Introduction

The present chapter addresses the aims and scope of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) with regard to European football. Its foundation coinciding with (and stemming from) developments the world over during the period of decolonization, UEFA could not have escaped its politicization or else its very existence would have become compromised. The historical background of UEFA suggests that the European football governing body emerged out of a need to maintain and regulate the European qualities of a game that had already succeeded in gaining an international reputation and unparalleled popularity. Although UEFA’s geopolitical boundaries were swiftly secured, the politics of football remained an important issue throughout the second half of the previous century merely because conditions during and after the Cold War dictated so. On some occasions, the (re)admission of certain members was as much a political decision. Ever since, UEFA has become all the more political in view of the growing power, and interference in sport, of yet another continental organization, the European Union. Characterizing the relationship between UEFA and the European Union are the Bosman case, the issue of racism in European football and, more recently, Article 165 of the Treaty of Lisbon. All in all, the following pages will guide the reader through what is perceived as the Europeanization of football.

The history of UEFA

Founded by European nations in 1904, the growing popularity of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) half a century later became all the more obvious given the admission of a considerable number of Latin American states. That they posed a threat to the apparent authority that their European counterparts had long enjoyed, the former fearing ‘that they were politically out-manoeuvred by the Latin Americans’ (Sugden et al., 1998: 11), was what propelled the formation of an exclusively European football association. Despite Europe’s division into British, Central European, Eastern European and Scandinavian football associations, sharing power at international level with non-European nations was not an option, since ‘Europe’s football administrators, [were] already nervous about the changing
geography of post-colonial football politics’ (Goldblatt, 2002: 398), thus the birth of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) in 1954. Setting up UEFA allowed the Europeans to improve their status within the world governing body, particularly, since leadership of the latter rested in the hands of two Englishmen, Arthur Drewry and Stanley Rous, from the mid 1950s to the mid 1970s. The Europeans’ thirst for power is better understood in the words of Stanley Rous, Vice President of UEFA, Hans Wach, President of the Austrian Football Association, and Artemio Franchi, UEFA President (Sugden and Tomlinson, 1997: 6).

Many people are convinced that it is unrealistic, for example, that a country like England, where the game started and was first organised, or that experienced countries like Italy or France who have been pillars of FIFA and influential in its problems and world football affairs for so many years, should have no more than equal voting rights with any of the newly created countries of Africa or Asia.

(Stanley Rous)

FIFA needs the support of a strong UEFA who is in harmony, all the more so as the new states in Asia and Africa create new problems on which settlement the big and important European associations of Great Britain, Germany, Italy, France, USSR and Spain must have their good, constructive and sporting influence. I am often thinking of the injustice that each member of FIFA without consideration of his importance has the same number of votes at the Congress. There are now numerous examples to make this fact ridiculous … I would like to remind you of the demand of a small Association at the last FIFA Congress to let Asia have another Vice President in the FIFA and I am convinced that the geographically large but in importance small Association cannot even compare its sporting values with Austria.

I would ask you, dear Sir Stanley, not to misunderstand me; neither do I want a special position for myself nor for the Austrian F.A. but I want to see FIFA and UEFA strengthened, political, national and confessional tendencies avoided and give those National Associations more rights who can guarantee a clean and correct guidance of FIFA and UEFA.

(Hans Wach)

With ever more states gaining their independence, and with existing countries splitting up into separate states – processes which are to be observed above all in the so called Third World – the number of national football associations inevitably continues to grow. And there is nothing to stop these emerging football countries from joining the enlarged FIFA family. This is the uncomfortable truth.

