

Dear friends,

one week ago the EGF executive-board decided to give the European Go Congress to Oberhof / Germany, following the clear majority of votes, as promised. I hope that from now on everything about EGC2017 will run smoothly although it's a tough challenge to organize a congress from scratch within less than 7 months.

The EGF will support the organizers in Germany as much as possible.

The European Go Congress is the most important event of European Go, but not only important for Europe. Therefore I want to explain right now more detailed what happened in the last months. There have been so many assumptions (right and wrong ones) on several media-channels – it was not possible for me to answer. But now I like to do this in a peaceful atmosphere.

We have to go back to the congress 2016 in St. Petersburg. EGC 2017 was one of the most important topics of the Annual General Meeting (AGM) scheduled for Tuesday and we all waited for our friend Kerem Karaerkek to hear more about the preparations of EGC 2017 before the AGM. We did not see real progress but also no big problems, besides "politics and accidents" in Turkey. After arriving a little bit late in St. Petersburg Kerem just spread an opinion survey among the players to know about their thoughts of EGC2017 in Turkey; or if they would like to see the congress in Turkey cancelled, and so on. The result was not very promising for Kerem. In a meeting (EGF-board and Kerem) before the AGM we tried to analyse the situation. We never had such a situation in the past: An engaged (new) Go-country, working over years for a congress, and suddenly it should not happen or taken away (by the EGF) ... On the other hand, if necessary, the EGC2016 would have been the best place to "find" a new organizer.

Well, what happened in the AGM? Kerem explained the status of preparations, all fine and inline. But there was the result of the player's survey. So in the AGM everyone (all country-representatives and all EGF-board members) has been asked if he/she would come to Turkey and how many players we can expect from the country they represent. Most country-representatives gave Kerem a positive feedback, but from two countries with normally many participants we also heard reservations about the expected number of players who will go to Turkey.

Anyway, the result was better than expected for Kerem. So he decided at the spot that he and his team would go on with EGC2017 in Turkey, although he was prepared to give the EGC2017 back to the EGF. Of course the whole community at the AGM promised to support him and doing the best to motivate as many players as possible to come to Turkey. Important to remark: At the AGM no word was spoken about a possible alternative city/country for EGC2017. Also, in all meetings before the AGM we never discussed alternatives.

In the next days Kerem opened a desk for registering for EGC 2017 and at the end of the congress he had 67 registrations, a nice result for the start.

On the last day before I left the congress, two days after the AGM, I got from Maxim Volkov (president of Russian Go Federation) under four eyes a personal/confidential message: "If Turkey can't do it, Russia will help and can host EGC2017". So I left St. Petersburg with the hope that the developments in Turkey (especially the non-Go related issues) will not become worse, and I knew that in the bad case we would have an EGC2017 because of Maxim's very friendly words. But: Since four weeks I know that I missed an important message in St. Petersburg: Manja Marz, our experienced "EGC-consultant", also offered the option to me to host the EGC2017 in Germany if necessary. She was all the time in contact with Kerem and knew about possible problems. Frankly spoken I waited all the time on such an offer from Germany. Therefore it's painful to hear now that I got it, but did not "realize" it. I'm very sorry about that.

In our Skype-meetings in September and October we (the EGF-board) still counted on an EGC2017 in Turkey, although the situation in Turkey did not change in a better direction. But it was our feeling of cooperation that we have to support Turkey to manage the EGC2017. We saw a constant number of registered players and we saw Kerem working on reducing the fixed costs, related to the expected 350 - 400 players (instead of 700 in the basic plan).

As an important step, also in line with the EGF-strategy of strengthening the EGF and being an attractive partner for sponsors, we decided that the EGF would take full responsibility for the next three European Championships (2017-2019) in Turkey, Italy and Belgium. Full responsibility means not only the organizing part (tournament-system, material, referee, broadcasting, PR-contacts and announcements, ...) but also the financial part. So the EGF will give the prize-money for the European Championship of the next three congresses! This means that the prize-money for the European Championship will be independent from the number of EGC-participants (entry-fee income). Of course this step is very welcomed by the new Pro-commission. Kerem was very pleased about this step as well.

