

FIFA Report Sparks Renewed Calls for Boycott of Russia's 2018 World Cup

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Following FIFA's release of a staunchly criticized report rejecting corruption allegations, a former British Football Association chairman called on Europe to boycott Russia's 2018 World Cup unless the international football body commits to radical reform.

FIFA came under fire last week after announcing it was closing its inquiry into the controversial bids that awarded Russia and Qatar the next two World Cups, publishing a reported that said it had not found significant evidence that bidding regulations had been violated.

David Bernstein, a British businessman who managed his country's football association from 2011 to 2013, told BBC Sport that the credibility of international football had "suffered enormously" because of FIFA's current practices.

"At some stage, you have to walk the walk, stop talking and do something," Bernstein said,

BBC Sport reported Monday. "If I was at the FA [football association] now, I would do everything I could to encourage other nations within UEFA [Union of European Football Associations] — and there are some who would definitely be on side, others maybe not — to take this line [of boycotting the upcoming World Cup]."

Hours after FIFA's announcement, Michael Garcia — the American attorney who spearheaded a two-year inquiry into Russia's and Qatar's bids — said the report, which was based on his investigation, contained "numerous materially incomplete and erroneous representations" and vowed to appeal its conclusion, Sky Sports reported last week.

Garcia's 350-page report has yet to be made public. FIFA ethics judge Hans-Joachim Eckert, whose 42-page report cleared Russia and Qatar of wrongdoing in their World Cup bids, said Garcia's investigation could not be published for legal reasons, The Financial Times reported Sunday.

Reinhard Rauball, the president of the German Football League, said Saturday that FIFA's reluctance to publish Garcia's report could prompt UEFA to withdraw from the association, an option he said should be "seriously considered," according to Deutsche Welle.

"FIFA is sort of a totalitarian setup," Bernstein said, according to BBC Sport. "Bits of it remind me of the old Soviet empire. People don't speak out, and if they do they get quashed."

Tensions over the crisis in Ukraine and the mutual imposition of sanctions between Russia and the West have prompted foreign politicians to sporadically call for a boycott of Russia's World Cup over the last few months.

FIFA head Sepp Blatter told Russia's R-Sport news site in October that his association trusts Russia and its government, and that it "unconditionally supports the staging of the World Cup by Russia."

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