(Artemio Franchi)

Concepts denoting imperialism, colonialism, and a perverse sense of cultural supremacy are echoed in the above statements. Needless to say, it is obvious that UEFA was early on more politically minded and less concerned with sporting administration. It was, however, UEFA’s resolve and political will that helped survive the Cold War divisions in Europe. Football had survived the political interference of fascist regimes in Western Europe, yet the threat of fascism was soon replaced by the oppression of hard-core communist governments all over Eastern Europe. Against this background, there is no shadow of doubt that ‘UEFA remained one of the only truly pan-European functioning institutions on the Continent, and football was one of the
very few forms of regular cultural interaction between the two halves of the Continent’ (Goldblatt, 2002: 406–7). UEFA and football, in particular, were forced to become politicized, as European history has recorded.

Membership with UEFA

It appears that UEFA’s map of Europe differs much from all conventional manifestations of the continent for its membership extends over the territories of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Kazakhstan – states that merely share borders with remote European nations such as Russia and Turkey, not to mention the disputed Europeanness of the latter two – and even distant Israel. The continent that was once identified with Christendom would consider fellow Christian Armenia and Georgia as European, but not Islamic Azerbaijan or Kazakhstan. Perhaps the distance that separates the islands of Cyprus, Malta, and Iceland from the European continental shelf should suffice to question their Europeanness too; however, the first two have been members of the European Union (EU) since 2004, while the latter applied in 2009 for membership, one condition of which is being a European country. Further perplexing the issue of UEFA membership is sovereignty. Sovereign Kosovo – albeit not widely recognized as such – has been denied membership of UEFA, but non-sovereign England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales have long been members of the European football governing body. As far as Kosovo’s recognition is concerned, it is important to note that thirty-one of UEFA’s fifty-three members have fully recognized Kosovo. The dependent territories of the Faroe Islands (constituent country of the Kingdom of Denmark) and Gibraltar (British overseas territory) was until recently yet another striking example of UEFA’s uncertain membership criteria considering that the former became a full member in 1990, whereas Gibraltar had been denied membership. The case of Gibraltar actually highlights UEFA’s only entry criterion – UN membership. In place since 2001, analysts have long perceived UEFA’s decision to adopt this unique membership condition as a mere ingenious scheme that effectively rejected Gibraltar’s application, as Menary notes (2007: 197), while making sure that the far more lucrative Spanish clubs and national team continued to compete at European level, for Spain had threatened to withdraw from all UEFA competitions should the membership application of Gibraltar ever meet with success. Yet the Faroe Islands held no UN membership either at the time of UEFA’s decision, not to mention the fact that they cannot even be considered eligible for one under their present political association with the Kingdom of Denmark. According to the relevant statuses, UEFA’s obscure membership criteria persist (UEFA, 2012: 3):

Membership of UEFA is open to national football associations situated in the continent of Europe, based in a country which is recognised by the United Nations as an independent state, and which are responsible for the organisation and implementation of football-related matters in the territory of their country. In exceptional circumstances, a national football association that is situated in another continent may be admitted to membership, provided that it is not a member of the confederation of that continent or any other confederation and that FIFA approves its membership of UEFA.

Gibraltar’s application for membership with UEFA, however, was submitted in 1997 and, therefore, pre-dated the adoption of the UN-membership condition. Now that Gibraltar has been admitted to UEFA, this one odd membership criterion is still not in effect merely because of the presence of the Faroe Islands Football Association among UEFA’s members. This helps emphasize the fact that UEFA has no particular (or clear for that matter) geographic,
religious, or political criteria when membership is concerned. That Gibraltar and Spain were kept apart in the qualifying groups for the 2016 European Championship is, of course, a highly political decision.

It is noteworthy that 'Regulations concerning which football associations can be members have altered over time. The number of member associations has expanded from just over 30 to 53 since the early 1990s’ (Horne, 2010: 856) much because of the collapse of the Soviet and Yugoslav federations. Needless to say, membership in post-Cold War Europe has become decidedly political, despite what the UEFA statutes suggest, particularly, when examined against the historical background of the European football governing body. Article 1 of the statute dictates that UEFA ‘shall be a society entered in the register of companies under the terms of Art. 60 et seq. of the Swiss Civil Code. UEFA shall be neutral, politically and religiously’ (UEFA, 2012: 3). That the ‘EU-based football federations number 30 out of the total 53 UEFA members’ (Garcia, 2007: 204), even though the EU consists of no more than twenty-eight member states, speaks volumes of the politics behind the issue of membership.

