

Letter to FIFA

**Attn: Mr. Gianni Infantino, FIFA President
Ms. Fatma Samoura, FIFA Secretary General**

**Re: Albania, issues with FAA member elections
FAA elections compromised**

Dear Mr. President
Dear Ms. Secretary General

This letter intends to transmit some concerns in relation with issues raised on the recently held election process in the Regional Football Association of Tirana (RFAT), member of Football Association of Albania (FAA).

I am availing myself the opportunity to refer you in the quality of the registered candidate for the position of the RFAT President. Please note that issues referred here, are far more important than the outcomes of my individual candidacy.

When it comes to internal elections processes, RFAT and FAA have no independent dispute resolution organs. Albania Chamber of Arbitration for Sports is temporarily not operational while addressing CAS Lausanne is entirely not applicable. So, this letter is the only feasible action I can undertake to incite awareness regarding some manners and practices which I would describe as harmful for football in Albania and beyond.

Background.

RFAT and seven other regional associations were acknowledged members of FAA with its statutory amendments adopted by General Assembly (GA) of 2011. Shockingly, RFAT got registered as legal entity only in 2018. However, this inconvenience did not affect the FAA firmness to invite RFAT voting delegate in all its GA meetings that took place between 2012-2020. With FAA Statute amendments passed in 2020, the number of voting delegates RFAT provides to the FAA GA was increased to eight as the overall number of delegates the regional associations provide increased to twenty-six.

I need to clarify that regardless of its statutory provisions, RFAT has never engaged in football organization activities. It has a President and a General Secretary (GS) but no personnel, no working committees, no structures of any kind. RFAT has never passed a GA regulation (alike FIFA Standing Orders and/or UEFA Rules of Procedures) or a General assembly verification committee (substantial GA integrity certifying body required by the Statutes).

Under these circumstances, the deduction that RFAT significance lies only with providing preferred voting delegates for the FAA GA seems fairly probable. On the other hand, the past RFAT GA resolutions are far from guaranteed to have been in line with the real will of Tirana football community. Unfortunately, the same story can be told for the other seven regional football associations that altogether can provide almost half of the votes to the AFA GA.

Election issues.

My campaign for the candidacy to the chairmanship of RFAT was confronted with a situation that I would describe as embarrassing, if we take into consideration that it happened under auspices and full responsibility of a FIFA/UEFA member association.

With no GA Regulation and no Verification Committee in place, all procedures and decisions were handled by the RFAT General Secretary who is in the same time member of FAA DC. The GA Meeting notification and invitation was distributed electronically to members on Dec 23rd, 2021. Members were required to provide within the deadline January 3rd (in midst of holidays) the names of their voting delegate without mentioning anything on proposals for presidential candidates. The text of the invitation did not indicate the number of the delegates the members are entitled to. This very important piece of information was seemingly transmitted orally or telephonically later on. After the deadline of January 3rd no delegates list was made public or distributed to members. Despite asking repeatedly in writing, I was never sent any kind of information on the number of the voting delegates and names. No information was given even about registered candidates I would compete with. I received an invitation to enter the GA meeting just the day before but I was refused to take with me a legal advisor. My insisting requests found an insisting silence by the RFAT GS, a behavior that cannot be named other than offensive, non-ethical and far from being in the spirit a football organization manager should instill.

Couple of days before the GA Meeting, member organizations were suddenly notified via email that FAA decided to hold its GA Meeting on Feb. 3rd 2022. Members were instructed to deliver till 8:30 of the GA Meeting day their proposals for the delegates to FAA GA, candidates for FAA president and delegates for FAA EC. Needles to state that none of these items were part of GA final agenda already distributed on January 14th. Statute stipulates that the final agenda cannot be modified except by decision of two thirds of GA meeting. Furthermore, the number of the delegates RFAT should now send to FAA GA was reduced to six compared with eight it was in the last FAA GA held by mid-2021. This decision made in the meeting the FAA Verification Committee held on Jan 10th, 2022, left without options interested parties to object or appeal it.