I hope you see how we tried to help Turkey in the EGC2017. It would have been totally disloyal to prepare alternatives or talk about alternatives in a discussion forum. The congress has been given to Turkey, and only Turkey had the right to give it back, no one else. That's why you can't find any statement of the EGF-board about "other organizers" besides Turkey till November 2016.

In one of our October-Skype-meetings, more than two months after EGC2016 in St. Petersburg, Natalia Kovaleva informed us officially about the chance for EGC2017 in Russia, based on contacts to the sponsor of the EGC2016. Because of my mistake (missing Manja's message in St. Petersburg) the whole EGF-board saw Russia in this time as the only possible alternative.

Well, whenever you try to get support from a big company you have to consider that the amount of sponsoring must be put in the budget-plan, in time! Normally these budgets are generated in the 4th quarter of a year. So, if Russia should host EGC2017, the Russian Go Federation had to contact their sponsor latest in the middle of November when the budget-planning task is still running in the company. Without the sponsor-support Russia probably can't help European Go in organizing EGC2017.

End of October still less than 70 players were registered for the EGC in Turkey. We also felt a growing problem in organizing this EGC because of a very insecure number of expected participants. Therefore we were convinced in the EGF-board that it's now the last chance to inform Turkey about the existing fallback option in Russia. Otherwise, if we don't do anything, we might have no EGC2017 or a totally destroyed Go-scene in Turkey with big private financial losses for Kerem. This would have been unacceptable for us; we want and need Turkey also in the future in our European Go-family.

Consequently I sent an e-mail on behalf of the EGF-board to Kerem where I explained that we could give two weeks time (not more) to him and his team about deciding for or against EGC2017 in Turkey. After 12 days, in November we got an answer from Kerem.

Our deal with EGC in Turkey has been already explained in detail in our previous "Open letter", here http://www.eurogofed.org/egf/EGC_2017_Official_Statement.pdf

In these days, while waiting for the response from Turkey, Natalia and me joined an event in Suzhou / China. Just before we have had decided within the EGF executive-board running the Pro Championship 2017 in St. Petersburg, with the experience that more countries were interested in hosting this event than we expected. Lessons learned – better ask before "assuming" that there are really no more EGC2017 candidates besides Russia. Therefore I sent an e-mail to the president of the German Go Federation, Michael Marz, asking if he would have a problem if we (EGF executive-board) give the EGC2017 to another country without any election. However, we should have asked all members.

Back then, for the executive-board Germany was the only realistic candidate besides Russia. So it was logical to ask only Germany before finally deciding about the EGC2017, if Turkey will give the congress back to the EGF.

Unexpectedly Michael answered that Germany might be interested in the EGC2017, especially if we (EGF executive-board) are thinking about a second congress in a row in Russia.

So, here's the short description about the situation after Kerem announced Turkey stepping back from EGC 2017:

- We had one candidate (Russia) and one interested country (Germany).
- We were convinced that we have to decide about EGC2017 as soon as possible, within three days; otherwise we potentially would completely lose EGC (no sponsor in Russia, not sure if EGC2017 would be possible in Germany).
- We have no time for asking other countries if they are interested, although the EGC-decision is normally a decision of the AGM.
- We have no time for a "normal" e-mail-voting amongst the EGF-members (the voting time frame lasts at least two weeks).
- We saw the importance of the EGC for European Go and we were "ready" to decide but we had to face the (for us) new situation with the interest of Germany.

In the next Skype-meeting we invited Manja and Michael Marz to discuss the next steps. Michael and Manja told us very clearly that Germany is really interested, but they needed at least one week time for looking for a venue. Although we all had the opinion that we can't wait with the decision for EGC2017 we agreed on the 7 days, with an "undefined" feeling. While Natalia felt very bad after this meeting, having in her mind that the Russian Go Federation promised a fixed date for a decision to their sponsor, also Michael and Manja felt uncomfortable, very near to anger. They wanted to help us, in a case in which it's normal to have several months time for preparing a complete offer. And now they had to beg for one week preparation-time, and maybe an extension of another 24 hours; from the German point of view very difficult to understand. Looking back I can repeat "I'm sorry for that".

