb, in similar style as all previous years in a booklet of 35 pages. The text is in somewhat rough **French**. Over large stretches it is the same as in the daily bulletin, but it has considerable divergences and additions. The sixth meeting is not recorded as it was not an official session of Congress according to Rueb. <https://www.stere.ro/1939-fide-compte-rendu-du-xvi-e-congres-buenos-aires/>
- In February 1940, the book *Ajedrez El Torneo de las Naciones* by Ignacio de Maria and Guillermo Puiggrós appeared (243 pages in small format). On pages 85–98, most of the meeting minutes in **Spanish** were reproduced as given in the daily bulletin. As in the latter publication, the second session of Thursday, 14 September, was omitted. The same applies to the sixth session, the “ratification” session of 19 September.
- In May 1940, the Argentinean Chess Federation (F.A.D.A.) published its own brochure *Torneo de las Naciones 1939* (52 pages). It was headed “Federación Internacional de Ajedrez” and was obviously intended as the official version of the “real” FIDE. On pages 11 to 18 it

contained the meeting minutes in **Spanish**, followed on pages 12 to 26 by a largely equivalent **French** version. The Spanish text followed essentially the previous publications, whereas the French, insofar as it was the same as that by Rueb, was more polished and had clearly been reviewed. Curiously, this report also ignores one of the sessions—it completely omits (by accident?) the fourth day, Saturday, 16 September, where among others it had been decided on a Peruvian motion that the title of World Champion did not belong to the titleholder. The publication makes no reference to minutes by Rueb, which he had sent out half a year earlier and within the stipulated three months after the Congress.

All in all, five versions of the meeting minutes are thus available in four different publications. A comprehensive textual comparison is beyond the scope of this article, but some discrepancies have been pointed out in the earlier analysis. It is certainly notable that not even one of these sources covered all six sessions.

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About the author. Dr. Richard Forster is a senior manager and data engineering consultant for a global consulting firm. He represented Switzerland in six Chess Olympiads and has authored and edited several works on chess history, including *Amos Burn* (2004), *The Zurich Chess Club* (2011), and the *Emanuel Lasker* trilogy (2018–2022). He can be contacted via the feedback form at www.emanuellasker.online.

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See www.chesshistory.com/fide1939 for additional illustrations.