

## **The Perspectives of the European Union and Qatar on the 2022 World Cup**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to investigate Qatar's and the EU's perspectives on the 2022 World Cup. Through a case study of the 2022 World Cup, the study evaluated the EU's and Qatar's views on the tournament using conceptual frameworks and the literature review approach, which involved gathering pertinent articles, political discourses, reports, books, etc. The concept of soft power has been used to analyze Qatar's strategy. The concept of civilizing power has been applied to the EU's perspective to examine these differing views, and it is the study's original contribution. The study's limitation is that it just examines the EU's and Qatar's discourses and actions toward the 2022 World Cup. The study has observed that Western nations, particularly those in the EU, emphasized concerns about Qatar's democratic practices and human rights record, arguing that a country lacking these values should not host such an event. In contrast, Qatar saw the event as an opportunity to share its values and strengthen its position in the political arena.

### **Keywords:**

The Case of the 2022 World Cup, the EU's Civilizing Power, Qatar's Soft Power and Sport Diplomacy.

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Makale geliş tarihi: 24.12.2024  
Makale kabul tarihi: 09.05.2025

## **Avrupa Birliği ve Katar'ın 2022 Dünya Kupası'na Dair Perspektifleri**

### **Özet**

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Katar ve AB'nin 2022 Dünya Kupası'na ilişkin bakış açılarını incelemektir. Çalışma, 2022 Dünya Kupası'na ilişkin vaka çalışması aracılığıyla, AB ve Katar'ın turnuvaya ilişkin bakış açılarını kavramsal çerçevelerle ve ilgili makaleler, siyasi söylemler, raporlar ve kitapların toplanmasını içeren literatür taraması yaklaşımını kullanarak değerlendirmiştir. Katar'ın iddialarını analiz etmek için yumuşak güç kavramı, AB'nin iddiaları açıklamak içinse medenileştirici güç kavramı kullanılmıştır ve bu durum çalışmanın özgün katkısını oluşturmaktadır. Çalışmanın sınırlılıkları, sadece AB ve Katar'ın 2022 Dünya Kupası'na yönelik söylem ve eylemlerini incelemesidir. Çalışmada, özellikle AB ülkeleri başta olmak üzere Batılı ülkelerin, Katar'ın demokratik uygulamaları ve insan hakları sicili konusundaki endişelerini dile getirerek, bu değerlere sahip olmayan bir ülkenin böyle bir etkinliğe ev sahipliği yapmaması gerektiğini savunduklarını göstermektedir. Bun karşın, Katar, kendi değerlerini paylaşmak ve siyasi alandaki konumunu güçlendirmek için bu etkinliği bir fırsat olarak görmüştür.

### **Anahtar Kelimeler**

2022 Dünya Kupası Vakası, AB'nin Medenileştirici Gücü, Katar'ın Yumuşak Gücü ve Spor Diplomasisi.

### **Introduction**

The World Cup is more widely recognized than any international governmental forum and is watched by an estimated 5 billion people worldwide (Siccardi, 2022). Since 1930, FIFA has organized the World Cup every four years, except for 1942 and 1946. To date, 22 tournaments have been held. This study, however, intentionally focuses on analyzing and evaluating the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. More than just a football competition, the FIFA 2022 World Cup embodies various sociocultural foundations and holds civilizational significance, highlighting the dynamic relationship between Qatar and the global community (Al-Naimi and Al-Naimi, 2018).

FIFA's decision to award Qatar the hosting rights for the 2022 World Cup in 2010 drew significant criticism from Western nations, especially within the EU and Europe. Similarly, the recent selection of Saudi Arabia to host the 2034 World Cup has ignited considerable controversy. Critics argue that these choices

were influenced by allegations of bribery and corruption. Much of the criticism also centered on Qatar's treatment of migrant workers and its discriminatory practices against women and disadvantaged groups (Reiche, 2023: 2). However, it is worth questioning whether previous World Cup host countries, such as Russia, adequately upheld democracy and human rights. Were these nations subjected to the same level of scrutiny and condemnation from the EU and European countries? Does FIFA possess a normative framework that would prevent it from selecting host countries with poor records on democracy and human rights?