Let me explain some basic points about the EGC and the value of sponsoring. The EGC is our biggest festival of Go at which most players can spend their nice holidays, it can be quite easily organised 'by people for people', which is nice in principle, but the European Championship itself asks for a more official/decent background. It is a big advantage to show that Go has a firm place in a society, that it is an officially recognised and supported activity. Only such a background can bring us big sponsors, which are necessary for the development of Go and improving the level of Go in Europe in the future.

The EGF-board considers sponsors as very important and necessary. My main task in the EGF is to find sponsors and working on the contacts with our sponsors. I have seen many sponsors for the EGF, coming and going. Do you remember Toyota, Hitachi, Fujitsu, IBM, MLily, Weiqi-TV, Ing-Foundation, Zhuyeqing Tea Co.? All these companies/foundations were sponsors of European Go, and we lost them all. So any sponsor who wants to help European Go is important. Also national sponsors, as for example Polymetal for Russia, are important for European Go. No, I don't expect that Polymetal will extend their sponsoring European-wide. But it is an advantage whenever you look for sponsors if you can show a list of existing sponsors, where a potential sponsor can see that European Go is worth to be sponsored.

- We have Air France as a sponsor of the EGF. Jean-Yves Papazoglou succeeded in getting a special reduction on Air France flights when travelling to an EGC.
- The World Pair Go Association is sponsoring the EGC every year.
- The EGF is in contact with several Chinese Culture Centres in Europe, all possible and important sponsors.

So, coming back to the EGC2017, "sponsoring" played an important role. At the EGC2016 you could see for the first time that it's possible to have a similar amazing event just as in China/Korea/Japan. The opening-session in St. Petersburg was really impressive. For the first time I had the feeling that we can reach the same "level of quality" being usual for events in China, Korea and Japan. Do you know that the number of players from China increased over the last years from 20 to more than 80 players? From Japan we always have between 50 and 100 players at the EGC. And that is not the end!

So, if we discuss about the EGC and the quality we always have to think about our very welcomed guests from Far East, direct related to the image of European Go in Far East. Can you imagine that a university in Beijing will sponsor European players?

Can you imagine that the Silk Road Tournament will happen in Europe within the next three years, with many players from China coming to Europe? All these new projects are connected with the image of European Go, while the EGC is the most visible part for foreigners of European Go.

Everyone is looking on the EGC as the biggest tournament of the world. Whenever I'm in Far East people ask about the EGC. The quality of the EGC is important for our image. That's why the AGM of 2013 decided for an "EGC-consulting-job" – and that's why a sponsor of the EGC is so important.

Of course we knew in the board that it's unusual to have a congress twice in the same country within two years. But we had a special situation we never had in before.

What can be safer than running a congress with an existing and motivated team/organisation, with tested and running IT-applications, with a workbook/roadmap for a defined environment and a big sponsor in the back where any financial problem can be solved? No question, the experience of EGC2016 in St. Petersburg encouraged us to believe on a successful EGC2017 in Russia. I don't want to know how many organizers would have been happy if they would have gotten the chance to show how they improved in quality and professionalism compared to the just finished event.

After one week we got two proposals for EGC2017, one for Oberhof/Germany and one for Sochi/Russia. We were very surprised about the detailed paper from Germany. Now we really had an alternative to an EGC in Russia. The pressure we felt that we have to decide right now in the board I explained already. So we met again in the night on Skype, trying to compare both proposals. We could not see a clear favourite. Of course everyone at the board weights pros and cons individual and different.

When looking in detail on the budget-plan for Oberhof I misinterpreted the position of the 10.000 Euro sponsor money. I thought that this position would be the EGF-money reserved for the European Championship (as explained before) although the German organizers put this number in the chart based on their experience from EGC 2012 in Bonn (money from local sponsors). My mistake – and I also missed the chance to call Michael and Manja on the phone in the night during the Skype-meeting asking for an explanation about this point.