Israel joined UEFA to avoid playing its Arab neighbours. Though not European, Israel enjoys the necessary sovereignty to join an international organization and is also a UN member, thus partially satisfying UEFA’s membership criteria. Yet Israel is not alone in this disordered mosaic that is UEFA. The Spanish autonomous regions of Catalonia and the Basque Country would certainly favour international competition, particularly, since they have already played international friendly matches. Chechnya, Greenland, and Northern Cyprus are non-sovereign European territories that have competed at international level under the auspices of the Nouvelle Fédération-Board (New Federations Board) — an organization founded in 2001 in order to organize ‘competitive’ football matches between peoples lacking international recognition. The Sámi people in Lapland; the principality of Monaco; Padania in Italy; the island of Gozo near Malta; the Occitan-speaking people of France, Italy and Spain; Rijeka in Croatia; the Saugeais and Walloon in France; Găgăuzia in Moldova; and the Roma are all distinct communities that maintain unofficial football associations and national teams. No doubt, age-old ambitions for statehood would automatically revive, should they ever secure membership with UEFA. The national diversity of its member associations already renders UEFA political. That forty-three European football associations have opted for their national coat of arms and other similar national symbols to decorate their badges serves to underline the Europeans’ ethnocentric approach to football, just like ‘the very same banners that ceremoniously headed the advance of European armies some time ago, nowadays lead national teams to the football field’ (Kassimeris, 2010: 246).

The (fictional) Europeanization of football

The Europeanization of football seems to have:

less to do with the narrow EC/EU-level conception of Europeanization grounded in political science, than with the broader and more process-orientated Europeanization approach in the discipline of history … Nevertheless, Europe continues to lack media structures that would allow communication to a Europe-wide public, in a common language spoken by all Europeans, and the intermediary actors that would serve as transmission lines between national states and social bonds. Football cannot replace these elements, but through its ‘pull’ and its potential for mobilization with the media it has the potential to create, at least in part, a European consciousness.

(Mittag and Legrand, 2010: 720)
UEFA’s concept of Europeanization, does not match the one that the EU has long instituted. Interestingly, ‘Several authors have pointed to the role of the new European club football system – especially the UEFA Champions League – as a source of Europeanization, and the televised European football market has been termed as a “European public space”’. This has been observed in particular on the level of fan practices. It has been argued that the diversity of club teams’ players’ line-ups in the post-Bosman era and the fact that many of the fans’ favourite players at their local clubs are now non-nationals could change the fans’ notions of representation and their ‘existing identity patterns’ and create ‘more European allegiances’. The border-crossing popularity of some clubs from the big four European leagues (England, Germany, Italy, Spain) throughout Europe among many fans and flaneurs points to emerging transnational, post-traditional and de-territorialized fan cultures and to a ‘Euro-cosmopolitanisation’ of football cultures (Manzenreiter and Spitaler, 2010: 699).

