

## Welcome to SD Europe's Executive Summary 2021/22

### Introduction

The season just ended has perhaps been the most difficult in the history of SD Europe. In the past 12 months, we have had to negotiate significant changes at the very top of the organisation. In August, Sofia Bohlin was appointed as the new Chair of the organisation in place of Diego Riva, who later stepped down from the board entirely. In March, Stuart Dykes replaced outgoing CEO Antonia Hagemann, and another director stepped down in June in Ulises Illan Frutos. Following the departure of Antonia, we then lost Arik Rosenstein at the end of May, after he received an offer he could not refuse from US Soccer. These changes would have been manageable enough were it not for the new footballing landscape we suddenly found ourselves in after the failed attempt by 12 elite clubs to form a European Super League, which not only threatened to destroy football in Europe as we know it, but also challenged the European Model of Sport and its key principles of open competition based on sporting merit, solidarity and autonomy.

That challenge led to all the football stakeholders re-evaluating their position in terms of each other and we witnessed a coming together in a show of solidarity against the attempt by the richest clubs to take an even bigger piece of the financial pie for themselves. The status of fans as a key stakeholder was enhanced by the role played by supporters in helping to defeat the Super League. With that, however, came a major challenge. The resulting governance review at UEFA as part of the discussions on the reform of European football opened up a doorway to meaningful supporter involvement in decision-making processes at the highest level, the aim being to enable supporters to advocate for their members, have a voice and input into decisions that affect them and their communities, and to strengthen the role of supporters within European football's governing body.

This is something SD Europe has lobbied for over many years. Yet with all the other football stakeholders embedded in the decision-making governance structures at UEFA being represented by a single body, the question facing the two European supporter organisations was how to go about determining which body can represent fans at this level. Against this background, the board of SD Europe agreed to enter into exploratory talks with FSE to discuss the various options available, eventually concluding that a merger of the two organisations was the best way to ensure the interests of our members were represented within UEFA. This is not without controversy, of course, and a heated debate has ensued within the SD Europe membership, with not all members in favour of a coming together of the two organisations.

The SD Europe board is tasked with representing the interests of its members at all times and did not take the decision to enter into merger negotiations with FSE lightly. The board is fully aware that a merger would mean the end of SD Europe as we know it. What is more important to the directors, however, is that the work of SD Europe is not only able to continue in its present form but also to grow and develop and become even better. This applies in particular to our work in the area of fan ownership, which we believe can only become stronger as a result of a merger. We are convinced that preserving our current status as a legitimate, representative and democratic supporter organisation with the regular funding needed to maintain a team of full- and part-time staff takes precedence over all other considerations, and that the risk to the work done by SD Europe since its launch in 2007 posed by losing this status is too high to contemplate as a serious option. It is now down to our members to decide whether we merge with FSE to bring about a powerful representative body for European football supporters and community-owned clubs in which the legacy of SD Europe can live on long into the future. We believe that the measures laid out in the merger principles document negotiated and agreed by representatives of the two organisations are the only serious way forward and recommend that our members vote to approve the merger at the AGM in Dublin on 17 July 2022.

### SD Europe activities

The Covid-19 pandemic continued to impact the work of the organisation well into 2022, causing delays to the Fans Matter and Kick Off Erasmus+ projects, for example, and reducing the scope of the Transfer Preparatory Action. Nevertheless, SD Europe achieved a number of highlights during the year. In October, we published *Clean Sheet: SD Europe's Path To Sustainability*. The report, which was developed in consultation with our wider network, aims to build an environmental action plan for SD Europe and its members and will hopefully form the basis of an Erasmus+ project application in the near future. In the same month, we partnered with KickIn! for an internal team and board of directors training session on diversity, equality and inclusion in football as part of our commitment to personal development.

On the European institutions front, SD Europe was granted observer status on the Council of Europe Committee on Safety & Security at Sporting Events for an additional three-year period, having originally been granted the status in January 2016. The Committee is the body in charge of monitoring the application of the 2016 Council of Europe Convention on Safety, Security and Service (the Saint-Denis Convention). This is an important part of the SLO Department's strategy as it helps to consolidate the involvement of supporter organisations in discussions about issues that affect fans across Europe. It also gives SD Europe the opportunity to collaborate with key stakeholders in the development of supporter-focused projects in accordance with the Standing Committee's integrated approach to safety, security and service at sports events. More details of SD Europe's work with the Council of Europe are provided in the SLO report below.

