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## Kazan inaugurates a new stage in women's chess

The race for the Women's World Championship title will take off in Kazan with a renewed Candidates Tournament, the strongest female event ever held, which features a record prize fund of 200.000 euros. From May 29th to June 19th, eight top Grandmasters will compete to become Ju Wenjun's challenger.

More than twenty years later, women's chess will celebrate a Candidates Tournament again. As FIDE President **Arkady Dvorkovich** had announced right after his election, reshaping and improving this competition was one of his priorities, and now, thanks to the **Ministry of Sports of Tatarstan** and the **Russian Chess Federation** - organisers of the event- the foundations for this reform have been laid. The Women's World Championship will now have a similar format to the absolute World Championship.

Eight of the best players in the world will compete in a double round-robin competition that spans along three weeks, with a substantial increase in prizes: the Candidates will now have a prize fund of 200.000 €, while the finalists will play for half a million euros. That means a 150% increase compared to the previous world championship final and makes the event in Kazan the best paid all-female round-robin in history.

The Ukrainian **Mariya Muzychuk** will lead the field, with a 2560 rating. At 26, she has the perfect balance between youth and experience, since she was the World Champion in 2015-16, and reached semi-finals last year. On paper, her closest opponent will be **Kateryna Lagno**, who was the challenger to Ju Wenjun's throne back in November; the Russian seems to be in excellent shape, and currently holds the title of World Blitz Champion. But in a long tournament that includes two other former World Champions -**Alexandra Kosteniuk** and **Tan Zhongyi**-, and where the gap between the top and lowest seed is barely 50 points, the fight is expected to be very close and exciting.

The following players have confirmed their participation:

1- Kateryna Lagno	RUS, 2559	(KO World Ch. 2018 finalist)
2- Mariya Muzychuk	UKR, 2560	(KO World Ch. 2018 semi-finalist)
3- Alexandra Kosteniuk	RUS, 2545	(KO World Ch. 2018 semi-finalist)
4- Anna Muzychuk	UKR, 2555	(qualified by rating)
5- Valentina Gunina	RUS, 2515	(qualified by rating)
6- Nana Dzagnidze	GEO, 1513	(qualified by rating)
7- Tan Zhongyi	CHN, 1513	(qualified by rating)
8- Alexandra Goryachkina	RUS, 2505	(1 <sup>st</sup> replacement)

Hou Yifan was the only player to turn down the invitation to take part in this event. Last year, the Chinese prodigy was awarded the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship to study at the University of Oxford, and since then she had to prioritize her studies over her competitive activity.

## **ABOUT KAZAN**

While being the 7<sup>th</sup> Russian city by population, with roughly 1,3 million inhabitants, its beauty and rich history makes Kazan often regarded as "The Third Capital of Russia", only after Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

Laying at the confluence of the Volga and Kazanka rivers, the capital of the Tatarstan Republic was founded in 1005, which makes this city at least 150 years older than Moscow.

Kazan is a famous sports center in Russia, having hosted the 2013 Universiade and many national hockey, boxing and swimming championships. It was one of the hosting cities of 2018 FIFA Football World Cup and, of course, it also held the 2011 Candidates tournament, won by Boris Gelfand.