The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Swiss Coach's Controversial Move to CSKA Moscow Risks Violating Sanctions – Blick

June 23, 2025



CSKA

Swiss football coach Fabio Celestini will take over as head coach of CSKA Moscow, a move that has drawn criticism in his home country and may also expose him to criminal prosecution under Swiss law, the Swiss newspaper Blick reported.

Celestini coached Basel to victories in the Swiss Super League and Swiss Cup last season and previously played for the Swiss national team. On June 20, he signed on to become CSKA's head coach for two seasons with an optional third.

CSKA's owner, the state development corporation VEB, is under U.S., EU and Swiss sanctions for its role in helping finance Russia's war economy.

The Swiss sanctions order specifies that VEB works in Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories on projects backed by the Russian government.

If Celestini's salary is paid from VEB funds, he could fall within the scope of these sanctions, legal experts told Blick.

Related article: Switzerland Unfreezes $15M in Seized Assets of Russians Implicated in Magnitsky Case

However, there would be no grounds for criminal charges if he remains in Russia, refrains from working in Switzerland or his adopted home of Spain and does not transfer his earnings from CSKA to a Swiss or Spanish account.

In Switzerland, sanctions violations are criminal offenses punishable by fines of up to 500,000 Swiss francs ($600,000) or up to one year in prison.

In more serious cases, such as systematic breaches or obtaining significant financial gain, the sentence can increase to up to five years in prison, along with possible property confiscation.

The Swiss daily Tages-Anzeiger called Celestini's move "morally bankrupt," while Neue Zürcher Zeitung described it as "ethically ambiguous and controversial."

Following the publication of Blick's article, CSKA's communications director Kirill Breido said that VEB is not the club's owner and that CSKA itself is not subject to EU or Swiss sanctions.

According to Breido, VEB transferred 77.63% of CSKA shares to Balance Asset Management, a Moscow-based real estate investment firm, in 2022.

Meanwhile, Russian football continues to be alienated from the international sporting community over the war in Ukraine.

Ajax Amsterdam recently declined to sign FC Krasnodar midfielder Eduard Spertsyan, recognized by Transfermarkt as the best player of the 2025 season, because he plays for a Russian team.

And FIFA reportedly banned Lokomotiv Moscow from registering new players as of June 18, citing the club's failure to pay compensation to Ukrainian club Mariupol for the training of player Mark Mampassi.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/06/23/swiss-coachs-controversial-move-to-cska-moscow-risks-violating-sanctions-blick-a89539