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Russia Protests as Ukraine Unveils Euro 2020 Uniform

By AFP

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Ukraine provoked Moscow's ire Sunday as its football federation unveiled Euro 2020 uniforms that feature Russian-annexed Crimea and nationalist slogans.

Postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic, Euro 2020 will be played from June 11 to July 11 across 11 cities including Saint Petersburg. Russia's second city will host seven matches, including a quarter-final.

In a statement on Facebook, Andriy Pavelko, the president of the Football Federation of Ukraine, said that Ukrainian players will wear "special uniforms" and posted photos of the jerseys in the blue-and-yellow colours of the Ukrainian flag.

The uniforms feature the silhouette of Ukraine that includes Russia-annexed Crimea and the separatist-controlled regions of Donetsk and Lugansk as well as the words "Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the Heroes!"

"We believe that Ukraine's silhouette will give strength to the players because they will fight for all of Ukraine," Pavelko said.

The "Glory to Ukraine" slogan is a patriotic chant that became a rallying cry for protesters who ousted a Kremlin-backed leader, Viktor Yanukovych, during a popular uprising in 2014.

The revolt was condemned as illegal by Moscow and sparked a crisis in ties between the two neighbouring countries. Russia annexed Crimea and supported Russia-speaking insurgents in Ukraine's industrial east. The conflict has claimed the lives of over 13,000 people since 2014.

The "Glory to Ukraine" call and "Glory to the Heroes!" response are associated with Ukraine's decades-old fight for independence.

The slogans have drawn criticism from Moscow for its association with World War II-era nationalist groups who both fought against and cooperated with the Nazis.

Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova on Sunday derided the new uniforms of the ex-Soviet state, saying Ukraine's football team "attached Ukraine's territory to Russia's Crimea."

The design, she said, brings to mind the art technique of "trompe l'oeil" that tricks the eye and creates the "illusion of the impossible."

Zakharova also said that Euro 2020 organisers and fans "should know" that the Ukrainian rallying cry "imitates" the infamous Nazi slogan.

"During the war this Nazi battle cry was used by regular and irregular nationalist Ukrainian armed units," Zakharova said on messaging app Telegram.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, speaking to state news agency TASS, declined to comment and referred all questions to European football's governing body UEFA.

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