

FIFA[®]

FIFA PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

45th UEFA CONGRESS 2021

Tuesday, 20 April 2021



Dear members of the Executive Committee, dear delegates, guests from all over the world, Patrice Motsepe – the new President of the Confederation of African Football – and all members present, it is as always an honour, and emotional, for me to speak at the UEFA Congress.

I wanted to speak to you today about the Covid Relief Plan, about the Back to Football protocol, congratulating you for the efforts you are making. I wanted to speak to you about the reform of the transfer system, which is so important, especially for the clubs training players. I wanted to speak to you about the protection of our children, for them to be able to play their sport in a safe environment. I wanted to speak to you about the fight against match-fixing, which we always have to be at the forefront of. I wanted to talk to you about human rights and about the incredible progress that Qatar has made in the implementation of human rights, leading to what will be the best World Cup ever in 2022 in Qatar. I wanted to talk to you about the future debates and discussions we will have about the international match calendar, about the Women's World Cup in 2023 and about the development of all of that. And about the great collaboration that we have been able to establish between FIFA and UEFA, and for that I want to thank the UEFA President and all his administration.

But the last 48 hours obviously changed everything. And it seems there is only one topic that is of interest. Yesterday we've been hearing reading about 'war', 'crime' - terrible words, and even more terrible if linked with the game we all love; with football, that should give joy to everyone. Of course I'm speaking about this 'Super League' project. So let me be extremely clear from the very beginning. FIFA is an organisation which is built on values: the true values of sport, and our statutes which define the institutional framework, the pyramid, with FIFA, the Confederations, the associations, the leagues, the clubs, the players. And at FIFA we can only, and strongly, disapprove the creation of a Super League that is a closed shop and a breakaway from the current institutions – from the leagues, from the associations, from UEFA and from FIFA – and which is outside of the system. There is no doubt whatsoever of FIFA's disapproval for this.

So FIFA is here, and I am here as FIFA President, to bring full support to European football, to UEFA, to the 55 Member Associations of UEFA – and of FIFA – to leagues, to the clubs, to the players and to the fans. All of the fans not just in Europe but all over the world as well.

Look at European football. Look at the success of European football. I'm a product of that system as well. I started to play in a small amateur club in the mountains in Switzerland. I was a very bad player, still am, but I had the opportunity to play. And when I was playing, we grew up and created our own team, which played in the lowest division in Switzerland – we could not be relegated because we were already at the bottom - on Sunday morning with our friends. I was managing the team, my mum was washing the jerseys – which is why I could play five minutes from time to time at the end of the game, when I couldn't create much damage anymore! But even when we were playing at the lowest level in the Swiss league, we had a direct to the top. That's a bond which was keeping, and is still keeping, football together. For me this has always been the magic of football, and from time to time when we happened to win a game, or maybe even score a goal, we were feeling like Paolo Rossi scoring in the final of the World Cup. This is the magic of football – this bond from the bottom to the top.

And look at the success of the top. I've been, dear friends, 16 years in UEFA. I've been working very hard and investing a big part of life to defend the principles and the values that has given this success to European football. The European sports model, as mentioned by Thomas Bach – a model that works for Europe, is based on openness and inclusivity, is based on promotion and relegation. It's a model that has proved very successful and I repeat it: I have spent a big part of my life promoting and defending this precise model.

So if you look at all this, we can see that there is a lot to throw away, for what may be a short-term financial gain for some. And people need to think very carefully, they need to reflect, and they need to assume responsibility. They need to think not only of their shareholders, which are important of course, but they need to think about all the people, all the fans, all those who have contributed to create what European football is today, and what European football clubs are today. It goes back not only decades – it goes back more than a hundred years. People with love, with passion, with commitment have created this. And we need to protect this. It is our task - my task as FIFA President, your task as UEFA, to protect the European sports model, protect clubs, club competitions and, of course, national teams. It's thanks to national teams that football can survive all over the world, and we need to protect that.

So if some elect to go their own way, then they must live with the consequences of their choice. They are responsible for their choice. Concretely, this means: either you are in, or you are out. You cannot be half in or half out. Everyone has to think about it, and this has to be absolutely clear. But I don't want to even think about that because, like UEFA, FIFA is also a democratic organisation, an organisation where everyone can speak and bring ideas, bring proposals, and they are always taken into account. But always with respect for the institutions: leagues, associations, UEFA, FIFA. Respect for the history and respect for the passion of so many people.

I understand as well that in these particular days that emotions are very high. The pandemic comes on top and exacerbates everything, of course. But we need to keep always the line, and football is hope as well. And it is our responsibility to make hope a reality. So we hope, of course, that everything will go back to normal, that everything will be settled, but always with respect, always acting responsibly, always with solidarity and always in the interests of national, European and global football.

I wish you a great Congress, I thank you very much for listening to me, for having me here. As Mr Bach said, it is really a pleasure and for me it is emotional to speak at a UEFA Congress, but to speak after one year at a Congress where people are present is even more emotional. So thank you very much. I wish you all the best.