Like any other sport, football is quite competitive and, considering its nationalistic properties, it required a Europe-wide competition so that football rivalries could transcend the more conventional national borders. In late 1954 a journalist for L’Equipe, Gabriel Hanot, proposed a football tournament for the champions of the European leagues of the time to compete against one another in a mid-week fixture. On January 1955 L’Equipe invited eighteen clubs to join the first competition, the European Cup, though not all football clubs had won their respective football league at home. Some were preferred over the actual winners merely because of their apparent appeal to the fans, though that would change the year after. During the same year the Inter-Cities Fair Cup was also founded, renamed UEFA Cup in 1971, open to clubs coming from cities that had hosted trade fairs. Evidently, the great success of the first two football competitions encouraged UEFA to set up yet another competition in 1960, the European Cup Winners’ Cup, aimed at increasing participation in European football competitions by inviting those clubs that had won their domestic cup competition. Yet the epitome of all European football competitions came in the form of the European Championship, originally named European Nations Cup. In an attempt to merge regional tournaments such as the British Home Championship, the Mitropa Cup, and the Nordic Cup, Henri Delaunay (secretary of the French Football Federation in the mid 1950s) proposed a continental competition open to all European nations. Not all European nations were wholeheartedly enthusiastic about the idea of this particular competition, with some arguing that ‘the international match calendar would be too full, the recently healed war wounds would be re-opened, and the dangers of commercialization would arise’ (Mittag and Legrand, 2010: 713). Ultimately, the British nations, Italy, Sweden, and West Germany were absent from the inaugural competition.

The nationally organized sport that was European football before the Second World War developed into a game that encouraged club and fan mobility during the very same period that Europe was witnessing the birth and evolution of another major organization in Europe, the European Economic Community (EEC), which set up a variable, but nevertheless increasingly integrated, framework of institutional and rule-based interactions … During the period after World War II, countless transnational interactions were formed, including technical and economic discoveries, growing migration and increased transnational mobility, as well as cultural transfers and changing methods of communication. The framework of increasingly multifaceted processes of interdependence – consisting of structural connections above and below the level of the nation state – is mirrored in football. Here, the media in particular acted as a decisive catalyst in football’s new European dimension.

(Mittag and Legrand, 2010: 719)
One concrete example of the game’s contribution to Europeanization is the symbol of UEFA’s most prestigious competition – the UEFA Champions League. The ‘Starball’, designed by the London-based Design Bridge, is a football that features eight black-and-white or silver stars, thus resembling the key properties of the EU flag:

The symbols of the Champions League may have wider significance to the process of European integration. They may constitute some of the first common symbols of the emergent European Union. It is interesting that Rod Petrie, the Group Creative Director at Design Bridge, noted for instance that the stars of the starball have ‘overtones of the European Union’ (Rod Petrie, email communication, 5 June 2000). They echo the 15 stars of the European flag. However, while the Commission rightly recognizes the need for common symbols, social symbols cannot be created artificially. In opposition to the contrived attempts of the Commission to create common symbols and rituals through which a convenient European identity might be formed, the Champions League can be seen as an important ritual in which the emergent solidarities of the New Europe are expressed in Durkheimian fashion (1966). These symbols may become totems for new social groups in Europe.

(King, 2004: 327)

While black and white make reference to the history of the competition, silver denotes wealth and nobility. An adaptation from George Frideric Handel’s Zadok the Priest, an anthem originally written for the coronation of King George II in 1727, the Champions League anthem echoes European tradition.

It is notable here that the anthem is associated with the (silver) cup itself because, in the introductory sequences, the music reaches its climax just as the footage of the Cup being lifted at the end of the previous year’s competition is shown. It is interesting that the anthem is orchestrated so that the most prominent instruments at this climax are horns; they communicate a shining metallic sound which musically reflects the trophy itself. Music and colours merge together as one dense signifier, communicating a concept of silver in both sound and vision.

(King, 2004: 331)

Although nowadays considered as a possible means of Europeanization, the UEFA Champions League was never designed to perform so. In fact, it was almost exclusively created to counter the threat of Europe’s leading clubs setting up an independent league away from UEFA’s administration in what could have been a financial disaster for the European football governing body and European football alike. Proposed by the Media Partners in Milan, the superleague never materialized, yet it propelled the setting up of a powerful lobby of European football’s elite, the G14 (later G18). Hence the UEFA Champions League, a UEFA attempt to satisfy the demand of the bigger football clubs around the continent for more financial rewards.

