Gathering Europe in Football: UEFA, the Development of European Football and the Cold War (1949–1961)

Philippe Vonnard*

Abstract. At a meeting in Basel on 15 June 1954, 25 of Europe’s national football associations agreed to form a representative body for European football, a decision which would, four months later, give rise to the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA). Five years later, the new body had exceeded the expectations of most of its founders and had become one of the most important actors in European football. Furthermore, it appeared as the sole pan-European body as other “European organizations” – created at the same period – in other fields never crossed the Iron Curtain and were mainly composed by Western Bloc or neutral countries.

This paper – which summarizes some of the key arguments examined in the book Creating a United Europe of Football (2020) – looks back at UEFA’s formation and early development. In doing so, it examines the issues of why UEFA developed so quickly, even though conditions for this development were not initially conducive, and how UEFA managed to overcome Cold War divisions to become a truly pan-European body.

The article brings together information from original archive documents (mainly from UEFA’s and FIFA’s Documentation Centres, but also from national football association archives), French press reports (mostly from L’Equipe and France Football) and interviews with three leading figures in European football during the 1950s.

Keywords. UEFA; FIFA; history; Europe; Cold War; football (soccer).

1 Introduction

On 15 June 1954, 25 of Europe’s national football associations met in Basel, where they agreed to create a representative body for European football. Just four months later, in October 1954, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) officially came into being.1 According to Gasparini, UEFA quickly became a leading player in the “Europeanization”2 of the game because “it progressively structured the European football space by organising European competitions, drawing up rules and regulations, and providing training courses for coaches and referees. As a result, Europe’s institutions, including national governments, the Council of Europe and (later) the European Commission and Parliament, came to regard UEFA as the authoritative voice on football mat-

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2 Europeanization, as used here in a top-down perspective, describes how decisions taken by a European organisation helped create a truly European dimension within football. Discussions of the concept of Europeanization as applied to football research (top-down and bottom-up perspectives) can be found in (amongst others): Gasparini, “Un sport européen,” Brand and Niemann, “Europeanization,” Mittag and Legrand, “Towards a Europeanization of Football?”
ters". Nevertheless, recent research shows that it was by no means a foregone conclusion that UEFA would achieve such a position. There were three main reasons for this.

First, it was the restructuring of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), initiated in response to a changing world context and pressure from South America’s football executives, that precipitated the creation of UEFA, rather than a desire within European football to create a continental confederation. In fact, some European football leaders had some reservations about forming a continental body and accepted the idea mainly by necessity.

Second, studies of the genesis of the first European competitions (European Champions Clubs’ Cup, International Youth Tournament and European Nations’ Cup) have shown that, contrary to a common misconception, UEFA was not the originator of these projects and was not initially inclined to organise European competitions, let alone create them.

Third, as Jürgen Mittag noted, UEFA brought together countries from all parts of Europe and from both sides of the Iron Curtain. Despite the long history of exchanges within European football and the doctrine of “apoliticism” which the sport had tried to uphold since the interwar years, the road to forming and developing a pan-European body was far from obvious. In fact, football’s achievement in creating a truly pan-European organisation during the early years of the Cold War was unique, as no other organisation in any field, whether cultural, economic, political or scientific, managed this feat before the 1970s.

The present paper – which summarizes some of the key arguments examined in a recent book on UEFA’s role in transforming European football in the
1950s11 – looks back at UEFA’s formation and early development.12 In doing so, it examines the issues of why UEFA developed so quickly, even though conditions for this development initially were not conducive, and how UEFA managed to overcome Cold War divisions to become a truly pan-European body. My research covers the period from the late 1940s, when the idea of creating a European grouping first emerged, to the early 1960s, by which time UEFA had been accepted as the governing body for European football.

My analysis is based on archive documents held by UEFA (minutes of congresses and executive committee meetings), FIFA (notably files pertaining to FIFA’s reorganisation), and the Belgian, French, East German and English FAs. Further information and alternative perspectives were provided by analyses and background details reported in the French sports newspapers *France Football* and *L’Equipe*, which actively pushed for more extensive exchanges within European football.13 I also obtained first-hand accounts of the events described by conducting extended interviews with two former UEFA secretaries general, Pierre Delaunay (1955–1959) and Hans Bangerter (1960–1989), and with the respected French journalist Jacques Ferran (from *L’Equipe*), who was a strong advocate of developing European football competitions during the 1950s.

Part one of the paper describes the route that led to the creation of UEFA, most notably the impact of FIFA’s restructuring in the early 1950s. The context surrounding UEFA’s formation explains why it initially had so few prerogatives. Part two focuses on how UEFA was created and the priorities Europe’s football leaders set for the new organisation. The final section looks at how UEFA strengthened its position and increased its power during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Decisions taken by UEFA’s leaders during this period helped produce a turning point in European football that led to the European dimension rivalling, or even taking precedence over, national considerations.

2 The road to building a representative body for European football (1949–1953)

Recent research by historians has shown the extent of European football exchanges during the interwar period and the important role FIFA played in fos-

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11 This book, entitled: *Creating a United Europe of Football. The Role of UEFA (1949–1961)*, focuses mainly on the 1950s. It was published as part of Palgrave Macmillan’s Football Research in an Enlarged Europe (FREE) series (co-edited by Albrecht Sonntag and David Ranc) https://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/14987. For a more long-term perspective (from the interwar period to the 1960s), see *L’Europe dans le monde du football*, and “From Mitropa Cup to UEFA Cup,” by the same author.

12 In UEFA’s commemorative albums (1979, 2004 and 2014), and in a review of UEFA’s activities, published by Laurent Barcelo in 2007 (Barcelo, “L’Europe des 52”). Cursory descriptions of UEFA’s creation and development can also be found in some general accounts of football history, such as Dietschy, *Histoire du football*, chapters 4 and 8.

