

THE CHESS GAME

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The Russian people's fondness for chess is known, so much so that it is a compulsory subject in schools. Either for this reason or because of a natural predisposition, most of the great chess geniuses were born in Russia or in some of the republics that made up the USSR. Mikhail Tal, Petrosian, Karpov, Kasparov, Kramnik, were world champions who came from there. The 1972 World Chess Championship in Reykjavík, played between the champion, Boris Spassky, and the challenger, Bobby Fischer, in addition to giving us some of the most sublime matches in history, was another episode of the Cold War between the USSR and the USA. I admit that I have employed part of the free time that I have had in my visits to Moscow and Saint Petersburg to admire how hundreds of players strived with passion and everywhere, in the streets and in the parks, and I understand them, because to me chess is not a game, it's not a sport, it's life itself locked up in sixty-four squares.

Even the leaders of this hobby do not withdraw. Proof of this is the ruthless game that Putin is playing on a global scale, where the invasion of Ukraine has only been one more move. It is not, as some might think, an opening move. He has not been a white pawn who has bravely advanced two squares in defiance of the enemy army. Putin started this long confrontation years ago and, as the good player that he surely is, he knows that there is no hurry, but there is consistency, and pieces that cannot go back, that doubled or isolated pawns become vulnerable and that the first phase of the game is to weaken the rival, dominate the centre of the board and from that challenging position open flanks that allow the incursion of the major pieces between the enemy ranks. And till the final victory. He ended that first phase a long time ago

with stealth, almost without us realising it. Only now, reviewing the annotations of the game, do we reproach ourselves for being so blind as not to see that behind many populist and disintegrating movements that have attacked Europe in recent years was the grandmaster's strategy, stubbornly working to exhaust. The internal tensions and external pressures that the European Union has suffered cannot be sustained without substantial economic support and a barrage of misleading information that blurs the battlefield, and each has undoubtedly come from the hand that moves the board. And if someone's memory falters, let him review the newspaper archive to surrender to the wise reflection of Saramago in *Blindness*: "I don't think we did go blind, I think we are blind, blind but seeing, blind people who can see, but do not see".

Those of us who are passionate about chess know first-hand the uneasiness we feel when our position is weak and facing a powerful attack, a feeling that was accurately described by the great Danish player - however, born in Latvia - Aron Nimzowitsch (1886-1935): "In chess, the threat of a move is stronger than its execution". When we guess the sinister plan of our opponent and we realise that in few moves he will inevitably check us, we can only look at him bewildered getting as a response an ironic rictus that hurts as does a threat. "You've noticed already, haven't you?", he seems to tell us, and we then know that we are exposed to his whims.

And we have realised, boy have we realised. Ukraine is not the final destination; it is certainly an important piece which helps to achieve a very advantageous position on the board, but the game does not end until the king is captured or until the enemy is defeated and it surrenders. Neither the first nor the second are an option for the European Union, because a checkmate would mean its end and the extinction of the way of coexistence that we have freely decided to give ourselves. We can only resist the criminal onslaught of the grandmaster, as the generations that preceded us did

with courage in the dream of a united and peaceful Europe. In the face of this attack, we must ensure our defence and, with it, that of the values we believe in: the fundamental rights of man, the dignity of the person, the equal rights of men and women, the equal treatment of nations large and small, the will to maintain justice and respect for obligations under international law, to promote social progress and to raise the standard of living of all people, security and the right to live without threats. These values are the king of the game, the precious good that the opponent wants to overthrow and which are protected by our pieces, sacrificing themselves if necessary because as long as the king remains standing, the adversary does not win. This will be a long game, where we will finally win and we will be strengthened from victory, because - as Nimzowitsch also claimed - the pieces that remain in seclusion for a long time, can acquire immense strength when they win freedom. That and no other is our hope.



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