The Champions League is ultimately the product of an uneasy compromise between increasingly dominant clubs and a dependent international federation. In this political context, the traditions of European competition are crucial to UEFA’s survival; it is not just an alibi for UEFA against the accusations of the fans and journalists but more specifically an alibi against the threat of the G14. Although increasingly dependent upon the biggest clubs who command large television audiences, UEFA have one
important political weapon in their favour; UEFA is effectively the guardian and representative of the traditions of European football.

(King, 2004: 332)

The UEFA Champions League provided the much needed impetus for the European football governing body to reiterate its authority over European football. King (2004: 333) notes that it was UEFA instructing the relevant design companies of what the competition’s logo should come to represent, the stars representing Europe’s finest football clubs, just as the whole broadcast symbolizes the clubs’ subordination to UEFA. Perhaps the symbols that helped Europeanize football across the continent and beyond will further contribute to the Europeanization of all things continental, though not necessarily from an EU perspective. Still, the shared symbols that the European Commission has long aimed at developing in order to better facilitate European integration may well be already available. In the process, Boyle and Haynes (2004: 62) note, UEFA has, of course, succeeded in securing a steady, substantial flow of income for all pertinent actors, of which some 25 per cent is retained by the European football governing body. Making official the Europeanization of the popular game is UEFA’s representative office to the EU, naturally located in Brussels, which was set up in 2004 and is primarily responsible for coordinating relations between the two European supranational organizations (UEFA, 2013a).

The (factual) Europeanization of football

The Bosman ruling

UEFA got its first taste of EU politics in the late 1970s when the European Commission (EC) became involved in the issue regarding the number of foreign players, particularly football players coming from an EEC member state, football clubs were allowed to field. The fact that sport, and therefore football too, was not subject to European Community legislation, however, meant that the EEC had little room for manoeuvre in this field. All changed soon after the Single European Act was initiated in 1987. Aimed at banning all relevant restrictions concerning the mobility of Community football players, the EC waited for the right opportunity to present itself – the case of Jean-Marc Bosman and his transfer from Royal Football Club de Liège to Union Sportive du Littoral de Dunkerque in 1990 – all the while UEFA had been operating the three-plus-two rule on foreign players (later changed to six-plus-five).

The Bosman case became an EU matter when the Liege Court of Appeal in Belgium referred the case to the European Court of Justice (ECJ), which stipulated that ‘Article 48 not only applies to the action of public authorities but extends also to rules of any other nature’ (Arnaut, 2006: 23–4). More precisely, the ECJ ruled that the Bosman case violated Article 48 (on free movement), as well as Article 85 and Article 86 (on free competition) of the Treaty of Rome. The final ruling was delivered in September 1995 and banned out-of-contract transfer fees and all restrictions on football players with EU citizenship. Since EU member states’ sports governing bodies were considered as public authorities subject to EU legislation, the Bosman case was treated as a violation of Article 48 of the Treaty of Rome that impeded the free movement of EU workers.

Football’s growing popularity, and economic returns, encouraged both the EC and the ECJ to recognize the popular game as an economic activity that had to be regulated by EU legislation, thus allowing them to interfere with UEFA’s transfer system. Even though UEFA claimed that the Bosman case referred exclusively to contractual matters, the EC clearly seized the opportunity
to challenge similar restrictions, and set a precedent for confronting the European football governing body over issues that were not compatible with EU legislation. When the European Commission and FIFA agreed in 2001 to reform the transfer system in Europe so as to comply with the relevant EU legislation, UEFA terminated the six-plus-five rule that was in place and introduced the home-grown player rule instead in an attempt to increase the number of nationals. UEFA’s home-grown rule is intended to ‘promote greater parity in domestic competitions’; ‘drive transfer prices down’; ‘focus clubs more intensely on training young, local talent’; and address the ‘fear that if teams lack local or even domestic talent, the lack of local connection will eventually alienate their fan bases’ (McDermott, 2010: 284–5). Within this context, the European Parliament (EP) “reaffirms its commitment to the home-grown player rule” and backs sports governing bodies in their efforts to foster the local training of young players. The European Parliament suggests the home-grown players rule as a model for other sports in Europe’ (UEFA, 2013b). It is noteworthy that ‘although both the European Commission and the European Parliament embraced UEFA’s homegrown plan, the new regulation is much associated to the need to preserve the local identity of clubs’ (Kassimeris, 2007: 49).