13 Montérémal, “*L’Equipe: médiateur et producteur.*”
tering links between European football associations. However, the new context that emerged in the aftermath of World War II, especially decolonisation, was making it increasingly difficult for Europe to maintain its dominant position within the world governing body. In addition, European football was going through a new phase of development that required close collaboration between the continent’s football associations. Before World War II, this collaboration would have been built via discussions within FIFA, but as the international federation became less Europe-centred, it was less able to fulfil this role.

2.1 Finding a new governance for European football

In April 1949, Ottorino Barassi, the President of the Italian FA used an interview with a French sports newspaper to suggest creating a “European confederation” that could, among other things, organise a European competition for national teams. Barassi was a very experienced official who had been active in Italian football since the 1930s and would later sit on FIFA’s executive committee. But where had Barassi’s idea come from? He was undoubtedly influenced by the debate over FIFA’s reorganisation, but two other factors may have also come into play.

First, although the start of the Cold War prevented most East-West exchanges in football, several new European competitions were launched for clubs (e.g., Latin Cup, Grasshopper Cup), nations (e.g., Mediterranean Cup, International Cup, which was relaunched in 1952) and young players (International Youth Tournament) as of the late 1940s. Furthermore, ambitious ideas for creating a European club championship were also put forward, most notably by journalists. But the changes taking place within European football went much further than launching competitions, as the rules on professionalism were evolving, the transfer market was expanding and international matches were starting to be televised. These developments were making Europe’s national football associations realise that they would have to work together more closely and to coordinate and homogenise their domestic championships. Other experienced football executives who, like Barassi, saw the need for closer collaboration in European football included Ernst Thommen – President of the Swiss FA and director of Switzerland’s sports lottery (Sport-Toto), and Stanley Rous – a former international referee who had been Secretary General of England’s powerful Football

15 Quin, “La reconstruction.”
17 Except for Yugoslavia, which maintained links with Italy. Shetti, “Like a bridge,” 808–10.
18 Vonnard, Creating a United Europe, chapter 5.
Association since 1934. These two men would play leading roles in developing European football during the 1950s.\textsuperscript{19}

Second, Barassi had probably been influenced by the South American model, which he would have been well aware of thanks to his numerous business trips to South America. Set up in 1915/16, South America’s continental confederation not only organised a tournament, called the Copa America, for the continent’s national teams, it regularly discussed problems affecting South American football. In contrast, Europe’s football leaders tended to discuss their problems within FIFA, which had been created in 1904. This solution had worked quite well during the interwar period, when FIFA was composed mainly of European national associations,\textsuperscript{20} but it became less appropriate after World War II due to the growing number of national associations from outside Europe being granted FIFA membership (20 associations joined FIFA between 1946 and 1950).\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fifa_memberships.png}
\caption{Increase in the number of FIFA member associations from 1904 to 1950. Figure based on the FIFA Handbook (1950).}
\end{figure}

These new members were not only creating administrative problems within FIFA, due to its lack of awareness of their political and sporting situations,\textsuperscript{22} they were also beginning to contest Europe’s hegemony over the federation.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} For instance, they created a new competition in 1955: the Inter-Cities Fairs Cup. Vonnard, “From Mitropa Cup to UEFA Cup,” 1033–34.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Quin, Une première élite, and Vonnard, L’Europe dans le monde du football, chapter 1.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Dietschy, “Making Football Global?,” 287–91.
\item \textsuperscript{22} The personal correspondence between Rimet and Seeldrayers, stored in FIFA’s archives, frequently refers to Ivo Schricker’s (FIFA’s Secretary General) complaints about this new situation (Zurich).
\end{itemize}
This situation gave greater weight to the South American confederation’s demand to divide FIFA into continental groups, which it had been making since the 1930s.\textsuperscript{23} When FIFA’s 1950 congress was asked to consider a new South American proposal fully to continentalise the federation, delegates voted to set up a reorganisation committee – drawn from Western and neutral European countries (four members), Eastern Europe (one member) and South America (two members)\textsuperscript{24} – to address the matter.

Although some European leaders, such as Barassi, Rous and Thommen, accepted the need for FIFA to change, they did not want a revolution in the federation’s governance; rather, they wanted to see a gradual transition to a more representative structure. In contrast, FIFA’s “old guard”, including Jules Rimet, the federation’s President since 1921, felt that continentalisation was a threat to FIFA’s unity, and if continental groups were formed, they should not have full power over football in their region.\textsuperscript{25}

2.2 FIFA’s reorganization opens the way to a European body

After discussing the possibility of forming a European grouping with José Crahay and Henri Delaunay, the secretaries general of the Belgium and French FAs, Barassi, in conjunction with Ernest Thommen, called a meeting of Europe’s national associations in the spring of 1952.\textsuperscript{26} In the end, two meetings were held, the first in Zurich, in May, the second in Paris, in June. Restructuring FIFA quickly became the main issue on the agenda and, although the idea of creating a European grouping was quickly dismissed,\textsuperscript{27} Barassi, Delaunay and Crahay were asked to constitute a standing committee to review Europe’s position. The resulting statement was the first time in the game’s history that Europe’s football leaders had spoken with a single voice. Furthermore, an official document stated that 18 national associations had signed a “European vision of FIFA’s new statutes” to be presented for discussion by FIFA’s 1952 congress, due to be held later that summer in Helsinki, during the Olympic Games.

