

International Judo Federation

Disciplinary Commission

Mr Lukas DUSEK (President),
Ms Frédérique JOSSINET (Member),
Dr Colin DRAYCOTT (Member).

Case number 2024-04 GEO

Decision

Preamble – The Charge and the Legal Basis

The Disciplinary Commission has been notified with the charge issued on 5 August 2024 following a reasoned request of Mohamed MERIDJA acting as IJF Education and Coaching Director (being also a member of IJF Ad Hoc Commission) with respect to Mr Lasha BEKAURI (hereinafter “the Defendant”) issued on 31 July 2024 referring to an incident occurring on 31 July 2024 during day five of the Olympic Games Paris 2024.

The Commission recalls that the Defendant has been charged as follows:

Subject: Notice of charge – IJF Code of Ethics violation under Article 3

Dear Mr Lasha BEKAURI

During day five of the Olympic Games Paris 2024, on 31 July 2024 you showed a clear religious sign when entering the field of play before your contest in round of 16, in - 90 kg category against Mr Ivaylo IVANOV (BUL).

We remind you that you have already received a warning letter on 12 October 2022 for the same violation of the IJF Code of Ethics.

We invite you to carefully read the contents of this letter which provides important information as to the consequences of the violation of the rules and regulations of the International Judo Federation (IJF) and next steps with the disciplinary proceedings.

Assertion of the IJF Code of Ethics, article 3

*Having showed a clear religious sign when entering the field of play, you had committed a potential violation of the **IJF Code of Ethics, version 27 February 2023, article 3:***

RESPECT FOR OTHERS

- Do not show any object, sign or religious gesture or movement of any ostentatious form before, during or after the fight or during the formal ceremonies.

The IJF Ad Hoc Commission, composed of Mr MERIDJA (IJF Education and Coaching Commission Director), Mr ROUGÉ (IJF International Development and Promotion Director), Mr BARTA (IJF Head Sport Director) and Dr ALLAN (IJF Secretary General) met and took the decision to:

- allow you to continue in the competition

- initiate a disciplinary action against you for the violation of the IJF Code of Ethics.

Next steps

Following the IJF Disciplinary Code Article 9 (version 4 May 2023, <https://www.ijf.org/ijf/documents/3>), we are referring the case to the IJF Disciplinary Committee.

As per Article 16.5 the IJF Disciplinary Committee will contact to inform you of the initiation of disciplinary proceedings by electronic means unless you inform us that you opt-out of electronic means of notification and provide us with an alternative form of communication.

The Commission recalls that the notice of charge was accompanied by a number of documents being:

A report by the IJF Ad Hoc Commission which reads:

During day five of the Olympic Games Paris 2024, on 31 July 2024, Mr Lasha BEKAURI (GEO), showed a clear religious sign when entering the field of play before his contest in round of 16, against Mr Ivaylo IVANOV (BUL).

This is against the IJF Code of Ethics.

Mr Lasha BEKAURI has already received a warning letter on 12 October 2022 for the same violation of the IJF Code of Ethics.

The IJF Ad Hoc Commission, composed of Mr MERIDJA (IJF Education and Coaching Commission Director), Mr ROUGÉ (IJF International Development and Promotion Director), Mr BARTA (IJF Head Sport Director) and Dr ALLAN (IJF Secretary General) met and took the decision to:

- allow the athlete to continue in the competition,

- initiate a disciplinary action against the athlete Mr BEKAURI for the violation of the IJF Code of Ethic, version 27 February 2023, article 3:

RESPECT FOR OTHERS

- Do not show any object, sign or religious gesture or movement of any ostentatious form before, during or after the fight or during the formal ceremonies.

The second document was a WeTransfer file containing a video clip of the incident where the Defendant showing the Defendant distinctively and visibly crossing himself as he enters the match.

The third document was a letter from IJF to Georgian Judo Federation, Mr. Giorgi ATABEGASHVILI, President, which reads:

Dear Mr. President,

We hope this letter will find you in good health.

