

## UEFA and FIFA officials accused of being “enablers” of a corrupt system

- EP Committee of Inquiry into Money Laundering looks into “epidemic” tax evasion in football
- MEPs question sector on possible “corrupt system”
- Hearing prompted by “Football Leaks” website

**Representatives of the top governing bodies for European and global football decline to condemn top players accused or convicted of massive tax evasion.**

Despite facing intense and often hostile questioning by MEPs -- including an accusation that they were enablers of a corrupt system -- officials from football's top bodies, UEFA and FIFA, sidestepped an invitation to openly criticise footballers, including Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi, during a public hearing of the Committee of Inquiry into Money laundering, tax avoidance and tax evasion (PANA).

Spanish footballer Messi and his father were found guilty of defrauding Spain of €4.1 million in tax and hiding the money in shell companies in Belize and Uruguay. Ronaldo, also named during the hearing, is currently battling charges of evading €14.7 million in tax.

### Fair play, fair taxes

One of the co-rapporteurs of the PANA Committee, Jeppe Kofod (DE, S&D) criticised the lax attitude of FC Barcelona in the face of Messi's conviction. He pointed to the club's social media campaign, launched, in the wake of the player's conviction, with the hashtag #WeAreAllLeoMessi

“You are for fair play, shouldn't you also be for fair taxes?” Mr Kofod asked Kimberly Morris, Head of Global Transfers & Compliance at FIFA and Julien Zylberstein, legal counsel at UEFA. But both officials ducked an invitation to condemn either the player or the club, with Ms Morris of

FIFA saying the matter “was more the purview of tax authorities.”

Mr Zylberstein said “we believe tax evasion is a clear threat to the social values of football and to the regulatory framework and to the integrity of the broader game. Having said that, it’s up to the regulatory authorities”.

The PANA committee Chairman, Werner Langer (DE, EPP) described the answers as “not completely satisfactory.”

### **“Double talk” by UEFA and FIFA**

He echoed the feelings of many MEPs, including Louis Michel (BE, ALDE), who accused the officials of “a magnificent example of double talk” and condemned their reluctance to criticise players convicted of tax evasion.

“These people are totally against the values you say you defend,” he said.

Another panellist, Merijn Rengers, a journalist with NRC Handelsblad -- part of the media consortium which published the findings of financial wrongdoing in the world of soccer -- said the desire to evade tax was “epidemic” in the industry and the attitude embraced the biggest clubs, players and agents. “Everybody is using tax advisors to evade tax,” he said.

He also raised concerns about the lack of transparency over third-party ownership, which traditionally involves ownership of a payer’s economic rights by third-parties, such as agents, management agencies or other investors. This trend had now extended to whole football clubs.

The representatives of UEFA and FIFA continued to face hostile questioning throughout the session, with one MEP asking whether it was possible that the regulatory bodies had become as corrupt as the industry. The UEFA official replied that the body had passed a series of modernising reforms in 2017, which included term limits for the UEFA president.

Watch the [full video recording of the hearing](#)

### Further information

[Link](#)  
to Committee of Inquiry into Money Laundering, Tax Avoidance and Tax Evasion

[Audiovisual material for professionals](#)

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