However, this document did not represent the views of the entire continent as defined by FIFA, which considered Europe to consist of the 32 countries that had been grouped together in the European World Cup qualifying zone since

\textsuperscript{23} Vonnard and Quin, “Did South America Foster European Football?,” 1428–29.
\textsuperscript{24} Minutes of the FIFA congress of 22 and 23 June 1950: FIFAA, box: 25\textsuperscript{th} – 27\textsuperscript{th} Ordinary Congress, 1946–1952, Activity Report Minutes.
\textsuperscript{25} On Rimet’s ideal, see Vonnard and Quin, “Jules Rimet;” Dietschy, “French Sport.”
\textsuperscript{26} Seeldrayers to Gassmann, 16 May 1952: FIFAA, box Reorganisation 1950–1953 (folder: 1. Study commission).
\textsuperscript{27} “A Zurich, les représentants de 13 nations jettent les bases d’une entente,” \textit{L’Equipe}, 28 May 1952. I did not find the minutes of the first meeting, but a brief summary of this discussion was contained in the minutes of the second meeting: Minutes of the European associations meeting of 27 June 1952: FIFAA, box Reorganisation 1950–1953 (1. Commission d’étude et bureau/révision).
the 1930s. In fact, the point of view presented in the document was Western Europe’s position, as the only Eastern European association present at the two meetings was Yugoslavia, which was non-aligned and seen as a buffer between Western Europe and the Soviet bloc. Indeed, football was by no means unaffected by the Cold War divisions that had split East and West. Although the Soviet Union had been granted FIFA membership in 1947, there were no matches between teams from Eastern and Western Europe from 1949 until September 1952, when Switzerland played Hungary. East and West also had different views on FIFA’s reorganisation, as the Soviet bloc associations wanted to strengthen the powers of FIFA’s congress and were against continentalising the federation. These differences meant there were few possibilities for cooperation between the leaders of Eastern and Western European football. Despite the Soviet bloc’s absence from the two meetings, the statements that emerged represented the views of a large part of Europe whose boundaries were similar to those of the Council of Europe and the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), and much more extensive than the “Little Europe” or “Europe of Six” of the recently created European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).

FIFA’s 1952 congress side-stepped the issue of reforming the federation’s structure by postponing the debate to an extraordinary congress the following year, thereby giving time for further discussions and allowing national associations to send new proposals. When the reorganisation committee met again, on 6 and 7 March 1953, they were finally able to agree on how FIFA should be reorganised, including the future composition of FIFA’s executive committee, whose members would be elected as follows:

- A Vice President chosen by the Soviet FA;
- A Vice President and an ordinary member chosen by the British national associations;
- A Vice President and an ordinary member chosen by the South American national associations;
- One ordinary member chosen by each of the Central American, North American, African and Asian groupings of national associations;

31 Nevertheless, recent studies by Yannick Deschamps and Sylvain Dufrasne have shown that there were exchanges of correspondence, projects for sports meetings, and even visits by workers’ clubs, notably between the Soviet Union and France: Deschamps, “Échanges et contacts sportifs,” 122–26; Dufrasne, “Au-delà de la ‘machine rouge,’” 76–79.
33 For a fuller description of these discussions, see Vonnard, Creating a United Europe, chapters 2 and 3.
– The remaining two Vice Presidents and four ordinary members to be chosen at FIFA’s congress by the “rest of the national associations” (i.e., the European associations).  

Immediately after this decision was taken, the two South American members of the reorganisation committee formally requested that places on FIFA’s executive committee be reserved for Europe “once and for all”. Although more information is needed to understand the South Americans’ strategy, it is likely that they wanted to allocate seats on FIFA’s executive committee so they would not later be attributed to other continents (Africa and Asia). If this happened, it would undermine South America’s position as the second most powerful force within FIFA after the Europeans.

Western Europe’s leaders discussed South America’s proposition during a long series of informal and formal meetings in the months leading up to the FIFA extraordinary congress, at which the reorganisation committee’s proposals had to be accepted or rejected. Nevertheless, it took until the eve of the extraordinary congress for Europe’s leaders to agree that the best way forward was to accept the new statutes, and therefore the method for electing the executive committee, proposed by the reorganisation committee. Hence, despite difficulties conceptualising how Europe’s football associations could form a united front, agreement was reached and, for the first time in FIFA’s history, Europe’s delegates to the extraordinary congress were able to speak in the name of a “group of European associations”.

After a further round of informal discussions, led by Thommen with help from Barassi, on the second day of the congress, most of the delegates finally accepted South America’s proposed reforms and the idea of the European associations being allocated six executive committee seats – two vice-presidencies and four ordinary members. Only the Soviet bloc associations, which had taken part in the unofficial discussions for the first time, opposed the proposed reorganisation as it neither improved equality between FIFA’s member associations (something they were also trying to achieve within the International Olympic Committee) nor empowered the emerging Asian and African countries. The Soviet bloc’s opposition also highlighted its isolation within FIFA, because none of the other non-European associations supported its position.

34 Minutes of the FIFA reorganisation committee meeting of 6 March 1953: FIFAA, Reorganisation 1950–1953 (file Reorganisation Committee).

35 In particular, documents from the archives of South America’s national associations and CONMEBOL. Although the correspondence with the South American associations and CONMEBOL held in FIFA’s Zurich archives throws light on how events unfolded, they provide little insight into specific points such as this.


37 Ibid. – For more details on these discussions, see Vonnard, Creating a United Europe, chapter 2 and 3.

3 UEFA: a new body for developing European football (1954–1957)?

The decision taken at FIFA’s extraordinary congress in 1953 had momentous consequences because it meant that each continent’s football associations were now directly responsible for electing the members of FIFA’s executive committee (except for its President), as described in article 17 of the federation’s new statutes, published in February 1954. As a result, continents that did not already have a representative body would have to form one, and Europe would be no exception.

3.1 The challenge of bringing together East and West

Significantly, the new European body would have to straddle the Iron Curtain and bring together football associations from both East and West. However, there was no guarantee that Eastern and Western Europe’s football associations would manage to come together within a united body, as the only other organisation that had managed this feat was the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). Moreover, as noted above, the Eastern bloc was unhappy with the way FIFA had been restructured. Nevertheless, a number of events during FIFA’s extraordinary congress showed there was room for optimism.

