

Euro 2012 to stay with 16 teams: hosts present bids

European football officials decided Tuesday against extending the European Championships from 16 to 24 finalists in 2012.

'We have decided today that there will be no expansion of the tournament to 24 teams,' UEFA vice-president Gerhard Mayer-Vorfelder said after an executive committee meeting in Cardiff, Wales.

The decision comes on the eve of a decision by the UEFA board on the hosts for the 2012 tournament. Three candidates are in the running: Italy, Croatia-Hungary jointly and Poland-Ukraine jointly.

UEFA, Europe's ruling body for football, had commissioned a study at the beginning of the year into the idea of a 24-team tournament from 2012.

Germany's Mayer-Vorfelder said he believed the decision to retain a 16-team format for the tournament was the correct one.

With 53 member associations in UEFA it meant that roughly one in three of the continent's football nations were already represented, he said.

The decision will make the organization of the 2012 tournament easier for the hosts, especially for either of the two joint host candidates from eastern [Europe](#) should they be successful in Wednesday's vote.

The Euro 2012 hosts will be decided in a secret ballot by the 14-member executive committee under the chairmanship of president Michel Platini.

The candidates were Tuesday making their final presentations before the committee assesses a UEFA evaluation report and votes Wednesday.

The evaluation report includes criteria such as transport, infrastructure, legal conditions, accommodation and security, plus recommendations put forward by the UEFA national teams committee.

Italy are regarded by some as favourites to host Euro 2012, but like other bidders they have been plagued by domestic problems.

The ongoing corruption scandal and the death of a policeman during fan riots have not helped Italy's bid to win the tournament for the second time since 1980.

All professional and amateur football was suspended in Italy in February after a policeman was killed at a Serie A match between Catania and Palermo.

However the Italian delegation in Wales, led by Giancarlo Abete, the newly elected president of the Italian football federation (FIGC), was confident.

'I am optimistic,' said Luca Pancalli, the extraordinary commissioner for the Italian Football Federation.

'Paradoxically, I would have had many more doubts if what has happened had not taken place,' he added.

There is meanwhile sympathy within the UEFA executive for the idea of holding the tournament in the east of Europe. Since the tournament began in 1960, only Yugoslavia in 1976 of the continent's eastern countries has been a host.

The Polish and Ukrainian presidents, Lech Kaczynski and Viktor Yushchenko respectively, have added their political weight to their countries' joint bid.

Hungary's joint bid with Croatia is to be supported by a message from space from Hungarian-born US space tourist Charles Simonyi and a television broadcast from football legend Ferenc Puskas recorded before his death in November last year.

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