Racism in football

Cooperation between UEFA and the EP also extends over the issue of racism in European football. European football has long been tarnished by a plethora of different forms of racial discrimination (see Kassimeris, 2007), thus the response of the two European bodies. UEFA’s guide to good practice (Unite Against Racism), is an attempt to foster greater participation in football for members of ethnic communities. Similar in content is UEFA’s Ten Point Plan of Action for Professional Football Clubs. Apart from emphasizing the need to involve football players and managers alike in anti-racism campaigns, UEFA also stresses that football has the potential to facilitate the integration of ethnic communities into society, particularly when taking into account the fact underlined that:

The sheer physical presence of a stadium with thousands of visitors every two weeks gives it a presence within local communities that is unmatched by most other institutions. It is often argued that clubs should be using the appeal of football to get involved in their local communities, working with young people, the disaffected and other marginalized groups. The ‘community capital’ that clubs can bring to effect social change in their environments is significant.

(FARE, 2006: 14)

Likewise, the EP, too, recognized the impact of football on social inclusion (European Parliament, 2006: 87), therefore, encouraging Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and the President of the EP, Josep Borrell, to adopt in March 2006 a resolution against racism in football. The resolution received unparalleled support, considering that a record 423 MEPs were in favour. Instrumental for securing the necessary support was Football Against Racism in Europe (FARE). Praising the role of both UEFA and FARE in combating racism in football, Borrell ‘stated that football’s modern day plague reflected social divisions in Europe, thus the need to combat all forms of racial discrimination and eradicate such an appalling phenomenon from all spheres of life, including football’ (Kassimeris, 2007: 173).

Despite UEFA’s record of racism-related bans and fines handed to football associations and clubs, there is still considerable room available for European football’s governing body to
combat racial discrimination with effect. Forcing clubs and associations to pay heavy fines or play behind closed doors, nevertheless, have done little to limit racism in football. In fact, UEFA has in the past been criticized for its poor response to racist incidents in European football, thus questioning its professed intent on stamping out racism. Apolitical UEFA is perhaps too politicized to enforce point deductions, expulsion from a competition or even relegation, as per FIFA’s statutes.

**UEFA’s position on Article 165 of the Lisbon Treaty**

A more recent issue concerns UEFA’s stance vis-à-vis the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) and, more precisely, the infamous Article 165 that ‘gives the EU a competence to support, coordinate and supplement sport policy actions by EU Member States’ (European Commission). Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union reads:

> The Union shall contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues, while taking account of the specific nature of sport, its structures based on voluntary activity and its social and educational function.

*(Official Journal of the European Union, 2010)*

Interpreting Article 165 of the Lisbon Treaty, UEFA (2011: 2) understands that:

> the EU has a supporting competence in the field of sport, meaning that its activities are limited to coordinating, where necessary, sports-related initiatives undertaken at Member States level. The EU may also adopt incentive measures, however, Article 165 expressly excludes any harmonising legislation. The new Article is clearly, therefore, *not intended to prejudice the legitimate autonomy and discretionary decision making power of sports federations*. [emphasis added]

However, where EU law does come into play and where it impacts on the activities of sports bodies, Article 165 now requires that the specific nature of sport must be recognised. In other words, while sport is not ‘above the law’, there is now a provision in the Treaty itself recognising that sport cannot simply be treated as another ‘business’, without reference to its specific characteristics *(the ‘specificity of sport’).* [emphasis in the original]

Making clear in the same document that ‘UEFA not only governs football at European level but also promotes, more broadly, the general interests of football throughout the continent’ (UEFA, 2011: 2), the European football governing body continues with its interpretation of Article 165 of the Treaty of Lisbon emphasizing the need to both ‘clarify the application of the *acquis communautaire* to sport’ and ‘recognise that sports federations have a wider public interest role and that EU law should be applied in a way that does not prejudice their ability to discharge their legitimate and statutory functions, including rule-making and application of sporting sanctions’ (UEFA, 2011: 2–4).

