

England shows the way for members to tackle Fifa crisis

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From Prof Roger Pielke, Jr.

Sir, Fifa, the international body that governs football, finds itself spiralling towards a crisis in its legitimacy ("[Sponsors cry foul over infighting at Fifa](#)", May 31). The new allegations of corruption surfacing almost daily might suggest that Fifa sits out of reach of mechanisms of accountability to its member states. But such a judgment would be premature.

The European Court of Justice has ruled on several occasions that, as an economic activity, football is subject to European law, with important decisions having been rendered on issues such as the mobility of players between teams and sports disciplinary rulings.

Efforts to hold Fifa accountable have also been brought to the ECJ. For example, in 2006 a lawsuit was brought by Sporting Charleroi, a Belgian club (with the support of 18 of the largest clubs across Europe), against Fifa over compensation for players injured in international competition. The lawsuit was ultimately settled out of court, and it clearly compelled Fifa to act.

The biggest obstacle to reform of Fifa is likely not its independence from mechanisms of accountability, but rather the interest of affected parties to wield those mechanisms in pursuit of change. Ultimately, like other international organisations, Fifa is unlikely to see constructive reforms unless participating nations take a leadership role. David Cameron's recent intervention on the pending Fifa election, Lord Triesman's recent House of Commons testimony alleging Fifa corruption and the Football Association's decision to abstain from the coming Fifa presidential election suggests England may be warming to this challenge.

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