During the Tashkent World Judo Championships Senior which took place on 6-13 October, 2022, your athlete Lasha BEKAURI (-90kg) showed a clear religious movement when entering the field of play before his bronze medal contest against Tristani MOSAKHLISHVILI (ESP).

This is against the IJF Code of Ethics.

In case of any future breach and clear violation of the IJF Code of Ethics, we will have no choice but to cancel the result of your athlete and we may also consider calling for a disciplinary session.

We attach a great importance that our athletes comply with the IJF current regulations.

However, we strongly expect that such behaviour will not happen again.

Relying on your kind cooperation,

Best regards,

The Commission recalls that the Defendant had acknowledged receipt of the charge.

On 9th August 2024 the Defendant received a Notification of initiation of the disciplinary proceedings where he has been asked to eventually answer to the charge and to eventually submit any documents to assist in his defence, as well as a list of any witnesses he wishes to produce in his defence, all in eight (8) days. In the notification the Defendant has also been informed about his rights including right of hearing.

The Defence

Within that time limit the Defendant responded in writing, as follows:

Dear Judo Family,

I would like to express my regret regarding the incident. As you know, the Olympic Games is a dream competition for every athlete and the emotional background is also high. Since I was in emotions and preparing for the meeting, I could not determine that I showed a sign of religious affiliation in an illegal place. I do not want this fact to be considered as disregarding the rules of International Judo Federation . As an athlete, I have the greatest respect for the judo family and rules.

With Respect,

Lasha Bekauri

Findings

The Commission finds that the Defendant concedes that his behaviour was wrong, and he apologises for it. He did not dispute that the act showed a religious symbol.

Thus, the Commission found him guilty as charged and considers the act as showing a religious movement of ostentatious form before the fight.

Considerations on the Appropriate Sanction

The Commission, in its attention to proportionality of the sanction to the offence recalls mainly the following:

- A. The Defendant has been warned in the past. Reference is made to the warning letter following the act during the Tashkent World Judo Championships Senior which took place on 6-13 October, 2022.
- B. Defendant has regretted the act; the Commission also understands the emotional aspect of the Olympics as he defended himself.
- C. The act does not appear to be of an aggressive nature.
- D. The monthly income of the Defendant presented by Georgian Judo Federation is [REDACTED] Georgian lari (apx. EUR [REDACTED]).

The Commission believed that with regards to the previous warning (letter A. above) another warning (i. e. verbal warning or written reprimand as stated in Sec. 7.1 a) and b) of the IJF Disciplinary Code) is not a sufficient sanction. At the same time the Commission believed that with regards to the regret and reasoning, as well as to the not aggressive nature (letters B. and C. above) the significant sanctions stated in Sec. 7.2 of the IJF Disciplinary Code such as ban are not needed this time (but could potentially be appropriate in case of another breach of similar nature in future). The Commission thus considered mainly financial penalties as stated in Sec. 7.1 d) of the IJF Disciplinary Code.

According to Sec. 7.4 of the IJF Disciplinary Code, the amount of the fine (financial penalty) may not exceed 12 (twelve) months of the average annual net income of the professional athlete arising from sports activities or the professional sport activity of sport professional. The Commission accordingly asked for enumeration of the Defendant's income – not only because of the maximal fine but also because the fine should be also proportionate to one's income in order not to be too strict as well as to have some real impact. The monthly income of the Defendant presented by Georgian Judo Federation is [REDACTED] Georgian lari (apx. EUR [REDACTED]).

Decision

The commission finds the Defendant guilty as charged.

Having taken the above factors into consideration, the Commission decides to apply the **financial penalty of EUR 325.**

The Defendant is informed that this decision is subject to appeal to the IJF Disciplinary Appeal Commission.

The financial penalty (fine) must be paid to the IJF Treasurer General within fifteen (15) days of receipt of the disciplinary decision (Sec. 49.3 of the IJF Disciplinary Code).

The time limit for appeal shall be fifteen days from the receipt of the decision appealed against.

Today the 30th day of August 2024

Lukas Dusek, President
On behalf of the Disciplinary Commission