FIFA's choice to host the World Cup in Qatar underscored the idea that the tournament is a truly global event (Siccardi, 2022). Qatar's objective in hosting the World Cup was to enhance its visibility in global politics and establish a solid foundation for its future ambitions. As the first nation to host the World Cup in the Arab, Middle Eastern, and Islamic worlds, Qatar has made the tournament more geographically, culturally, and religiously representative (Oyman, 2023: 43). In contrast, the EU initially criticized Qatar's suitability as a host, citing its poor record on democracy and human rights. Throughout the World Cup, the EU repeatedly raised concerns about labor rights, women's rights, freedoms, and other fundamental human values. In contrast, Qatar emphasized its religious values and exercised its sovereign rights throughout the tournament. This situation highlights a potential clash of cultural values.

This study uses the concepts of soft power for Qatar and civilizing power for the EU to analyze the claims made by both parties, each of whom appears to have sufficient evidence to support their viewpoints. Using two conceptual frameworks is a method that is not frequently employed in the literature. However, as mentioned, this study draws on the EU's civilizing power and Qatar's soft power to describe their perspectives on the 2022 World Cup case. In this regard, the study's originality lies in applying two distinct concepts to explain the EU's and Qatar's viewpoints on the 2022 World Cup case study. While the EU is often described using terms such as civilian and normative power, assessing its civilizing power in the context of the 2022 World Cup case study is essential. This perspective underscores the argument that a nation lacking fundamental values such as human rights and democracy should not host the World Cup. Conversely, Qatar views hosting the World Cup as a soft power instrument, as it provides a platform for enhancing its global image.

The main argument of the study is that the EU viewed the 2022 World Cup as an opportunity to advance its norms in alignment with its civilizing mission, while Qatar leveraged the event to enhance its soft power and initiate a new identity-building process in international politics. By analyzing the claims made by both parties, the research aims to objectively demonstrate how the World Cup

has influenced Qatar's position in international politics. Additionally, the study examines the event's impact on Qatar while addressing the criticisms directed at the country. It also explores the extent to which the EU articulated its claims before and after the World Cup and whether it succeeded in promoting its values. The research reviewed various sources to achieve these objectives, including articles, opinion pieces, and videos produced since FIFA's announcement of Qatar as the 2022 World Cup host, presenting its findings impartially. The EU's primary resources for the case study are limited, so the aforementioned resources have been thoroughly analyzed.

### **Conceptual Framework: Qatar's Soft Power Versus the EU's Civilizing Power**

The study makes its points more straightforward to understand by using soft power and civilizing power.<sup>1</sup> The first concept of the study, "soft power," was introduced by Joseph Nye (1990) in his book "Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power." Since its inception, the idea of soft power has garnered significant attention from researchers and academics as a valuable framework for analysis. Nye broadly defines soft power as the ability to achieve your goals through attraction rather than through incentives (2004:X). Attraction is the quintessential expression of soft power, best understood as a form of symbolic communication aimed at influencing others, operating in both active and passive ways (Solomon, 2014: 726-27).

Nye outlined three essential resources of soft power: 1) culture, when it resonates positively with others; 2) political values, when consistently upheld at home and abroad; and 3) foreign policy, when it is seen as legitimate and morally credible. Legitimacy is a vital component of soft power; without it, actions risk diminishing soft power instead of strengthening it (Nye, 2008: 199). In this sense, Nygård and Gate state that "as a tool of soft power, sport diplomacy works through four mechanisms: image-building; building a platform for dialogue; trust-building; and reconciliation, integration and anti-racism" (2013:242).

