

Axel Hellmann and Oliver Leki  
CEOs  
DFL Deutsche Fußball Liga GmbH  
Guiollettstraße 44-46  
60325 Frankfurt am Main  
Germany

June 13, 2023

RE: DFL's ongoing business relationship with Russia

Dear Mr. Hellmann and Mr. Leki,

We write to you as [B4Ukraine](#), a coalition of Ukrainian and international civil society organizations working to curtail the financial resources enabling the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In the spirit of respect for the fundamental rights of all people, the rules-based international order, and a prosperous global economy, we expect companies to demonstrate public support for the people, democracy, and territorial integrity of Ukraine, opposition to Russia's war of aggression, and alignment with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs).

We request an urgent dialogue regarding potential inconsistencies between DFL Deutsche Fußball Liga GmbH (DFL's) statements and the DFL's ongoing operations and relationships in Russia that may contribute to, or be linked with, human rights harms.

It has been over one year since Russia invaded Ukraine and the devastating impacts continue to shock the global conscience and shake the global economy. Russia is violating international humanitarian law (IHL), including war crimes and crimes against humanity, through attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure (e.g., mass executions, sexual violence, torture, forcible transfer of civilians). More than 24,000 Ukrainian civilians have been killed and injured and millions more have been forced to flee their homes, creating one of the largest humanitarian and refugee crises of modern times. In recognition of the severity of abuses, in March 2023 the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin to answer war crimes charges.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, recent developments in Russia point to an expanding universe of financial, legal, and reputational risks facing those with remaining presence in the country.

In response to this unprovoked and unjustified war,<sup>2</sup> according to the Kyiv School of Economics Institute's [#LeaveRussia company tracker](#) many companies have already left Russia. However, the DFL is continuing to broadcast German football in Russia, on the Russian television channel Match TV.

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<sup>1</sup> International Criminal Court, "Situation in Ukraine: ICC judges issue arrest warrants against Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova," March 17, 2023, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-ukraine-icc-judges-issue-arrest-warrants-against-vladimir-vladimirovich-putin-and> (accessed March 22, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> The UN General Assembly condemned Russia's "aggression against Ukraine" and demanded that Moscow "unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders."

The DFL's decision to continue its relationship with Match TV in Russia, despite the ongoing war against Ukraine and Russian censorship, raises concerns about the message the DFL is sending and its potential impact. While the DFL claims that it wants to reach the Russian population with messages of peace ("kicking for peace"),<sup>3</sup> this response seems tone-deaf considering the millions of suffering Ukrainians who lack the privilege of watching football matches in safety. By maintaining its presence in Russia, the DFL inadvertently contributes to the normalization of everyday life in a country engaged in illegal aggression. It sends a signal to both the Russian population and the world that despite Russia's aggressive actions, life continues as usual, with access to high-quality German broadcasting and football matches. This legitimizes the war through the association with the DFL's reputable brand name. The DFL is an influential organization which must recognise its responsibility and human rights obligations in light of the particular situations of this war. DFL must consider the ethical implications of its decision and the potential harm it may cause. Taking a principled stance against the aggression and human rights violations by suspending its broadcasting in Russia would send a message of solidarity with the victims and demonstrate a commitment to peace and justice.

Other Leagues have already recognised this and left Russia. The Premier League, the English football league, and the French Ligue 1 have all taken steps to prevent broadcasting in the Russian Federation and "terminated their TV contracts in Russia at the beginning of March."<sup>4</sup> The decision of the 20 Premier League clubs was reportedly unanimous.<sup>5</sup> The opinion and positions of all the Bundesliga clubs appears to be the same, as all clubs condemn Russia's war. Schalke 04 terminated its partnership with Gazprom as a response to the invasion, and other clubs expressed their solidarity with Ukraine.<sup>6</sup> FIFA and UEFA announced that Russian clubs and national teams are suspended in all their football competitions after Poland, Sweden and Czech Republic refused to play against Russia.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, a number of Scandinavian football associations are re-examining and terminating their contracts with corporations, particularly Mondelez, who are still operating in Russia.<sup>8</sup> The Swedish Football Association was reported to have suspended its advertising campaign with Marabou, which is owned by Mondelez. The Danish Football Association is pausing all active campaigns with Marabou and the women's national team on digital platforms and social media.<sup>9</sup> The Finnish Ice Hockey Federation is enquiring Mondelez for explanations.<sup>10</sup> We are urging the DFL to follow in these footsteps and terminate its relationship with the Mondelez-owned signature brand Milka (and any other Mondelez owned brand) as its corporate sponsors.

