



# KOSOVO

## COMPROMISE 2007

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## What about the lands that football forgot?

By Steve Menary, Sportingo

[http://www.sportingo.com/football/a10632\\_england-world-cup-but-what-about-lands-that-football-forgot](http://www.sportingo.com/football/a10632_england-world-cup-but-what-about-lands-that-football-forgot)

Little Montenegro are chasing a place at South Africa 2010 – it may be a hopeless cause, but they are likely to be the last new members of FIFA's global family for some time.

When Europe's national teams began qualifying for the 2010 World Cup, UEFA's newest member – Montenegro – joined the chase for a place in South Africa.

Montenegro looks likely to be the last new UEFA member for some time, even though two more 'countries' are looking to join.

The problem for the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and Kosovo is that not everyone believes they can be deemed countries.

Cyprus was a British colony until securing independence in 1960 but the island's Greek and Turkish communities had always been at odds – especially on the football field.

Teams from both communities played in an all-island league until 1955, when Çetinkaya, the strongest Turkish Cypriot side and last winners of the all-island league in 1952-53, were barred from playing a match against a Greek Cypriot side, Pezoporikos, in the capital Nicosia.

The Turkish Cypriot sides split off and formed their own federation, the Kıbrıs Türk Futbol Federasyonu (KTFF) that year. When independence was secured, the Turkish Cypriots insisted the deal included separate sporting bodies for the two feuding communities.

As inter-communal violence got worse, the Turkish Cypriots retreated to the north of the island and in 1974 a Greek-inspired coup prompted Turkey to invade, leaving 6,000 people dead and many homeless.

After this invasion, the KTFF organised ad hoc 'international' matches against the likes of Saudi Arabia, Libya, Malaysia and Turkey. No attempt was made to join FIFA but these friendlies were played with tacit approval of then FIFA general secretary Dr Helmut Kaiser.

In 1983, that ended when the TRNC declared itself a republic under hard-line



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nationalist leader Rauf Denktas. That declaration has only ever been recognised by Turkey, and the KTFF were left in international isolation and their footballers in a curious limbo.

The obvious place for ambitious players wanting to play professionally was Turkey, but to the Turks, the TRNC was a foreign country and their footballers were treated as overseas players.

One Turkish Cypriot, Sabri Senden, signed as a professional for Greek Cypriot first division side Nea Salamina a few years ago but was denounced as a “weak character” by President Denktas.

In 2004, Denktas was replaced as the TRNC’s president by the moderate Mehmet Ali Talat, who favoured uniting the island under a United Nations (UN) plan, which also allows for separate sporting teams following the UK model.

The TRNC has used football to try to establish the idea of Northern Cyprus as a state in the eyes of the rest of the world, with ‘international’ matches played against the likes of Lapland, Zanzibar and Gibraltar.

This was ignored by UEFA and FIFA until Luton Town visited the TRNC in summer 2007 for a pre-season training camp. A friendly was organised against Çetinkaya but the Greek Cypriots objected and the match was cancelled.

In response, TRNC politicians cancelled talks with their counterparts in the south and FIFA finally intervened and asked the two bodies for talks, which are ongoing.

A key player is Marios Lefkaritis, UEFA’s honorary treasurer and one of two delegates elected specifically on to UEFA’s executive to represent smaller nations, along with Malta’s Joe Mifsud. Lefkaritis also joined the FIFA executive last year.

For would-be members, trying to break into the FIFA elite involves winning over powerbrokers such as Lefkaritis or Russia’s Viacheslav Koloskov in the case of Kosovo.

Koloskov is also on the FIFA executive and a key ally of Serbia, from whom Kosovo universally seceded in February this year after being run under a UN mandate since the end of the Balkans War.

The Serbs vehemently dispute Kosovo’s independent status and, while FIFA may laughably insist politics has no place in sport, both Serbia and their backers in Moscow are likely to do whatever they can to deny Kosovo the chance to play international football. The Greeks and the Cypriots are doing the same.

UEFA tweaked their entry requirements a few years ago to keep out Gibraltar – and



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appease Spain – and new members must now be recognised as a country by the UN.

Montenegro secured that easily enough, but neither the TRNC nor Kosovo are likely to join them any time soon and footballers in both places look likely to remain isolated for some time.

*Steve Menary is the author of 'Outcasts! The Lands That FIFA Forgot' (Know The Score Books, 2007).*