Over in Brussels, the EU Sports Policy Report prepared by Tomasz Frankowski MEP was approved by the European Parliament in

November. SD Europe was able to feed into the drafting process and many of our members contacted their MEPs in support of the report and its recommendations. The report “calls on the member states, sports governing bodies and clubs to acknowledge the status of fans in sport by involving them in governance and decision-making bodies. The recent crisis has shown that even though sport events can run without spectators, fan culture is an indispensable part of the sport experience. In this regard, it is important to acknowledge the status of fan organisations in sport by involving them in governance.”

The report also shares synergies with most of SD Europe’s positions shared with UEFA as part of the UEFA Convention in July 2021. In our position paper, we made our position clear on the required reform of European football:

- Vastly improved financial sustainability and responsibility within European football protecting clubs and leagues
- Consistent good governance involving ownership, fan representation in decision-making and the special status of fans
- Creation of greater parity for and growth in the women’s game
- Enhanced competitiveness and greater solidarity between clubs, leagues and UEFA, making the game fairer

The second point is of particular relevance given the potential merger with FSE to be decided by members at the AGM. The stakeholders participating in the Convention agreed that the game needs collective decision-making, a process that includes not just fans but also players. It is vital that the ills of the game are addressed by a balance of stakeholders, not by the same people and interests making the same decisions for the benefit of a few.

In November, SD Europe, FSE and European Leagues reached an agreement on principles to formalise the working relationship and future cooperation between the three organisations. Among other things, the principles noted that the football stakeholders share a joint responsibility for collective governance structures and should therefore have appropriate involvement in matters of legitimate interests in the European football governance model. In the year under discussion, representatives of both European supporter organisations attended the European Leagues general assemblies in Milan and Istanbul. Further, SD Europe has entered into talks with European League to ascertain the potential for working together in the areas of supporter liaison and environmental sustainability.

SD Europe now has a long tradition of developing EU projects to enhance our work in the areas of fan ownership and supporter liaison, and the 2021/22 season was no exception. Meetings and training sessions took place across Europe as part of our Fans Matter and Kick Off projects, while the Transfer Preparatory Action was launched in November. The highlight was the approval by the European Commission of our youth and democracy project Future of Football, which aims to encourage more young people between the ages of 16-24 to get involved in the running of their clubs.

SD Europe members continue to engage with the governing bodies in their countries to promote the interests of supporters, and a particularly successful example of this was seen in Germany in December when the German Football League (DFL) approved a resolution to change its club licensing requirements, ensuring that dialogue between fans and clubs is now a binding requirement to compete in the Bundesliga and Bundesliga 2. This was one of the recommendations of a task force established to discuss the future of the professional game in Germany, in which SD Europe members Unsere Kurve played a role. This development highlights the potential for achieving significant change of benefit to supporters through amendments to the licensing regulations, something SD Europe intends to continue pursuing at European level.

Elsewhere, SD Europe continued our successful SLO of the Month website feature and launched a new series of articles highlighting the work done by fans on their club boards, the aim being to use this to bring supporter directors closer together in a European network to exchange experience and provide mutual support. Additional podcasts were released on a variety of topics and members and the wider football community were kept up to date with the latest developments in the SD Europe world through our regular newsletter.

The decision by UEFA to invite SD Europe and FSE to attend the UEFA Congress in May, the first time this has happened, was another welcome development.

## **SLO report**

SD Europe’s SLO department began the year with three team members but ended with just two. After Antonia Hagemann left the CEO role, Stuart Dykes vacated his position as Head of SLO Development to succeed Antonia as CEO on 1 March. This meant that Lena Gustafson-Wiberg stepped up as department head, with Tony Ernst continuing to provide support. The changes had a knock-on effect on the work of the department, of course, and some parts of the work plan had to be scaled down or postponed. Nevertheless, the 2021/22 season was still a productive one for us.

