



C/2024/2272

2.4.2024

**Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber) of 21 December 2023 (request for a preliminary ruling from the Tribunal de première instance francophone de Bruxelles — Belgium) — UL, SA Royal Antwerp Football Club v Union royale belge des sociétés de football association ASBL (URBSFA)**

(Case C-680/21, <sup>(1)</sup> Royal Antwerp Football Club)

*(Reference for a preliminary ruling — Competition — Internal market — Rules introduced by international and national sports associations — Professional football — Private law entities vested with regulatory, control and sanctioning powers — Rules requiring professional football clubs to use a minimum number of ‘home-grown’ players — Article 101(1) TFEU — Decision by an association of undertakings adversely affecting competition — Concepts of anticompetitive ‘object’ and ‘effect’ — Exemption under Article 101(3) TFEU — Conditions — Article 45 TFEU — Indirect discrimination on the basis of nationality — Restriction on the freedom of movement for workers — Justification — Conditions — Burden of proof)*

(C/2024/2272)

Language of the case: French

**Referring court**

Tribunal de première instance francophone de Bruxelles

**Parties to the main proceedings**

Applicants: UL, SA Royal Antwerp Football Club

Defendant: Union royale belge des sociétés de football association ASBL (URBSFA)

Intervening party: Union des associations européennes de football (UEFA)

**Operative part of the judgment**

1. Article 101(1) TFEU must be interpreted as precluding rules that have been adopted by an association responsible for organising football competitions at European level and implemented both by that association and by its member national football associations, and which require each club participating in those competitions to enter in the list of its players and to include on the match sheet a minimum number of players trained either by that club itself or within the territory of the national association to which that club is affiliated, and rules that have been adopted by an association responsible for organising football competitions at national level, and which require each club participating in those competitions to enter in the list of its players and to include on the match sheet a minimum number of players trained in the territory of that association, if it is established, first, that those decisions by associations of undertakings are liable to affect trade between Member States and, second, that they have either as their object or their effect the restriction of competition between professional football clubs, unless, in the second of those scenarios, it is demonstrated, through convincing arguments and evidence, that they are both justified by the pursuit of one or more objectives that are legitimate and strictly necessary for that purpose..
2. Article 101(3) TFEU must be interpreted as meaning that it allows such decisions by associations of undertakings, if they prove to be contrary to paragraph 1 of that article, to benefit from an exemption to the application of that paragraph only if it is demonstrated, through convincing arguments and evidence, that all of the conditions required for that purpose are satisfied.
3. Article 45 TFEU must be interpreted as precluding rules which have been adopted by an association responsible for organising football competitions at national level, and which require each club participating in those competitions to enter in the list of its players and to include on the match sheet a minimum number of players trained in the territorial jurisdiction of that association, unless it is established that those rules are suitable for ensuring, in a consistent and systematic manner, the attainment of the objective of encouraging, at local level, the recruitment and training of young professional football players, and that they do not go beyond what is necessary to achieve that objective.

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<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 73, 14.2.2022.