

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0403/01

by Toine Manders (ELDR), Ward Beysen (ELDR), Graham Watson (ELDR), Elspeth Attwooll (ELDR) and Ole Andreasen (ELDR)
to the Commission

Subject: Complaint about abuse of UEFA's position

We have recently heard that UEFA has banned a new initiative, the Euro League, from the football market. If the Euro League does start up, both the clubs and their players taking part will be banned from taking part in other events organised by UEFA and the players will be barred from appearing for their national teams.

Football clubs' income is no longer determined by the number of spectators but by media revenue which is what is used to pay players' salaries. The small EU countries are at a disproportionate disadvantage in this respect and consequently they are no longer able to compete with the large countries. To meet this challenge a number of small countries (Belgium, Portugal, Scotland, Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark) have proposed having a competition (the Euro League) between their best clubs. Bringing these countries together opens up the field and makes the matches more attractive to the media and to sponsors, and will enable small countries to compete once again with the major football countries such as Spain, France, Germany, England and Italy. Since the Commission agrees with us that professional football is an economic activity, clubs must have the opportunity of developing their economic strategies within the internal market. A ban by UEFA, which occupies a monopoly position in this respect, is, we feel, in violation of European rules.

We are increasingly aware of UEFA abusing its monopoly position in other areas, too. One example is the transfer system which the Commission is looking into.

If Opel and Volkswagen can be compelled by the Commission to change the way they treat their dealers, UEFA should change the way it treats the clubs.

1. Does the Commission agree that in the case described above UEFA is abusing its position of power and hence is in contravention of European rules?
2. If so, is it prepared to look into the ban on the Euro League and to take what action is necessary so that competition - a priority objective of the European Union - can take place under conditions of fairness, not least for football clubs from small countries?
3. Can the Commission look into whether UEFA has abused its monopoly position in other areas, too, and is it prepared to take whatever action is necessary?
4. Further evidence can be provided on request. If the answer to question 5 is in the negative, what opportunities are there, in the Commission's opinion, for clubs from small countries competing within the internal market if they are obliged to operate exclusively within their own Member States?