First, despite their opposition to decentralising FIFA, leaders from the Soviet bloc’s associations had attended, probably for the first time, meetings with other European associations. In addition, at the end of the discussions, Serguei Savin, a member of FIFA’s executive committee and one of the Soviet Union’s most important football administrators, suggested to a French journalist that his country might soon play an international match against France. This statement was a sign of the Soviet Union’s new-found willingness to participate in football exchanges with other European countries, possibly as a result of what historians call the “thaw” in east-west relations that had followed Stalin’s death in March 1953.

Following initial discussions with fellow standing committee members Barassi and Crahay, Delaunay, the committee’s Secretary, invited the European associations to a new meeting in Paris in April 1954. The 22 associations which sent delegates to Paris were (in alphabetical order): Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, England, Finland, France, East Germany, West Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, The Saar, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Yugoslavia. Another nine

40 “Au Congrès extraordinaire de la FIFA (Samedi et dimanche),” L’Equipe, 16 November 1953.
42 The Saar was administered by France but had a certain amount of autonomy. As a result, it set up its own football association, which became affiliated to FIFA in 1952.
associations – Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Iceland, Northern Ireland, Poland, Romania, the Soviet Union and Wales – declined the invitation.\textsuperscript{43} The presence of the powerful and influential English and Scottish associations was a sign that their leaders were rallying to the idea of creating closer ties between Europe’s associations. In contrast, the absence of all the Soviet bloc associations except Hungary and Czechoslovakia showed Eastern Europe’s reluctance to go down this road.\textsuperscript{44}

When the Paris meeting failed to reach agreement, Stanley Rous proposed adjourning until just before the next FIFA congress in June,\textsuperscript{45} thereby providing time for informal discussions to address two main stumbling blocks. First, the delegates had been unable to choose European football’s six representatives on FIFA’s executive committee, as eleven associations had nominated candidates. Second, most of the Soviet bloc countries had refused to attend the meeting, which was a major problem because FIFA’s statutes clearly stated that the European grouping had to encompass both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Another important step was taken when it was agreed that the standing committee should continue its work preparing draft statutes for the new body. To this end, on 24 April, Delaunay sent a questionnaire to all of Europe’s football associations, asking for their views on the form any future body should take. Delaunay’s accompanying letter described three options – from a grouping whose sole purpose would be to elect Europe’s FIFA executive committee members to a true representative body capable of structuring European football.\textsuperscript{46} The response rate was high, as 26 of the 31 associations contacted returned the questionnaire. However, most of the Soviet bloc associations did not reply or declined to state their position.

\textsuperscript{43} Minutes of the European associations meeting of 12 April 1954: BA, DY, 12 DTSB, 2.081 Zusammenarbeit mit der FIFA, 03, n°169–171.

\textsuperscript{44} To date, I have been unable to ascertain exactly why Hungary and Czechoslovakia took part in the discussions. It may be because they had had closer footballing, economic and cultural ties to the countries of Western Europe since the interwar period. For example, Hungary and Czechoslovakia had competed in the International Cup, alongside Austria, Italy and Switzerland, and Hungary was one of the most successful teams in Western Europe in 1952 and 1953, playing numerous international matches, most notably against England, at Wembley, in November 1953. In March 1951, Italy’s Giovanni Mauro told his colleagues on FIFA’s executive committee that Central Europe – meaning Austria, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Hungary and Yugoslavia – had not been represented at the last reorganization meeting due to the absence of its spokesman, Yugoslavia’s Mihailo Andrejevic. This reveals the continuing links between leaders from Eastern and Western Europe. For an overview of Czechoslovakia’s and Hungary’s importance in European football during the interwar period, see Quin, “Central Europe rules European Football.”


\textsuperscript{46} Delaunay to the Secretary General of the East German FA, 20 April 1954: BA, DY 12 DTSB, 2.081 Zusammenarbeit mit der FIFA, no. 182–183.

Stadion, Bd. 44, 1/2020
When the standing committee analysed the completed questionnaires, they found that most associations preferred Delaunay’s second option, that is, to create a body that would elect representatives to FIFA’s executive committee and hold annual meetings to discuss issues relating to European football. The favoured way of doing this was to appoint an executive committee and set up a head office at its Secretary General’s place of residence. Committee meetings and annual general meetings were to rotate between European cities in order to ensure they included all the body’s member associations. Thanks to these decisions, taken in the spring of 1954, Europe’s national associations were at last ready to cross the Rubicon and form a continental body.

I also argue that at the same time, the Soviet bloc’s football associations were realising that they would have to abandon the idea of forming an Eastern European body if they wanted to play a role in governing FIFA. Thus, as figure 1 shows, most of the Soviet bloc associations attended the meeting Rous had proposed, which was held in Basel.

47 “Groupe des associations européennes de football. Analyse des réponses au questionnaire relatif à la forme constitutionnelle du groupe”: BA, DY 12 DTSB, 2.081 Zusammenarbeit mit der FIFA, no. 176.

48 A number of studies have examined how communist countries used football in international relations. For example, Majtényi looked at the situation in Hungary in “Football et pouvoir dans la Hongrie communiste.”
According to the Belgian delegation, the second round of discussions took place in “a friendlier atmosphere than the Paris meeting [of 12 April]”, and the idea of forming a European body was quickly approved. The meeting also reached agreement on who to elect to FIFA’s executive committee and allocated the Vice President positions to Switzerland’s Ernst Thommen and the Netherlands’ Karel Lotsy, both of who were highly experienced leaders and already members of FIFA’s executive committee.

