

From: Russian Human Rights NGOs

To: Aleksander Čeferin, UEFA President

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Members of the Fair Play and Social Responsibility Committee of the UEFA

UEFA EURO 2020 affects freedom of assembly in Saint Petersburg

Dear Sirs and Madams,

1. In June-July 2021, in the course of UEFA EURO 2020, seven matches will be held in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

1.2. Major events like the European Championship are beneficial to the communities and places where they are held. They promote unity through sports.

1.3. The UEFA Strategy for 2019-2024 is formed on four pillars: Football, Trust, Competitiveness, Prosperity.

1.4. In April 2021, the Strategy was updated to include the fifth principle: Responsibility.

1.5. The Responsibility pillar statement is as follows:

We have a responsibility to ensure football fits in a sustainable, safe and diverse society. Our activities can only be implemented when the direct and indirect impact on environments, societies and economies has been acknowledged. Setting policies that are aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals will help protect the fundamentals of the game for future generations.

1.6. Earlier, in 2018, UEFA, together with the Council of Europe, signed the Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in sports and sporting events. The Memorandum outlines the promotion of human rights as one of the crucial areas of cooperation. Namely, cl. 2.1. states that “Protection and promotion of human rights in the context of sport activities, including by using football events as leverage” is one of the strategies for cooperation.

1.7. Further, the promotion of human rights is part of the UEFA Social Responsibility policy. The UEFA Social Responsibility report for 2018/2019 outlines the following objectives:

*Help prevent human rights violations from occurring through sport.
Support access to effective remedies where violations have occurred.
Promote a positive human rights legacy through sport and sporting events.*

2. Given the above, we would like to bring to the attention of the President and the Committee a very difficult human rights situation in Saint Petersburg, especially with respect to the right to assembly.

2.1. Firstly, the President of the Russian Federation with his Decree No. 286 instituted that for the duration of the tournament (June 2 till July 12, 2021) all assemblies and even solo demonstrations in Saint Petersburg and part of Leningrad Oblast can be additionally limited by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Federal Security Service.¹ Given that authorities are already consistently rejecting notifications to hold rallies, these additional stages of executive control effectively ban any civil activity which the government does not support. Similar measures were in place during the FIFA World Cup 2018. That led to major limitations of freedom of assembly all over Russia, including Saint Petersburg.²

2.2. Secondly, from March 2020, a full ban on public assembly is in place in Saint Petersburg, which includes a ban on solo picketing.³ At the same time, we see that the ban on other public events has been lifted. For example, the matches in Saint Petersburg will be open for the fans to attend without significant limitations.

2.3. Thirdly, in general, the human rights situation in Saint Petersburg is quite disturbing. Violations include police brutality, detentions and violence against peaceful protestors.⁴

3. Russia is a member of the UN and the Council of Europe.

3.1. Articles 10 and 11 of the European Convention for Human Rights guarantee freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.

“Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.”

“Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.”

¹ See <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202105170063?index=0&rangeSize=1> (accessed on 10 June 2021).

² See <https://ovdinfo.org/reports/art-ban#11-2> (accessed on 10 June 2021).

³ See <https://ovdinfo.org/express-news/2020/10/14/vlasti-peterburga-obyasnili-zapret-na-odinochnye-pikety-i-h-publichnostyu> (accessed on 10 June 2021).

⁴ See <https://ovdinfo.org/reports/suppression-april-21-protests> (accessed on 10 June 2021).

3.2. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that *“Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.”*

4.1. Under Article 29, cl. 1, the President represents UEFA. Under Article 29 cl. 4 (d), the President is responsible for relations between UEFA and political bodies and international organisations.

4.2. Further, under Article 35, cl. 1 (e) of the UEFA Organisational Regulations, the UEFA Fair Play and Social Responsibility Committee deals with ethics, fair play and social responsibility relating to UEFA and football in Europe.

5. In light of the above, we request that the UEFA considers addressing the issues described in this letter, namely:

5.1. We kindly ask the Committee to address the human rights violations by implementing relevant provisions of the UEFA Social Responsibility guidelines and requirements for hosting countries.

5.2. We kindly ask the President to address the human rights violation issues described in this letter:

- by making a public statement condemning such violations,
- by declaring that UEFA does not require nor support such extreme security measures that virtually ban all peaceful assemblies for the duration of the tournament,
- by bringing the issue up in the course of international communication and cooperation,
- by bringing this information to the attention of the Council of Europe.

Kind regards,