

SPEECH BY MR PER OMDAL

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Mr President, Members and Colleagues,

European football has again reached a crucial moment in its relations with the European Union. I am sure you are all aware of the political and legal negotiations that have taken place in recent years, from the system of international transfers to the marketing of UEFA Champions League broadcasting rights. The new challenge we face today concerns the legal basis of sport in the EU Treaty.

After a series of meetings with various Sports Ministers and EU officials, which I will summarise in a moment, I can assure you that the debate is very much under way. As we speak, the Convention on the Future of Europe has already begun drafting the EU's new Constitutional Treaty, which Europe's leaders will be debating through 2004 and perhaps beyond. Part of this Treaty could potentially contain a new legal basis for sport. It is no exaggeration to say that the outcome of the discussions and the nature of the final text may have profound implications for the future of sport in Europe.

UEFA's objective, shared by its member associations, is to ensure that the new EU Treaty provides a legal framework for sport that is clear, stable and consistent. Above all, it should do two things:

- Firstly, enshrine the legal recognition of the specific nature of sport; and
- Secondly, protect the autonomy of European sport's governing bodies so that they can do their job properly, free from unnecessary interference from political authorities at the national and European level.

In short, it should give a firm legal base to the principles set out in the Nice Declaration issued by the European Heads of State in December 2000.

Let me underline that this is not about obtaining an exemption from EU or national law. We are not – and should never be – above the law. What we *do* need, however, is greater legal certainty. The good and proper running of football demands a proper framework for sport in EU law.

The UEFA Working Group on EU Matters, created by the Executive Committee, has intensified its activity. In the past few months, we have held a number of high-level meetings with EU Ministers and officials. These have included:

- **Jean-Luc Dehaene**, former Prime Minister of Belgium and now Vice-Chairman of the European Convention;
- **Bertie Ahern**, Prime Minister of Ireland, and his Minister of Sport;
- **George Papandreou**, the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, whose country currently holds the EU Presidency;
- **Evangelos Venizelos**, the Greek Minister of Culture;
- **Brian Mikkelsen**, the Danish Minister of Culture;
- **Richard Caborn**, the British Minister of Sport; and
- **Wolfgang Clement**, German Minister of the Economy and Social Affairs.

In all of these meetings, the Ministers responded positively to UEFA's arguments. They are sympathetic to our case about the need for greater legal certainty, and they are supportive of the structures that have governed football so well until now.

We have to recognise that there is a mix of views about the way forward. Some countries are inclined to favour a Treaty Article as a means of safeguarding the specificities of sport and protecting the role of sports bodies. Some prefer a Sports Protocol. And some want no more than a fuller acceptance of the Nice Declaration.

UEFA respects these views and is fully engaged in the discussions. Ultimately, this is not about Protocol versus Article. It is the end result that matters, as we have set out in our Resolution to Congress. If the Article approach maintains political momentum, UEFA will make every effort to ensure that we achieve the objectives we have previously set for a Protocol solution.

The increase in activity of UEFA's EU Working Group is set to continue. Our efforts will not cease until we have achieved our aims. I would like to thank all those who have taken part in this campaign so far – their work alone deserves a happy outcome.

Encouraged by this new political momentum, the Executive Committee now asks for your support. Over the coming weeks, we can all make a vital contribution to the discussions in the European Convention and in our national governments. We can all help to ensure that football receives a new legal framework that provides clarity, certainty and consistency. UEFA's 52 members give us the political legitimacy – and the ability – to approach every member of the European Convention as well as every EU Member State – old and new.

In the coming days, you will all receive a letter from UEFA, explaining precisely how each of you can make an individual contribution at national level. The objective is to approach your political representatives and put the case to them. Now is the moment when the European Convention will be drafting the new Treaty provisions relating to sport; now is the time when your voice will have most impact.

And now the Resolution. As you can see, the Executive Committee has included the key principles that we are promoting:

- Solidarity and the links between the elite and the grassroots of the game;
- The education and training of young players;
- The integrity of our competitions;
- Our efforts to combat racism and all forms of drug abuse; and
- Protecting the specificities of sport and the autonomy of governing bodies.

This Resolution is an important step in our campaign to give sport in Europe a better legal base for the future, and I hope, Mr President, that Congress will be able to give it their full and active support.

Thank you for your attention.