Another important decision in terms of guaranteeing the new body’s autonomy from FIFA was to form an executive committee consisting of members who were not on FIFA’s executive committee. Seats on the new body’s first executive committee were allocated by consensus, rather than by vote, and attributed to leaders who had played important roles in FIFA’s restructuring and/or who represented the different regional blocs within European football (United Kingdom, Latin countries, Scandinavia, Soviet bloc). These men were José Crahay (Belgium), Henri Delaunay (France), Ebbe Schwartz (Denmark), George Graham (Secretary General of the Scottish FA), Joseph Gerö (President of the Austrian FA) and Gustáv Sebes (a former coach of the Hungarian national side and a key figure in Hungarian sport).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Function in national association</th>
<th>Working activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schwartz E.</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sebes G.</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>Member of the Board</td>
<td>Minister of Sport</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crahay J.</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>member</td>
<td>Secretary General</td>
<td>Secretary General</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gerö J.</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>member</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Minister of Law</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graham G.</td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>member</td>
<td>Secretary General</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delaunay H.</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Secretary General</td>
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Members of UEFA’s first executive committee (1954). Table based on the UEFA executive committee minutes (1954/55).

The choice of these six leaders illustrates the desire of Europe’s football executives to minimise the effects of the Cold War on the new body and exemplifies their compromise-based approach to resolving potentially divisive issues. Appointing Ebbe Schwartz as the new body’s President, the day after the Basel meeting, was also designed to build unity. Schwartz was from Denmark, a

small, “Western neutral” country that oscillated between non-partisanship and capitalism, so his appointment can be seen as a compromise between East and West and a sign that the new body intended to adopt the sort of apolitical approach that FIFA had followed during the interwar period. In addition to his connections with several other influential figures in European football, especially Rous, Schwartz’s work on FIFA’s recent reforms had enabled him to build ties with FIFA’s executive committee and many South American football executives. This made him a valuable asset in Europe’s dealings with other international football organisations. The executive committee’s continuing efforts to ensure “harmony” and unity within UEFA through compromise and conciliation can be seen from the President’s speech to the inaugural UEFA congress and official UEFA documents (Secretary General’s annual reports and UEFA’s official bulletins, published from 1956).  

3.2 Building a European body … and creating European competitions

But the choice of these six members reveals another aspect that appeared to be taking on ever greater importance for many of the leaders who contributed to the creation of UEFA: a desire to homogenise the way European football was run. On the one hand, the members chosen were not active within FIFA. In fact, from the outset UEFA insisted on remaining separate from FIFA in order to ensure it retained its independence. On the other hand, three of the six members of UEFA’s first executive committee were paid officials, unlike the members of FIFA’s executive committee, who were not paid for their football activities. This sociological difference, which deserves further study, may explain the gradual evolution from the moral, even ideological, view of the game held by Rimet, Barassi and Thommen, to a focus on more technical issues relating to the development of the game. This change seems to have paved the way for UEFA to expand its prerogatives, especially in terms of organising competitions, an issue on which Crahay, Delaunay and Graham (the three salaried officials) appear to have rapidly found agreement.

The decisions taken in the summer of 1954 resulted in the founding of a representative body, baptised UEFA in October 1954, which would give new impe-
tus to the development of European football. UEFA’s existence was made more concrete in the next few months by opening a dedicated bank account in Paris, the home of its first headquarters (an office provided by the French FA), and creating a “UEFA” letterhead.\textsuperscript{55} The executive committee then moved on to organising the match between Great Britain and the “Rest of Europe”, in the tradition of the 1938, 1947 and 1953 matches between a Great Britain team and a FIFA selection, that was due to take place in the summer of 1955. UEFA received a share of the revenues from this match, which was a great success, attracting reporters from several European sports dailies and 58,000 spectators. Moreover, it was an excellent way of strengthening ties between national associations and enabled UEFA to demonstrate its pan-European credentials while promoting rapprochement between the countries of Europe, even though some national associations declined to send their players (notably Hungary, Soviet Union, Spain, West Germany).\textsuperscript{56}

UEFA’s first two congresses, in Vienna in March 1955 and in Lisbon in June 1956, took three important decisions that would shape the organisation’s development. The first decision helped define the borders of European football, as Iceland, Greece and Poland were granted UEFA membership, but affiliation requests from Turkey and Israel were refused.\textsuperscript{57}

Second, the congress adopted a set of statutes that gave UEFA the remit “to study all issues concerning football in Europe”.\textsuperscript{58} Other decisions covered procedures for negotiating television rights for European matches (referred to as the “Vienna Agreement”) and for homogenising the European calendar. The delegates also decided to launch a quarterly newsletter, published in the organisation’s three official languages (English, French and German), in order to report executive committee decisions and the results of UEFA competitions. Although UEFA was still quite weak, as is shown by the fact that its decisions were regarded as recommendations rather than binding rulings, it managed to define a European position on certain issues, such as asking FIFA to redistribute to the European associations half of the income it received from its levy on international matches between European national teams.

Third, and in contrast to the first draft of the organisation’s statutes, drawn up in 1954, UEFA began creating its own competitions. Many national associations still opposed the idea of a European tournament for national sides, but they accepted the idea of UEFA taking over both the International Youth Tournament,\textsuperscript{59} which had been set up by FIFA, and the European Champions Clubs’...
Cup, which had been launched by journalists from the French sports newspaper L’Equipe. This decision had major consequences for both competitions, as it turned the International Youth Tournament into a Europe-wide event (only European teams could compete) that was hosted by a different European country each year, and it increased the legitimacy of the Champions Clubs’ Cup, which quickly attracted clubs from every country in Europe. Indeed, when UEFA officially took over the Champions Clubs’ Cup, just before its first edition in June 1955, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and East Germany, which had not originally been invited to take part, asked to be included in the tournament. Thus, UEFA’s decision helped build a European dynamic within football by creating new exchanges between its members.

In return, the two competitions strengthened UEFA’s finances (it received a percentage of ticket sales and some revenues from broadcasting rights) and increased its legitimacy as the representative body for European football. Just as importantly, UEFA’s success in changing the International Youth Tournament’s rules strengthened its claim to be an independent voice capable of defending the interests of European football. FIFA had wanted UEFA to keep the same tournament format, including the ban on designating an overall winner, whereas UEFA insisted on a number of rule changes aimed at making the event more competitive. This face-off between the two organisations demonstrated UEFA’s intention to take control of footballing affairs within Europe, while continuing to respect FIFA’s primacy over world football.