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<sup>3</sup> Caspar Buses, "Kick for Peace," *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, April 29, 2022, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/medien/dfl-fussball-bundesliga-russisches-fernsehen-match-tv-1.5575240> (accessed June 12, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> Jens Krepela, "The Bundesliga and its business in Russia," *DW*, June 4, 2022, <https://amp.dw.com/de/bundesliga-zensur-durch-russland-vertrag-dfl/a-61376745> (accessed June 12, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Davis VanOpdorp and Janek Speight, "Schalke to end partnership with Gazprom," *DW*, February 28, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/schalke-to-end-sponsorship-agreement-with-gazprom/a-60930045> (accessed June 12, 2023).

<sup>7</sup> Chuck Penfold, Matt Pearson, and Janek Speight, "FIFA, UEFA suspend Russian clubs, national teams," *DW*, February 28, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/fifa-uefa-suspend-russian-clubs-national-teams-from-all-competitions/a-60928571> (accessed June 12, 2023).

<sup>8</sup> Mondelez was recently placed on the Sponsors of War list of the Ukrainian Government. NACP, "Sponsors of War – Mondelez," <https://sanctions.nazk.gov.ua/en/boycott/30/> (accessed June 12, 2023).

<sup>9</sup> SportTV2, "DBU pauses campaigns with Marabou and the women's national team," June 3, 2023, <https://sport.tv2.dk/fodbold/2023-06-03-dbu-saetter-kampagner-med-marabou-og-kvindelandsholdet-paa-pa-use> (accessed June 12, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> Ari Virtanen, The Ice Hockey Federation investigates the sponsor's activities in Russia - "We make decisions in peace," *Helsingin Sanomat*, June 3, 2023, <https://www.hs.fi/urheilu/art-2000009632009.html> (accessed June 12, 2023).

By withdrawing from Russia, the DFL would not only make a symbolic gesture against the war but also avoid indirectly supporting the Putin regime. Match TV was founded in 1998 by Gazprom, the state-owned Russian energy company, and is now part of Gazprom Media Holding, which is considered to be close to the government.<sup>11</sup>

This action would align with the values of peace, human rights, and justice that the DFL and DFB claim to uphold. Bernd Neuendorf, the President of DFB says that “Human rights are universal and binding all over the world” and the German national team has long stood by their position on human rights: “It wasn't about making a political statement — human rights are non-negotiable.”<sup>12</sup>

We are reaching out to inquire about the DFL's plans regarding its relationship with Match TV or any other broadcasting channels or operations in Russia. Specifically, we would like to know if and when the DFL intends to terminate these partnerships. Additionally, we are interested in understanding the duration of the current contract, the financial gains derived from the contract, and the extent of the DFL's financial contribution in Russia.

In consideration of the above points, we are asking DFL to:

- Immediately cease all operations and presence in Russia and completely exit the Russian market.
- Refrain from any future business, trade, or investment in Russia until Russia ends its war in Ukraine, territorial integrity of Ukraine is restored, and accountability imposed for war crimes and the destruction of Ukrainian infrastructure and property.
- Establish and implement comprehensive human rights due diligence measures for any responsible exit from or re-engagement with Russia.

We request an urgent dialogue with DFL's relevant senior management and staff to discuss the company's ongoing activities and relationships in Russia, associated risks to the people of Ukraine and the company. Please contact the B4Ukraine Coalition at [contact@b4ukraine.org](mailto:contact@b4ukraine.org) to schedule a call. We kindly ask for your response by 5:00pm CET, June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

Sincerely,

The B4Ukraine Coalition

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<sup>11</sup> Andrea Schultke, “Bundesliga broadcast in Russia cancelled,” Deutschlandfunk, April 5, 2022, <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/df1-russland-bundesliga-zensur-tv-100.html> (accessed June 12, 2023).

<sup>12</sup> James Thorogood “Germany players make World Cup human rights protest,” *DW*, November 23, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-players-make-world-cup-human-rights-protest/a-63861249> (accessed June 12, 2023); AP, “German soccer boss criticizes FIFA on human rights campaigns,” November 18, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/world-cup-sports-soccer-germany-middle-east-d9e34d076b434804c472efacddcaeaf8> (accessed June 12, 2023).