As every year, the SLO Department worked to a defined strategy and work plan with a clear vision. We decided early on to focus on three main areas: 1) the SLO Education Programme delivered through the UEFA Academy, 2) the EU Preparatory Action TRANSFER and future Erasmus+ applications, and 3) a re-orientation of the SLO development work with national associations and leagues according to an agreed country breakdown.

For the SLO Education Programme, which Lena Gustafson-Wiberg leads in conjunction with UEFA, we delivered training to SLOs in six new countries: Germany, Portugal, France, Belgium, Norway and Romania. This takes this total of training programmes delivered to eight (Russia and Denmark being the other two), and we have sessions for two more countries planned and one more confirmed and lined up. The SLO Education Programme is SD Europe’s flagship and we are very proud to have fulfilled all our

obligations this season.

As far as the Transfer Preparatory Action is concerned, things ground to a halt due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The initial meeting with the project partners was hosted by the German Football League in Frankfurt in November, with all the plans set on the basis of a needs analysis conducted by the project's academic expert, but none of the exchange visits could go ahead given the restrictions on travel and gatherings. We still have high hopes for the project, however, and the new season will see as many exchange visits take place as possible.

We also managed to complete and submit a new EU Erasmus+ application. This project is about the development of higher education courses and occupational standards for football club supporter liaison officers. The decision from the European Commission is expected this autumn. If the application is approved, it will mark another milestone in the ongoing professionalisation of the SLO role.

Members will recall from the previous AGM that we had hoped to shape EU sports policy via a draft Council Resolution on Police Liaison with SLOs, the principal intellectual output of the 2018/19 LIAISE project. This was due to be submitted by the French Presidency to the Council of the European Union for adoption in the first half of 2022, but unfortunately that did not happen. The draft resolution is now set to be submitted by the Czech Presidency in the second half of this year.

The planned re-orientation of the SLO development work with the national associations and leagues according to an agreed country breakdown had to be re-assessed due to the heavy workload. New priorities have been defined and initial steps to resume the work after the break due to the pandemic are underway.

Elsewhere, the SLO Department completed the UEFA Practical Guide to Supporter Liaison, the follow-up document to the 2011 UEFA SLO Handbook. The Guide, which has also been translated into German and French, will form a constituent part of the training delivered through the UEFA Academy. On the tournament front, we submitted a report to the Council of Europe on the national team SLO work by the competing nations at UEFA 2020 and proposed recommendations for improving the service provided to supporters at major events, and we took part in the final meeting of the working group set up for this purpose. We also attended another meeting of the Council of Europe Ad Hoc Working Group on the preparations for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and sat on a panel at the annual Financial Times Business of Football Summit.

#### Selected highlights in the 2021/22 season

- **Position paper submitted to the UEFA Convention**
- **Contributed to the European Parliament Sports Report, which among things called for football supporters to be represented on decision-making, or decision-proposing, bodies at European, national and local level**
- **Developed and won Football for Future, a youth and democracy project that aims to facilitate strong youth participation, leadership and democratic decision-making in football clubs and fan organisations across Europe by creating spaces/lasting structures for democratic learning and helping young fans (aged 16-24) to take part in decision-making.**
- **Successfully submitted an Erasmus+ application for an SLO Higher Education and Occupational Standards project to (i) achieve a higher degree of professionalisation in the SLO work in European football through a consortium of universities that deliver high-quality professional education in the field of sport and (ii) define minimum occupational standards for football club SLOs across the EU and beyond.**
- **In line with the mandate given to us by our members, we set in motion the process to develop an Erasmus' application for a Green Project that aims to raise awareness for sustainability issues in the game and reduce the carbon footprint of football fans and clubs.**
- **Achieved a three-year extension of our Observer Status to the Council of Europe Committee on Safety and Security at Sports Events.**
- **Delivered six two-day sessions of the SLO Education Programme.**
- **Facilitated the publication of the UEFA Practical Guide to Supporter Liaison, the successor document to the 2011 UEFA SLO Handbook.**

That concludes our review of the 2021/22 season. We hope we can continue the work of SD Europe long into the future!

Stuart