



Aleksander Čeferin
President
UEFA

Copied to:
Theodore Theodoridis, UEFA General Secretary
Richard Masters, Chief Executive of the Premier League

14 February 2023

SUBJECT: Ensuring UEFA Competition Integrity

Dear Mr Čeferin,

We are writing to you in the light of media reports that entities linked to the Qatari government are proposing a bid that would enable them to take a controlling stake in Manchester United. In line with UEFA's rules aimed at protecting the integrity of its competitions, we would urge UEFA to outline a clear public position prohibiting any takeover of this nature. No consortium of Qatari investors capable of such an acquisition would be able to convincingly demonstrate their independence from the Qatari state.

FairSquare Projects is a non-profit human rights organisation. We produce original research designed to support people at risk of abuse, hold accountable those responsible, and identify how the abuse can be stopped. Among the issues we work on are accountability in sport and the impacts of authoritarianism. While there continues to be considerable uncertainty around this purported interest in Manchester United, we wish to highlight several issues of serious concern.

Since 7 February, numerous media outlets, including the [Daily Mail](#), [Sky Sports](#), and [The Guardian](#) have reported Qatar's interest in Manchester United. Media reporting notes the most obvious hurdle to a takeover is Qatar's ownership, through Qatar Sports Investments (QSI), of Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), which in the event of a Manchester United takeover would contravene the obligations of member associations to ensure the integrity of competitions as laid out in article 7bis (5) of [UEFA's Statutes](#).

"Member Associations shall ensure that neither a natural nor a legal person (including holding companies and subsidiaries) exercises control or influence over more than one of their clubs whenever the integrity of any match or competition organized at Member Association level could be jeopardized. Member Associations shall include such an obligation in their statutes and lay down the necessary implementing provisions."

The Guardian reported on 8 February that, "it is understood that those driving the Qatar interest are conscious of the UEFA rules and a solution is being sought." The report added that "this could include trying to persuade Uefa to consider the possibility of adjusting or changing its regulations." The Daily Mail reported on 7 February that Qatar would seek to get around the regulations by ensuring that "the bid for United would come from separate, individual Qatari investors."

A basic study of Qatar's political and economic system amply demonstrates the impossibility of any Qatari consortium proving itself independent of state influence, and thus separate from the ownership of PSG.

Freedom House's World Freedom Index classifies Qatar as "not free", and its most recent assessment is highly critical of Qatar's record on the rule of law, corruption, and political participation: "Qatar's hereditary emir holds all executive and legislative authority and ultimately controls the judiciary." The anti-corruption organisation [Transparency International](#) (TI) has noted that in Qatar, "powerful patronage networks rooted in the royal family continue to wield control over state resources with little transparency or accountability". The [Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index](#) states that, "members of the royal family directly or indirectly own or control most of the economy". The major investment vehicles in the country are tightly linked to the ruling family and its resource base, and to each other. For example, the chairman of QSI sits on the board of the Qatar Investment Authority.

Checks and balances on the way in which funds are distributed and used by the ruling family are minimal to non-existent, which would undermine any assurances provided about the sources of funding for such an acquisition. [Freedom House](#) notes that, "no genuinely independent anticorruption mechanisms hold senior officials and members of the ruling family publicly accountable for the allocation of state resources". [TI](#) concurs that "independent mechanisms to detect and prevent systemic corruption are severely lacking." In this respect, UEFA should also take note of ongoing investigations by [law enforcement in Belgium](#), where numerous media outlets have reported that Qatar is the primary source of funds used to bribe numerous European politicians. In December 2022, Belgian police found approximately €1.5 million in cash in suitcases during raids of 16 homes in the country. Numerous people, including the Greek MEP Eva Kaili and the Belgian MEP Marc Tarabella have been charged with participation in a criminal organisation, corruption and money laundering. On 15 December, the European Parliament voted to suspend access to Qatari representatives to the parliament premises and to halt all pending legislation involving Qatar.

UEFA should be fully aware of the capacity of state-owned clubs to disguise the sources of their funds. In [February 2020](#) UEFA's club financial control body found state-owned Manchester City had "committed serious breaches of the UEFA Club Licensing and Financial Fair Play Regulations by overstating its sponsorship revenue in its accounts". While the Court of Arbitration for Sport subsequently ruled that those allegations were either not established or time-barred, the English [Premier League charged Manchester City](#) this month with breaking financial fair play rules around 100 times over a nine-year period between 2009 and 2018.

UEFA's Statutes are very clear on the critical importance of ensuring that no single party can exercise control or influence over more than one club, and this is all the more important when the owners are states. State ownership of European football clubs jeopardises the integrity of the game, its proclaimed values and its sustainability. Any attempt by UEFA to change its rules to facilitate joint ownership of multiple clubs would hand the keys of European club football to autocratic states characterised by repression and the absence of the rule of law, and in the specific case of Qatar, one that currently stands accused of seeking to corrupt Europe's democratic institutions.

Yours sincerely



Nicholas McGeehan
Director



James Lynch
Director