The Moscow Times
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UEFA Demands Ukraine Make Changes to 'Political' Jersey

By AFP

June 10, 2021



The kits sparked outrage from Moscow over their inclusion of Moscow-annexed Crimea and popular patriotic chants. **EPA / TASS**

UEFA on Thursday demanded that Ukraine make changes to their jersey for Euro 2020 to remove a "political" slogan that sparked protests from Russia.

European football's governing body said the message "Glory to the Heroes," a rallying cry during the 2014 anti-Russia protests in Ukraine that is featured inside the shirt, was "clearly political in nature."

Related article: Russia Complains to UEFA Over Ukraine's 'Political' Euro 2020 Kit

Russia welcomed the move, but the Ukrainian football association said it was in talks with UEFA to reverse its decision.

The Ukrainians stressed to AFP that "earlier UEFA had approved the new kit and every element of it, including the slogan."

On Tuesday, Russia had sent a letter of complaint to UEFA over the yellow jersey which on the front also features the outline of Ukraine including Crimea, which was annexed by Russia in 2014.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy posted two photographs on Instagram of himself holding the jersey and said it bore "many important symbols that unify the Ukrainian people."

The presidential press service then released a selfie Zelenskiy took of himself wearing the jersey.

"The Ukrainian national football team's new jersey is in fact not like the others," Zelenskiy said.

But UEFA said the map would not need to be removed or changed because a United Nations General Assembly Resolution "recognizes the territorial borders as broadly depicted by the design."

The slogan "Glory to Ukraine" was also approved by UEFA as "on its own (it) may be considered as a generic and non-political phrase of general national significance."

That chant was also used by protesters who ousted a Kremlin-backed president, Viktor Yanukovych, during the Maidan demonstrations seven years ago.

The slogan has drawn criticism from Moscow for its association with World War II-era nationalist groups who cooperated with the Nazis.

Since annexing Crimea, Russia has backed pro-Moscow separatists in eastern Ukraine. The ongoing conflict there has claimed the lives of more than 13,000 people.

Russia hailed UEFA's decision, with Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova saying "sport is not a battlefield, rather it is a field for competition."

"Become sporting heroes and you will have glory. Do it that way and not with nationalist slogans saying the motherland should be glorified," Zakharova wrote on Telegram.

Ukraine begin their campaign at the European Championship on Sunday against the Netherlands in Amsterdam. Drawn in Group C, they also face Austria and North Macedonia.

Russia have been drawn in Group B alongside Belgium, Denmark and Finland. Their first match is against the Belgians in St. Petersburg on Saturday.

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