4 UEFA as the regulator of European football (1958–1961)

UEFA further demonstrated its independence from FIFA by removing any reference to the world governing body from the new statutes it adopted in October 1958. Revising its statutes was just one of many actions UEFA’s leaders took between 1958 and 1961 in order to strengthen the organisation’s position and develop European football.

4.1 UEFA becomes the dominant body in European football

UEFA’s rapid growth during its first five years resulted in accumulating several additional areas of responsibility, which were progressively assigned to new standing committees. Thus, by the end of 1958 UEFA had seven standing committees (in addition to the executive committee) covering Finance, Youth, Tele-

60 Vonnard, “A Competition.”
61 Due to a lack of time, UEFA had to reject this request but the winners of these countries’ national championships were invited to take part in the second Champions Clubs’ Cup.
vision Issues, the European Champion Clubs’ Cup, the European Cup of Nations and European Champion Clubs’ Cup Appeals.63

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Year created</th>
<th>Number of members*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champion Clubs’ Cup</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeals</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cup of Nations**</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UEFA standing committees (to end 1958); *excluding the General Secretary; **a provisional commission had been set up in 1955. Table based on UEFA’s General Secretary Reports for 1958 and 1959.

Coordinating the work of these committees was a huge task, so the 1958 congress agreed to appoint a full-time, salaried Secretary General. This decision created a dilemma for Pierre Delaunay (who was also Secretary General of the French FA). Delaunay had taken over the role at UEFA from his father, Henri, who had died in 1955, but now he would have to choose between the two organisations. In another move to highlight UEFA’s growing stature, it was decided that a dedicated headquarters would be set up. Despite attempts by the French FA to keep UEFA in Paris, the executive committee finally decided to move its headquarters to Switzerland, which had the twin advantages of being “neutral”,64 thereby facilitating relations with countries from both sides of the Iron Curtain, and of having a well-developed banking system that would allow UEFA to manage its finances more effectively. In fact, following problems with its bank account in Paris, UEFA had opened an account in Switzerland in 1957 in order to facilitate financial dealings with its member associations.65 The fact that FIFA and many other international organisations, including the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the EBU (discussions between UEFA and


64 At this time, Switzerland was close to the Western camp, as the country’s political and economic leaders were anti-communist (Bott, Hanhimäki, Schaufelbuehl and Wyss, Neutrality and Neutralism). However, it was easier for countries from East and West to obtain visas for Switzerland than for other countries.

the EBU about televising football games had begun in the spring of 1956\(^{66}\) were based in Switzerland was undoubtedly another factor in UEFA’s choice.

UEFA’s move to Switzerland brought an end to Pierre Delaunay’s tenure as Secretary General because he did not want to move his family (he had two young children).\(^{67}\) According to Jacques Ferran, “Pierre Delaunay did not have the ambition or the desire to give up French football to go there, so we knew in advance he would say [no], that he [would] prefer to keep [his position at] the French federation”.\(^{68}\) Indeed, another reason why UEFA chose Switzerland for its headquarters may have been its desire to appoint a new Secretary General in the person of FIFA’s deputy Secretary General, Hans Bangerter, who had made it clear he wanted to stay in Switzerland.\(^{69}\) In his autobiography, Stanley Rous said that he had known Bangerter for several years and held him in high regard. Rous felt that Bangerter’s dynamism would be a significant asset for the young UEFA.

Bangerter was only 30, but he already had a lot of experience in sports administration. After studying at a technical school in Berne, he had worked at Switzerland’s Federal Gymnastics Centre (Eidgenössische Turn- und Sportschule) in Magglingen, where he was responsible for welcoming foreign visitors and course participants, notably Rous. His appointment as FIFA’s Deputy Secretary in 1953 allowed him to work with the experienced Kurt Gassmann\(^{70}\) and to forge closer relations with European football’s most influential leaders, including Barassi and Thommen. Other qualities that made Bangerter an excellent choice for the position of Secretary General of an international organisation included his Swiss nationality (Switzerland is a “neutral” country), his strong sense of diplomacy, and his fluency in all three of UEFA’s official languages (English, French and German).

Under Bangerter, the secretariat’s responsibilities grew rapidly and it soon became necessary to recruit three secretaries (Ilse Schmidlin, Suzanne Otth, Ursula Krayenbuehl) to help with the work. The secretariat was also becoming more professional, as can be seen from UEFA’s official documents, which now followed standardised formats (with precise headings and numbered pages) and systematically included drafting dates and signatures.\(^{71}\)

At the end of the 1950s, UEFA’s annual congresses attracted around 60 delegates from approximately 30 member associations. Like FIFA congresses, these gatherings were also social occasions that helped strengthen ties between attending leaders. Finally, from the very beginning, UEFA had helped national associations take part in international competitions, either by providing financial

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\(^{66}\) On EBU-UEFA discussions, see Mittag and Nieland, “Suche nach Gesamteuropa;” Vonnard, “Inventing a ‘European space of discussions.’”

\(^{67}\) Interview with Pierre Delaunay conducted on 18 September 2012 in Versailles.

\(^{68}\) Freely translated from the French. Interview with Jacques Ferran conducted on 19 September 2012 in Paris.

\(^{69}\) Interview with Hans Bangerter conducted on 1 October 2012 in Bolligen.

\(^{70}\) On Gassmann, see Zumwald, “Administrer et développer le football.”

\(^{71}\) Tonnerre, Vonnard and Sbetti, “Ghost Administrators,” 116–17.
support for team travel, especially in the case of the International Youth Tournament, or by providing deficit guarantees so less wealthy associations could host matches (e.g., in 1958, when Luxembourg, a small association with limited resources, jointly hosted the International Youth Tournament).\textsuperscript{72} Other initiatives included taking steps to improve the standard of European football by, for example, setting up training courses for coaches and trainers. These courses began in March 1960 and were overseen by Gustáv Sebes.

