

Counting down to 2012

2008-04-14



In 2012 Poland and Ukraine will jointly be hosting the European Football Championships. POLISH MARKET talks to Polish Minister of Sports and Tourism Mirosław Drzewiecki about preparations for the event.

Q: Some newspapers abroad have blamed Poland and Ukraine for delays in preparations to Euro 2012. Are there any such delays on the part of Poland? Are you aware of any on the part of Ukraine?

A: The 2012 Euro Cup is a joint undertaking by Poland and Ukraine but let me focus mainly on tasks that have to be carried out in Poland. Poland's preparations for Euro 2012 have to be divided into two stages. The first started on 18 April 2007, that is when we won the bid to host the European championships and ended on 19 November of that same year. A critical report by independent UEFA experts on the state of preparations in Poland for the event covers that stage. I agree that little was done over that period and the unstable political situation and early parliamentary elections in Poland and Ukraine added to the delay. However, as of November 19, 2007 preparations in Poland have been stepped up. That was corroborated in UEFA's successive report which took note of the major progress made in this respect and stressed the positive changes in project reporting and management. The Ministry of Sports and Tourism working in tandem with cities, the PL 2012 company tasked with preparing the infrastructure for the Euro 2012 championships in Poland and the Polish Football Association (PZPN) worked out a joint methodology of drawing up reports and integrated presentations for UEFA. We have received a detailed timetable of things to be done and we observe the deadlines set by UEFA to the letter.

Q: What will be the final cost to Poland of hosting the 2012 Cup?

A: To calculate the cost of organising the event, investment expenditures directly

connected with the football championships have to be separated from those that would have to be made anyhow. It's really hard to quote the total cost at this moment. We are building roads, hotels and stadiums, modernizing airfields and railways not just on account of the championships but mainly because these undertakings are indispensable for the country's growth and development. The Euro 2012 event is an economic catalyst for changes that would have to be introduced sooner or later. The football championships will last a few weeks while investments made over the next few years will serve their purposes for many long years.

Q: Do you already know on how many football stadiums – four, six or perhaps five - will the final tournament be played in Poland?

A: That is to be ultimately decided by UEFA. UEFA took a reasonable approach on that matter by not closing the list of cities-organisers on March 3 and letting the Euro 2012-related investments go on in all.

Q: But do you have any favourites, perhaps?

A: No, and I think that all the cities should be preparing themselves for the event with equal commitment. Several weeks ago we met with all the six cities being considered to hear their presentations. What we got were six entirely different visions of organizing the tournament and I had the impression as if the city representatives came from six different countries. So I told the PL 2012 company that as of then all such presentations be prepared in a uniform way. The uniform formula that was subsequently presented to UEFA representatives on April 3d and 4th represented a definite improvement in reporting quality. The professional presentation by the cities proved that business management of the preparations brings expected, positive results.

Q: It is said that one hundred or more Polish towns have officially submitted proposals to perform as locations of residence and training centres for Euro 2012 players....

A: 110 such proposals were received and passed on to UEFA. All the applications meet the basic criteria defined by UEFA in terms of distance from airports, hotel standards and availability of appropriate training facilities. UEFA delegates will visit the locations this spring. Our task will be to amend the Council of Ministers' ordinance on EURO 2012 undertakings by including infrastructure investments specified by the towns and required for organising the event. This amendment designed to facilitate administration procedures will be affected within the next few weeks. The residence and training centres must be ready for use in 2010. The PZPN national football union will select 16 recommended by UEFA but the final decision will be taken by those responsible for arranging facilities needed by the respective national football teams participating in the championships.

Q: Stadiums, hotels, road infrastructure, airports, railway network, security.... which of these Euro 2012-related blocks of problems are in your view most important to ensure the Cup's success?

A: Each of these problem blocks is important and each demands immense effort and commitment. The things most vital for the EURO 2012 event consist of stadiums, residence and training centres as well as access roads. Stadium concepts are already in readiness, projects have been prepared by proven architectural workshops, financial guarantees are in place, bidding procedures will start shortly. The basic issue, of course, are stadiums because no spectacle can be performed without a stage. Good roads, fast trains and modern airports are needed to bring performers and audience to the theatre. To ensure full EURO 2012 success, we need to prepare the whole infrastructure which, I admit is still far from perfect. But Poland is not a third world country. New major investments are launched and big events are being organized in this country each year with quite success. Euro 2012 has set a concrete deadline for completing undertakings which we would have to measure up anyhow. Typically for Poles, we like to have a fixed date by which work must be completed. This has a mobilising effect. In that sense, EURO 2012 has become a deadline for Poland of completing quite a number of important undertakings which will transform this country for the better in terms of civilisation standards. It depends solely on us how we'll meet that challenge.

Interviewer: Jacek Świdziński