Delegates entered in the Meeting hall (FAA central premises) only after passing three security checks. Security guards allowed to pass only those whose names were found in the lists provided by an unknown authority acting instead of GA verification committee. Legal advisers were certainly not allowed to enter despite holding authorizations from represented member entities.

Two FAA EC members, the former RFAT President (with mandate expired weeks ago) and the RFAT GS had decided to sit themselves in the Meeting's leading table. The Meeting Secretariat was instituted with FAA GS and FAA Legal Department Director. Internet and mobile phone signal were not available except to FAA staff, so no communication with legal advisors left at the gates was possible for the other participants.

A representative of a member association, employee of FAA in the same time, was appointed to inform the GA meeting that sixty-seven delegates were present in the meeting hall. He specified also the number of delegates each member had sent in the GA Meeting with no reference made on the decision maker authority. Such a number was surprisingly high and quite unverifiable because no official report with data and criteria followed was distributed. Some delegates stated they saw delegates never seen before in football related activities despite the community is relatively small and everybody meets everybody in match-days. The statutory requirement for delegate to belong to the member organization he/she represents was not verified or reported as met. Under the circumstance, at least 20 delegates abandoned the GA Meeting stating their disagreement with what was exposed there. I joined their action fully determined to take the issue under legal advisory.

FAA fault.

All above is not simply a failure of RFAT to handle the GA event organization and meet the standards for fair elections. RFAT is left to be a virtual organization which simply takes instructions and human resources from FAA. In reality, FAA top officials seem really not to be able to distinguish the difference between a member organization and a subordinate structure when talking about regional associations.

Months before the RFAF GA was notified, FAA employees went fully involved in RFAT election process. On ready-made forms they collected signatures from many member entities by promising favors or menacing punishment to those refusing to sign. The purpose was to make sure no candidate other than the selected one could register and the voting delegates list could be made only with "duly" oriented people.

Moreover, late in the process, we got information on member representatives being pressured to sign letters appointing delegates other than those specified within the statutory deadline. Such letters could have become useful to alter the original voting delegates' list by being dated falsely and protocolled as received within official deadline. Such a forgery, certainly unlawful, can indeed provide an explanation why the list of the voting delegates was never made public.

It is now clear to all community and public opinion that what is happening with elections at RFAT and other regional associations is inseparable with FAA presidential and EC member elections. With quite few voting delegates elected by now through very distrustful processes, the credibility of FAA elections may be very close to become compromised. The courts' interventions that will probably follow will surely add even more confusion to the process and the FAA reputation will be further broken. My firm conviction is that the FAA higher management is certainly the first to be blamed for inciting and then letting all this to unfold.

Dear Mr. President

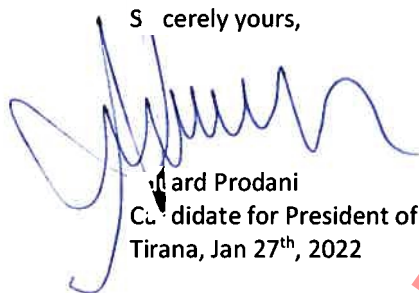
Dear Ms. Secretary General

I strongly believe that as a member of FIFA and UEFA, in addition to organizing football competitions, FAA has also an important role to play in promoting the best possible practices in football governance, football institutional development and strengthening, football image promotion, etc. When it comes to football good governance, fair elections and football public image FAA should act as an example to be followed by its members and the whole football community in the Country.

Therefore, I claim your attention and consequently your involvement in the lines you deem most appropriate to discourage the persistence of such embarrassing acts and situations. Football is a very popular sport in Albania. What happens in football becomes soon a matter of public judgement. Your involvement will be crucial to the efforts for protecting football and its image in this part of the World as well.

I will not hesitate to keep you informed on any other practices and behaviors I will deem harmful to football.

Sincerely yours,



Ilir Prodhani
Candidate for President of RFAT
Tirana, Jan 27th, 2022

cc: Theodore Theodoridis
Kavin Lamour
Angelo Rigopoulos
Emilio Garcia