

## ON SOME DIPLOMATIC ASPECTS OF ORGANISING FIFA WORLD CUP 2022 IN QATAR

### ABSTRACT

Sports diplomacy is a means to influence diplomatic, social and political relations through sports. However, the sports and politics have had both positive and negative implications over history. On the one hand, sports diplomacy significantly contributes to building ever-strengthening relations among nations, sports federations and athletes which help to support world peace. On the other hand, everyday practice reveals cases of implementing negative impacts on organising sporting events such as financial and political influences, or even bribery and corruption.

One of the most frequently criticised examples of the failure of the ideals of sport is organisation the 2022 FIFA World Cup which is scheduled to take place in Qatar. Football has always been the most popular sport in the world and its most significant quadrennial championship always attracts attention of millions of people worldwide. Decision to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup in the Middle East country evoked various suspicions, as the decision may be connected with possibilities of money laundering and other financial profits.

### ASSIGNMENT OF 2022 FIFA WORLD CUP

The FIFA World Cup in Qatar will be the 22nd World Championship in the football history. In November 2010, the decision had been accepted regarding the venue of this event together with an assignment of 2018 FIFA World Cup. There were four potential organisers from Europe: England,

the Netherlands together with Belgium, Spain with Portugal, and finally the Russian Federation which finally gained majority in the second vote (The Independent, 2010). Since 2018 FIFA World Cup was scheduled to take place in Europe, countries from other regions of the world (except the South American region where the 2014 FIFA World Cup was being held) demanded the assignment to organize the following FIFA World Cup outside Europe<sup>2</sup>. In the fourth round Qatar defeated the USA in the vote and won. This result caused turbulent discussions among sport officials, sport diplomats, as well as sport public in general.

Thus the Qatar Championship is likely to carry several primaries. It will be the first FIFA World Cup in the Near East and the first FIFA World Cup taking place in the Arab country. At the same time, Qatar would become the smallest country with the current population of over 2 million, which has ever organized the World Cup in the past<sup>3</sup>. The results of the vote have provoked unfavourable reactions by media and by the traditional football countries which did not succeed in the vote.

There were several accusations that when selecting the place of the championship, FIFA no longer takes into account the popularity and football tradition in particular countries. Some experts think that FIFA focuses primarily on finance however FIFA argues that generally, the decision to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup in the Middle East country will contribute to promoting football in other countries than the ones in Europe or South America. However, this decision is a walk on thin ice: 2018 FIFA World Cup will take place in Russia where the international political situation currently unfavourable, 2022 FIFA World Championship in Qatar will be accompanied by several issues which will probably complicate organising such an important event as FIFA World Cup is.

## **PROBLEMS AND DISCREPANCIES**

The first major issue of the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar is scheduled date which will not be traditionally held in June or July. The tournament is scheduled for late November till mid-December instead, in a reduced timeframe of around 28 days. In this time of year, temperatures on the Arabian Peninsula reach about 40°C, which could be a serious health risk

for some participants. On the one hand, there could be endangered players who should play in extremely hot weather, on the other hand there could be endangered spectators who will come from all over the world. Qatar organizers have declared that they will build air-conditioned stadiums to minimize this problem however they are not able to secure lower temperatures outside football stadiums.

The decision to organize FIFA World Cup in winter was criticised by the representatives of elite national football leagues in Europe who are strictly against this solution. They claim that major risks include discontinuity of their clubs season, financial losses, as well as exhaustion of the key players (Gibson, 2014a). Major representatives of the Premier League in the U.K. and Spanish *Primera División* refused winter terms but they could not influence or change this alternative. Thomas Bach, the head of the International Olympic Committee, declared that the world football championship must not collide with the Winter Olympics to be held in January 2022 (Gibson, 2014a). Maybe this is the reason why UEFA prefers November-December term to January term which was also under consideration. Solving this problem will most likely require reconsiderations in the schedule of national leagues, as well as a lot of negotiations which will probably be accompanied by certain compensations for football clubs. However, reaching agreement between all parties will not be possible in short period of time.

## **OTHER NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF QATAR CANDIDACY**

Another problem faced by the organizers of 2022 FIFA World Cup is related to poor working conditions of workers who build new sports facilities in Qatar. Qatar's low population resulted in insufficient number of workers who will be able to construct stadiums, facilities and infrastructure in such a short time. As a consequence, there are plenty of builders coming from Nepal, India and the Philippines, willing to work in unfavourable working conditions for low salaries (Vinik, 2014). They work twelve hours a day, seven days a week, and during the summer when temperatures reach over 50°C. Regularly, there occur violations of human rights and freedoms related to lax safety, insufficiency of drinking water, long working hours, delayed salaries, etc.

Accusations regarding violations of human rights have been reported by media and several human rights organizations. They revealed the following alarming fact: on average, more than 200 workers from India and 180 workers from Nepal die in Qatar as a consequence of accident or heart failure. Providing there are no measures that would stop this tendency, by the year 2022 the number of victims could reach 4000 (Vinik, 2014). This number of victims is comparable to massive epidemics or serious war conflicts. Furthermore, such statistics do not comply with organizing sporting event which main mission is to contribute to peaceful coexistence of states and people.