UEFA's rapid development led to tension with FIFA, whose structure had become firmly continentalised by the creation of confederations for Asia and Africa.\textsuperscript{73} In fact, the confederations had begun envisaging extending their role in governing world football, with some considering forming alliances to address specific issues.\textsuperscript{74} As Tomlinson and Sugden noted, by the 1960s the resulting challenges to the power of FIFA's executive committee were causing tension, especially between UEFA and FIFA, with the appointment of FIFA Presidents proving to be a particularly thorny issue.\textsuperscript{75} Problems between the two organisations had first arisen in 1956 and the next two years saw several wrangles over issues such as the rules of the International Youth Tournament,\textsuperscript{76} the redistribution to European national associations of FIFA's earning from international matches\textsuperscript{77} and, as examined below, the creation of a championship for European nations. At the end of the 1950s Thommen used his great diplomatic skills to persuade UEFA and FIFA to set up a joint commission at which the organisations' leaders could discuss problems. Nevertheless, between 1955 and 1960, UEFA gradually increased its independence from FIFA and established itself as a significant player in the development of European football.

4.2 Developing European football: a UEFA monopoly

Probably the most significant action UEFA undertook to develop European football was to organise European competitions. Encouraged by the immediate
success of the Champion Clubs’ Cup, on 18 March 1956 UEFA’s executive committee “took note of a proposal by Dr Frey to create a similar event to the European Champion’s Cup, to be played among the winners of national cups”. However, new competitions were not that easy to launch and it took UEFA another five years to convince most of Europe’s football associations to agree to a Cup Winner’s Cup.

Similarly, many associations were hostile to the idea of a European competition for national sides and four years of heated debate, between 1955 and 1958, were needed before 17 national associations agreed to take part in the first European Nations’ Cup. The birth of this tournament has been already been studied, so I will not discuss the process further, but two aspects of the competition’s genesis provide interesting insights into UEFA’s role in developing European football.

First, it would have been extremely difficult for the competition to go ahead if the ten Soviet bloc countries had not agreed to take part. Their participation was a sign of their desire to have a say both in UEFA’s development and in European football in general, an objective that was facilitated by the détente in East-West relations and the Eastern bloc’s realisation that football could be used as an instrument of diplomacy. Second, the launch of the European Nations’ Cup changed the entire context of European football. The fact that nearly all of UEFA’s members took part in the second edition was both a reflection of the tournament’s success and a mark of the growing belief in the importance of European football and the increased standing of UEFA’s competitions.

This second aspect is important because UEFA was not the only stakeholder wishing to develop exchanges within European football, especially by creating new competitions. The Inter-Cities Fairs Cup, for example, was launched by a private committee based in Basel in the same year (1955) as the Champion Clubs’ Cup and was still being run independently of UEFA at the end of the 1950s. If UEFA was to extend its authority over European football, it had to take control of the Fairs Cup and, more broadly, all European-scale tournaments. Hence, UEFA asked its congress, meeting in Stockholm on 4 June 1958, to modify the organisation’s statutes by adding “a paragraph identical in all respects to that contained in the FIFA regulations, making UEFA’s approval necessary for tournaments with more than three teams”. However, the motion was withdrawn after a short but intense debate, because most of UEFA’s members considered the clause too restrictive for national associations.

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80 Access to the Soviet union’s archives would be needed to fully understand this shift. For a general overview of the Soviet Union’s sports policy during the 1950s, see Dufraisse, “Au-delà de la ‘machine rouge,’” 76–83; Parks, The Olympic Games, the Soviet Sports, chapter 1.
mittee made another attempt to increase UEFA’s control over European competi-
tions a few months later, when it asked the national associations to approve a
procedure requiring potential tournament organisers to submit an authorisation
request to UEFA’s secretariat, listing “its Committee members’ names, the list of
teams taking part in the competition, as well as the competition’s rules”. These
initiatives enabled UEFA to keep track of existing and projected European com-
petitions, but its real aim was to further extend its control over European tour-
naments.

UEFA’s reaction to the creation of the International League Liaison Com-
mittee (ILLC) confirmed its intention to progressively monopolise the administra-
tion of European football. Created in May 1959 by the English, French and Italian
professional football leagues, the ILLC was set up to run supranational club
competitions, such as the Franco-Italo Cup, which was first contested in the
summer of 1960. UEFA’s reaction to what it saw as “some national leagues, members of the International Liaison Committee of Football Leagues, trying to
take over the duties and rights of national associations” was to set up a com-
mittee of its most influential executives (Peter Joseph “Peco” Bauwens, Crahay,
Schwartz, Pujol) to clarify the situation and closely monitor the ILLC’s actions.

As well as demonstrating UEFA’s determination to eliminate potential rivals,
the case of the ILLC highlighted the rapprochement between UEFA and FIFA,
noted above. Hence, in August 1960 Thommen wrote to the ILLC, inviting it to
contact UEFA and to limit its actions so it did not impinge on the interests of
either FIFA or UEFA.85

From a geopolitical perspective, UEFA quickly came to play a prominent role
in encouraging dialogue between East and West and overcame Cold War divi-
sions to achieve consensus between national associations from both sides of the
Iron Curtain on issues such as televising football. In fact, agreement on foot-
balling issues sometimes led to alliances that would have been unthinkable in
other contexts, as when Spain and the Soviet bloc came together to promote the
idea of creating a European cup for nations.

Moreover, the European Champions Club’s Cup made meetings between East
and West almost commonplace, as almost a third of the games played in this
competition between 1955 and 1960 (67 out of 228 matches) brought together
teams from opposite sides of the Iron Curtain. These matches also allowed
countries that did not have diplomatic relations to meet on an informal basis,

82 Freely translated from the French. Minutes of the UEFA executive committee meet-
83 Minutes of the FIFA executive committee meeting of 24 April 1959: FIFAA, box
Executive committee (1959).
84 Freely translated from the French. Minutes of the UEFA congress of 19 August 1960:
85 Minutes of the FIFA executive committee meeting of 19 August 1960: FIFAA, box
Executive committee (1960).
86 Vonnard, “Inventing a ‘European space of discussions’.”