The fact that the EU is now in a position to claim competence on sport allows the EC to draft the first ever EU sports programme and brings together officially EU sports ministers. Given the EU’s ever growing scope for power, it is evident that UEFA fears the possibility of surrendering, at least partially, its authority to the same supranational organization that has already challenged national sovereignty at many different levels. Given that national sports federations are considered as public authorities subject to EU legislation, UEFA can only hope
that the EU’s interference in football will be limited or else its authority over European football will be seriously compromised.

**UEFA, football and politics**

When UEFA decided to award Israel the UEFA Under-21 European Championship, Michel Platini, UEFA President, was quoted as saying ‘UEFA is an apolitical organization’ (CNN, 2012) in order to defend its seemingly controversial decision. Yet UEFA is often asked to make a political decision, as already mentioned above. There is no doubting, therefore, that UEFA, football, and politics go hand-in-glove.

Hosted at the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw, the draw for the qualifying rounds of Euro 2012 was highly political. Initially Armenia were drawn to play in Group A alongside Azerbaijan but was immediately moved to Group B instead. The two states from Caucasus are better known, perhaps, for their twenty-two-year regional rivalry over the area of Nagorno-Karabakh, thus UEFA’s decision not to pair them in the same group. The two UEFA members were last drawn together for the qualifying rounds of 2008, but the football matches between Armenia and Azerbaijan were cancelled by the European football governing body because of security concerns. Along similar reasons, it was decided that Georgia and Russia should be kept apart, due to their conflict in 2008 over the disputed area of South Ossetia, with the two countries ending up in different groups.

To rationalize its certainly unique decision, Platini explained that UEFA ‘don’t want to mix sport and politics’ (Lanyado, 2010), yet the decision was, of course, highly political by its very nature. When employed to serve fundamental human values, sport – football in particular – has the all-important qualities to facilitate peace, as indicated through a number of relevant projects across Europe over time (European Commission, 2004). Interestingly, no such decision was ever made in the history of UEFA to prevent other regional rivals from playing football competitively against one another; therefore, Platini’s argument begs the question: why was football reduced to a mere instrument of animosity? Surely UEFA must have exhausted all other possible scenarios, if any, before reaching that decision. Perhaps employing football for the purpose of facilitating some process of reconciliation between the two UEFA members would still render the popular game political, thus allowing the European football governing body no room for manoeuvre. The decision to keep those nations apart in the draw was no doubt driven by politics, as is the fact that the decision intended to allow some distance between UEFA and its members’ regional rivalries in order to maintain some sense of neutrality. For the record, FIFA kept the same former warring states apart for the purposes of the 2014 World Cup qualifying round, but made no attempt to separate Croatia from Serbia when the two former adversaries were drawn in the same group.

On the whole, it becomes evident that UEFA never hesitated to resort to politics in order to either safeguard its principles or promote its goals, but was always keen to maintain an apolitical stance, again, to serve the very same interests. That UEFA’s foundation coincided with highly political developments around the continent, such as the setting up of the EEC and the Cold War division of Europe, cannot be ignored. The breakdown of the world order necessitated drastic political measures and scheming tactics for any organization to survive. Needless to say, UEFA could not have escaped the fact that the new realities of post-war Europe commanded an equally new political ethos. Later, the emerging need for (or threat of) Europeanization would only further politicize the seemingly apolitical UEFA.
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