In both proposals we did not see a financial risk, but more flexibility and the possibility for higher prize-money in the Russian proposal because of the well-known national sponsor. We also tried to analyse the financial aspects for the participants (accommodation, meals, travelling, visa).

From the "holiday-view" there were big differences: Walking in the hills and forests or swimming in the black sea; Mediterranean climate or German summer. Flying via Moscow or Istanbul vs. travelling by car as an option for at least 150 European players.

As we could not find a clear favourite in the meeting we postponed our decision for 12 hours. No one should decide in this important point because he/she just heard a convincing argue of a colleague. Everyone should have the chance to decide for his/her own, in quietness, after having a sleep.

Next day we got the result, we seven voted in a secret vote with 4:3 for Sochi.

Well, you know what happened after this decision. I don't want to restart the discussion. In the executive-board we were surprised about the severe reactions. We were convinced that we did what has to be done and we did it in full responsibility of finding the best possible way for saving the EGC 2017. It was very disappointing for us to see so many persons arguing against Russia, totally ignoring that Russia only wanted to help.

All the time we were afraid about having to cancel the whole EGC2017 if we don't decide fast. Now we had a decision, but more or less useless because not accepted by many players. Would Russia organize a congress with so little support from European players? Would the sponsor being still interested to sponsor this event? Is the sponsor now also gone?

Our all over deadline was end of November; luckily I got the opportunity to meet in Tokyo on 2nd December the representatives of the German and the Russian Go federations. In the meantime I got messages of the main organizers, Manja and Natalia, being extremely frustrated, frankly spoken both of them no longer interested in organizing EGC2017, neither in Russia nor in Germany. So Tokyo was the last chance to save the congress 2017. Our meeting in Tokyo was not planned in before; it was simply luck that we five met in Tokyo at the same event (Pair-Go Championship).

We started with a kind of brainstorming where the representatives from Russia explained that under these circumstances they agree on a new discussion, not insisting on the positive vote for Sochi. I don't know how Maxim Volkov felt, thinking about the problems he will probably get with the Russian sponsor. Next, we discussed about possible solutions, among them very special ones (a three week EGC in Oberhof and Sochi) with combined organizer's teams. All this was only possible because everyone wanted to cooperate and we all were looking for a peace-generating solution for European Go.

Finally we could fix not only the schedule for finding a new decision for EGC 2017 but also a mode of cooperation between the two committed teams. I have to thank Manja, Natalia, Maxim and Michael for their goodwill, their flexibility and their engagement shown in Tokyo for saving the EGC 2017.

Now, after the decision for Oberhof, it's time to thank the Russian Go Federation for the big help they offered to the European Go-scene, the very fair cooperation and finally the acceptance of the result against Sochi without starting to fight against the decision. And I really hope that Polymetal will keep on sponsoring Russian Go. The way we treated this big sponsor "Please wait -- please wait a bit longer -- sorry -- not decided -- yes -- Sochi got it -- yes -- we have to buy flight-tickets to Sochi for fixing accommodation-arrangements -- no -- please wait again on a new vote -- sorry -- Sochi lost the vote" is not the style we should do it. On behalf of the EGF, I have to apologize for all the trouble!

Here's my final statement for today and how I interpret my role in the EGF:
Although I've been the leader of German Go for many years I am a totally convinced fighter for the European idea. This means in Go: European Go needs all countries, especially Germany and Russia, who belong to the biggest and therefore most important Go-countries in Europe. In other words: You can't expect that I am always fighting for German initiatives only. My job is balancing, between east and west; between strong countries and smaller, promising ones; between top-players and developing Go at the base.

Please excuse my long letter but I had the feeling that you should know more about our work in the EGF executive-board and a bit more about my personal opinions.

From now on we all look forward to the congress in Oberhof.

I wish you all a happy and peaceful new year

Martin Stiasny