

Crimean Clubs to Join Russian Soccer League

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The  **Moscow Times**

The Russian Football Union has confirmed plans to bring the two Crimean soccer clubs currently playing in the Ukrainian Premier League over to the Russian league system.

The territory of Crimea became part of Russia last week after the Black Sea region held a referendum that saw voters choose to rejoin Russia after 60 years as part of Ukraine.

The two top Crimean clubs are Tavria Simferopol and FC Sevastopol, both of which have so far continued to play in the Ukrainian league despite their home region's reunification with Russia.

"In the near future, we will prepare a project at working meetings of the necessary documents" to bring the two clubs into the Russian soccer leagues, RFU President Nikolai Tolstykh said.

Tolstykh added that negotiations with FIFA, UEFA and the Ukrainian Football Federation were ongoing.

Sevastopol are ranked 11th and Tavria 14th in the 16-team Ukrainian Premier League.

Tavria, who have already said they hope to compete in Russia next season, told RIA Novosti last week that their funding has been cut off after billionaire owner Dmitry Firtash was arrested earlier this month in Austria on an FBI warrant accusing him of bribery and running a criminal organization.

A court in Vienna said Firtash was released last week after posting bail of more than \$170 million.

Over the last two years, several leading Russian clubs have lobbied FIFA and UEFA for a full unification of the Russian and Ukrainian leagues, a project whose future now appears uncertain.

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