Sport has become an essential part of soft power, mostly due to its universality (K. Al Khalifa and Farello, 2021: 245). Sport plays a crucial role in almost every nation's soft power in today's globalized world. As a practical instrument of public diplomacy, it may foster communication and global understanding while boosting national pride and extending national influence

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1 Some of the references used here for these concepts are taken from the author's master's (Europeanization of German Foreign Policy: The EU's Soft Power in the Case of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict) and PhD (The EU's Normative Paradox: The Cases of Hungary and Poland) theses.

(Shearer, 2014: 56). As understood, sport has gained increasing significance as an effective tool for public diplomacy (Al-Emadi, Sellami, and Fadlalla, 2022: 1). In addition, as a subset of sport diplomacy, “soccer (football) diplomacy” refers to how governments use football to promote public diplomacy, primarily through individual players, teams, matches, tours, tournaments, and governance structures (Beck, 1914: 225).

According to Dichter, the sport has served as a vehicle for representing national policy and identity (Dichter, 2020: 2). The literature indicates that major sporting events like international tournaments (like the Olympic Games or World Cup) are where soft power and sport most clearly cross over. Large-scale events like the 2016 Rio Olympics and Paralympics, the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, the Asian Games in China, and the Beijing Olympics and Paralympics in Beijing all confer prestige on the host nation (K. Al Khalifa and Farello, 2021: 245).

Sport, especially football, has seen significant investment from Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia to boost nation branding, power projection, and economic diversification (Bianco and Sons, 2023: 93). Griffin contends that Qatar aims to leverage the tournament as a platform to establish itself as a legitimate global actor and a society that reflects universal values and norms, despite the geographic and cultural distinctions frequently emphasized by Western nations (2019: 1002). Brannagan and Giulianotti further argue that Qatari authorities use global sports to boost their international reputation and appeal. This approach aims to promote values such as professionalism, responsibility, innovation, sophistication, modernity, competence, international goodwill, cooperation, security, peace, integrity, and effective leadership, extending these principles beyond the realm of sports (2018: 715). Al-Kubaisi also highlights that Qatar employs sports diplomacy as a foreign policy tool to project its soft power. The country’s pursuit of ‘sporting success’ is driven by three primary objectives: promoting national well-being, strengthening international diplomatic relationships, and positioning itself as a leading global hub for sports (2023: 35). Griffin further suggests that Qatar’s effort to host the 2022 World Cup stems from a desire to reshape its identity, challenge Orientalist stereotypes about the emirate, and emphasize its distinctiveness compared to its regional neighbors (2019: 1001). In addition, Al Thani emphasizes that the organizers of the 2022 World Cup deliberately structured the event to strengthen Qatar’s soft power by utilizing impactful social and economic strategies to influence foreign policy (2021: 1729).

The second concept explored in this study is the “civilizing power” of the EU. Bringing civilization to the rest of the world is a task that both the US and the EU have set for themselves, and they both share the universalistic objectives of democracy and capitalism (Mitzen, 2006: 270). For a long time, the US has

regarded itself as a civilizing power whose use of force is secondary to its mission and moral principles (Mitzen, 2006: 270). The US hegemony continues to be considered by some as fostering civilization and progress. But American officials argue that US power does not promise to change any region through difficult “nation building” but rather enables any state to change itself by supporting a worldwide framework of peace and free institutions (Pomeranz, 2005: 43). On the other hand, the EU’s civilizing mission, which derives from the Union’s distinct *raison d’être* (the main reason or goal behind an individual or entity’s existence), especially the growing economic interdependence being used to prevent war from returning, supports the logic of empire (Del Sarto, 2016: 227).

The EU positions itself as a civilizing power, moving beyond the civilian power model. Its approach is rooted in cosmopolitanism, emphasizing the promotion of its values globally and the reshaping of the international order to align with its vision (Barbé and Morillas, 2019: 757). They perceive the EU as a large, powerful, and resource-rich country. They monitor the EU’s endeavors to enforce proper conduct, establish worldwide norms, and impose regional limitations on a broad spectrum of ostensibly sovereign actors (Zielonka, 2013: 35). The EU, highlighting its civilizing mission to foster peace and stability in other regions, seeks to promote its model of norms and integration by imposing conditions related to human rights, democracy, and the rule of law (Çelik Yücel, 2018: 23). From the EU’s standpoint, it is reasonable to depend on the laws and procedures that have proven effective in achieving this objective within Europe (Del Sarto, 2016: 227).