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both during matches and at associated events (visits, dinners), thereby helping the process of European integration.

5 Conclusion

This essay looked back at UEFA’s beginnings and highlights the reasons why it grew so rapidly during its first few years. My research confirmed other scholars’ preliminary findings, that the creation of UEFA was made possible by the conjunction of two processes: FIFA’s reorganisation, in which South America’s football associations played a leading role, and the desire of several football execu-

But these games were also opportunities to get to know “others” better. In 1962, Raimundo Saporta, Real Madrid’s treasurer and a pillar of the International Basketball Federation, made the first official visit to the Soviet Union by a Spanish official when he travelled with Real Madrid to Moscow for a European game. When he returned home, he reported back to the Francoist government on living conditions in the Soviet Union (Simón, “L’homme de l’ombre”). ECCC matches also provided opportunities to see “how the other half lived”. It would be interesting to examine these cases in more detail.

Clubs that took part in the second edition of the Champions Cup. Interestingly, this map does not show the border between East and West Germany. Was this an oversight or does it represent UEFA’s vision of Europe at the time? Map published in the UEFA Official Bulletin, Issue 6, November 1957.
tives, most notably Barassi, Crahay, Delaunay, Rous and Thommen, to reform European football by bringing together the continent’s national associations.

However, these factors do not explain why UEFA developed so quickly or how it managed to overcome Cold War divisions to become a truly pan-European organisation. Careful study of the archives showed that UEFA’s rapid development was driven by two main forces. First, UEFA needed to assert its authority as the representative body for European football, which meant overcoming potential rival organisations, especially in terms of creating competitions, such as those devised by journalists at *L’Equipe* and by the ILLC. UEFA also had to demonstrate to the EBU that it was the only legitimate partner when it came to televising European matches. Second, several executive committee members wanted to expand UEFA’s activities as quickly as possible, with some wishing to take football’s development in a different direction to that favoured by their European counterparts at the head of FIFA. The fact that some members of UEFA’s executive committee were salaried officials, and not unpaid volunteers, undoubtedly played a (still to be determined) role in this. Thanks to the momentum provided (mostly) by these two forces, by the early 1960s UEFA had achieved its aim of being recognised as the governing body for European football. Not only had it taken control of the most important European competitions and limited the influence of potential rivals, it had also guaranteed its independence from FIFA.

UEFA’s other major success during its early years was to become a truly pan-European body. To accomplish this feat it had adopted a similar approach to that developed by FIFA between the wars and ensured its decisions remained as “apolitical” as possible. Thus, from the outset, many of the decisions taken by UEFA’s leaders (appointing a President and a Secretary General from “neutral” countries, choosing Switzerland for its headquarters, including all major factions within the executive committee) were designed to reduce the impact of the Cold War and avoid conflict within the organisation. UEFA also benefitted from FIFA’s vision of Europe, established before World War II, which included 32 countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Finally, UEFA’s formation coincided with the “thaw” in East-West relations that followed Stalin’s death in March 1953, which created a more favourable political context for East-West cooperation. In the case of UEFA, because its competitions brought together all of its member associations, the discussions needed in order to organise matches facilitated dialogue between the two blocs. By the 1960s, UEFA’s unique success in becoming a pan-European organisation capable of bringing together East and West had started attracting the attention of Europe’s political leaders.

UEFA continued to strengthen its position during the 1960s by creating new competitions (e.g., Cup Winners’ Cup, UEFA Cup) and launching several programs (training courses, conferences, etc.) aimed at developing European football. Many of UEFA’s initiatives were deliberate, but others were brought about by disagreements with FIFA or by the need to minimise the impact of geopoli-
tics on the organisation (the Cold War was never far away and often impacted UEFA’s activities).\textsuperscript{88}

So, what can UEFA’s early history tell us about contemporary European football? As I have shown, although UEFA faced numerous challenges to its position, from its very beginnings it followed a policy of gradually increasing its power. To achieve this, it had to limit the influence of potential rivals, which it did by demonstrating its ability to develop European football. UEFA’s goal in doing so was not just sporting, it was also political: to create a “united Europe in football”. Although this goal was probably not shared to the same extent by all of UEFA’s leaders, its meaning at the time of the Cold War was clear. The current political context is, of course, very different to the situation in the 1950s and 1960s, but following a more political goal could help UEFA contest the power of the major clubs and their ambition – which appears increasingly achievable – of creating a closed European championship including only the best clubs, drawn mostly from Europe’s biggest championships. Although this kind of tournament would undoubtedly offer fans the highest quality football, it would diminish one of the most interesting aspects of European competitions: their ability to bring together (mostly thanks to television) people from different parts of Europe for at least 90 minutes. Bringing people together in this way does not create a European identity, but it provides a link to Europe for people who feel excluded from or uninterested in the European integration process.\textsuperscript{89}

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\textsuperscript{88} UEFA’s development in the 1960s has still not been studied in depth but a number of insights can be found in Vonnard, \textit{Creating a United Europe}, chapter 8, and Schotté, “La structuration.” More general information on European football’s development during the 1960s is provided by Dietschy, \textit{Histoire du football}, chapter 8; King, \textit{The European Ritual}, chapters 1 and 2; Sonntag, \textit{Les identités du football européen}, chapter 8; Dietschy, \textit{The Origins and Birth} (most notably the papers by McDougall and by Breuil and Constantin); Vonnard, Quin, and Bancel, \textit{Building Europe} (especially the contributions by Vonnard and by Schotté).

\textsuperscript{89} For more on this point, see Weil’s study of contemporary perceptions of Europe in a disadvantaged Paris neighbourhood: “Plutôt l’UEFA que l’UE!”.
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