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Judgment of the Court in Case C-680/21 | Royal Antwerp Football Club

Football: the rules of UEFA and the Belgian football association on 'home-grown players' could be contrary to EU law

A footballer and a Belgian club are challenging UEFA's rules and those of the Belgian football association that require a minimum number of 'home-grown players' to be included in teams. The Court holds that that requirement could infringe both competition rules and the free movement of workers. However, the national court in charge of the case will have to verify whether or not that is the case.

UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) requires football clubs to have a minimum number of 'home-grown players' in their teams. The Belgian football association (URBSFA) has adopted similar rules. In both cases, those rules define 'home-grown players' as players who are trained at national level, although UEFA's rules also refer to players trained within a given club.

A professional player and a Belgian club (Royal Antwerp) are contesting those rules before a Belgian court. That court decided to refer questions to the Court of Justice on this issue.

In its judgment, the Court confirms, first, that UEFA's rules and those of the URBSFA come under EU law, since they concern the exercise of an economic and professional activity. They must therefore respect competition rules and the freedoms of movement.

As regards **competition rules**, the Court next holds that the rules on home-grown players could have as their object or effect the restriction of the possibility for clubs to compete with each other by recruiting talented players, regardless of where they were trained. High-level football is a sector where talent and merit play an essential role. However, it will be for the national court to determine whether those rules restrict competition as a result of their very object or because of their actual or potential effects. If that proves to be the case, it will nevertheless remain possible for UEFA and the URBSFA to demonstrate that those rules may be justified under the conditions recalled by the Court in its judgment.

As regards **the free movement of workers**, the Court holds that the rules in question may give rise to **indirect discrimination, based on nationality**, against players coming from other Member States. Here again, however, it remains possible for UEFA and the URBSFA **to demonstrate that those rules nevertheless encourage recruitment and training, and that they are proportionate to that objective.**

NOTE: A reference for a preliminary ruling allows the courts and tribunals of the Member States, in disputes which have been brought before them, to refer questions to the Court of Justice about the interpretation of European Union law or the validity of a European Union act. The Court of Justice does not decide the dispute itself. It is for the national court or tribunal to dispose of the case in accordance with the Court's decision, which is similarly binding on other national courts or tribunals before which a similar issue is raised.

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The [full text and, as the case may be, the abstract](#) of the judgment is published on the CURIA website on the day of delivery.

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