Although FIFA refuses to take responsibility for this situation, its representatives promised to negotiate with Qatar in order to improve poor working conditions of workers. Situation has been improved however there are no available data regarding current situation in Qatar. Furthermore, it is difficult to estimate the number of victims directly connected with the organisation of the world championship. Nevertheless, we may say that 2022 World Cup in Qatar already has its victims even the event has not started yet.

## **CORRUPTION ACCUSATION**

In the year 2011, there were suspicions that the assignment of 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar has a corrupting background directly related to top FIFA officials. The key role was being played by Sepp Blatter, the former president of FIFA, Michel Platini, the former president of UEFA and Mohammed bin Hammam, the former chairman of the Asian Football Federation, who had been the member of FIFA executive for 16 years. Mohammed bin Hammam had lobbied for the allocation of the 22<sup>nd</sup> FIFA World Cup in Qatar just one year before Qatar won the vote. *The Sunday Times* obtained a large number of documents, particularly e-mails, letters and copies of bank transfers which convicted Mohammed bin Hammam of corrupting other FIFA officials in order to support Qatar candidacy to host the championship. These payments were worth of 5 million dollars. The bribes were not directed only to the members of FIFA executive with right to vote, they were also directed to other officials – without right to vote. In this way Mohammed bin Hammam aimed at creating broad supporting “team” for Qatar candidacy, which would influence the decision of four African officials – members of FIFA – with

rights to vote who were against Qatar candidacy. It has been revealed that Jack Warner, an official from Trinidad, accepted over one and a half million dollars from the company directly owned by Mohammed bin Hammam (Bond, 2014).

These accusations significantly violated good reputation of FIFA football federation. Six major sponsors who supported 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil refused to support international organisation connected with corruption, condemned such deeds and demanded thorough investigation (BBC, 2014). FIFA responded by setting up working group lead by Michael Garcia, responsible for investigating of this case. The group elaborated the report and submitted it to the FIFA Ethics Commission. The world media together with wide soccer public demanded publishing the report. However, in November 2014, it had been decided not to publish "García's" report in a full extent which caused general public disagreement. This reaction resulted in the decision of the FIFA Ethics Commission to publish at least 42-page survey of the report, which should deprive both Russia and Qatar from unfair right to organize the World Cup (Gibson, 2014b).

Garcia disagreed with the manner in which the conclusions of the investigation had been published and stated that many misinterpreted facts and incomplete information had been presented. Hans Joachim Eckert, who published the summary of the Garcia report, refused to publish the entire text in full extent due to "legal reasons". Controversy of the situation had its further consequences. Two major sponsors, SONY and Emirates terminated their co-operation with FIFA, and do not plan to establish closer links with the world football in near future. FIFA declared that the termination of their cooperation was not connected with corruption suspicions. They claim that SONY had previously announced its savings mode programme and Emirates had stated they were not going to participate in events with global impact (Smith, 2014).

Although both decisions not to support FIFA World Cup were conditioned by above mentioned facts, corruption suspicions caused that sponsoring this sporting event is no longer such an attractive business. Even inside FIFA structures doubts related to organising 2022 World Cup in Qatar arise. Although the new FIFA president Domenico Scala admitted that this

could have been wrong decision, it is fixed that despite all the disputes, the championship will finally be held in Qatar. Its realisation may be significantly affected by the fact that other sponsors are in the process of deciding whether to sponsor the event or not. Their refusal would complicate life to organisers as well as global football. It is therefore important to gain lost reputation of FIFA as soon as possible so that 2018 and 2022 world tournaments are realised without political or private influences.

## CONCLUSION

2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar has recently been one of the most discussed topics among sports and diplomatic public. Its organizers have to face serious issues related to scheduled date, human rights of workers, and corruption affecting top FIFA officials.

According to scheduled date, the event will take place in November – December 2022 which is not welcomed by the representatives of national elite football leagues. FIFA have to find and reach a reasonable compromise to satisfy all initiated.

Poor working conditions of workers who construct stadiums and other facilities have also become an object of media interest and human rights organizations criticism. Human rights organizations try to make pressure on organizers to completely eliminate human rights violations. Situation has been improved but there are no available numbers of current situation in Qatar. It is hard to estimate final number of victims connected with organising the championship.

There were suspicions that the assignment of FIFA World Cup in Qatar has a corrupting background directly related to the top FIFA officials. Accusation of corruption is another serious problem which resulted in the fact that two major sponsors, SONY and Emirates terminated their contracts with FIFA.

There are currently few alternatives available for FIFA to solve the situation. The most appropriate is the publication of the entire text of the investigation report, the prosecution of potential offenders and the re-evaluation of its priorities. This would result in eliminating all accusations and suspicions and would help to solve other issues as well.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> Australia, Japan, South Korea, the USA and Qatar were potential candidate countries.

<sup>3</sup> It is estimated that the population of Qatar will reach 2,8 million in the year 2020.