Multilateralism, emphasizing diplomacy, and the EU’s dedication to advancing representative democracy, the rule of law, social justice, and human rights in its foreign policy are deeply connected to Europe’s civilizing identity (Mitzen, 2006: 271). The EU is frequently seen as a post-modern empire with a distinct civilizing mission (Stivachtis 2018:92). Defining what is deemed good or normal for other states parallels the mission *civilisatrice*, a concept fundamental to colonial practices (Cebeci, 2015: 48). Some contend that the EU operates as a modern empire, exhibiting imperial attitudes and tendencies in its interactions with non-EU countries (Stivachtis, 2018: 92).

Civil or civilizing power is associated with neocolonial, Eurocentric perspectives emphasizing state authority and physical power (Whitman, 2011: 5). Missions of civilization take the form of complex historical and ideological processes that are inconsistent with rigid moral positions. The success of civilizing activities depends more on their ability to acquire internal and external legitimacy than on their adherence to ethical norms (Zielonka, 2001). The “civilizational standard” was the main instrument of the historically European-led civilizing process. It established the conditions for non-European

governments to be accepted into the emerging European international society (Stivachtis, 2018: 92). Using the dichotomy of “civilization/barbarian” in colonial and imperialist discourse and defending civilization against the threat of barbarians were features of the establishment of European imperialism (Mikelis, 2016: 75).

Within the mentioned frameworks, the EU initially criticized FIFA for prioritizing Qatar as the host of the World Cup. It subsequently raised concerns about Qatar’s stance on women’s rights, labor rights, and the alcohol ban. Perhaps the root of these criticisms lies in Qatar’s identity as a non-Western country that does not fully embrace Western values. However, the fact that these issues are being openly discussed in Qatar, along with the implementation of reforms in certain areas, suggests that the EU’s civilizing efforts have been, to some extent, effective.

### **Overview of World Cup and Qatar’s Aspirations to Host the World Cup**

Various countries across different continents have hosted the World Cup. European nations have hosted the tournament most frequently, with Germany, France, and Italy each hosting twice and Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Russia hosting once. South America ranks second in the number of hosts, with Brazil hosting twice and Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay each hosting once. Asia has also hosted the World Cup multiple times, with Qatar hosting once and Japan and South Korea co-hosting once. North America has hosted the tournament three times, with Mexico hosting twice and the United States once. Additionally, South Africa has hosted the World Cup once. There have been 22 World Cups, 11 of which have occurred in Europe. This has drawn criticism from some countries, which argue that the tournament, despite its name, has not always been truly representative of a global event.

There are several reasons why states seek to host the World Cup. For example, when Uruguay hosted the inaugural FIFA World Cup, it aimed to demonstrate to the world that it was a modern nation by building a 9,000-seat stadium and incorporating the tournament into the nation’s centennial celebrations (Dichter, 2020: 2). The second World Cup, held in Italy in 1934, furthered ‘an image of Italian sporting prowess encouraged and manipulated by the Fascist regime,’ showcasing how the event has been used to serve larger diplomatic and political goals (Dichter, 2020). The Franco administration aimed to improve Spain’s international standing and end the country’s post-World War II isolation by using football as a tool to legitimize its political regime abroad (Simón, 2020: 48). In addition, in the years leading up to the World Cup, people

in Chile would often refer to themselves as being at the ‘end’ or on a ‘corner’ of the earth. Public discourse spread across media platforms because of the World Cup’s attention. A writer pondered, “Thousands have come from all nations on Earth to decipher that heart. We have been, in these moments, the heart of the world.” (Else, 2020: 2020).

Before exploring the details of the 2022 World Cup, it is helpful to provide some background about Qatar. Situated in the Arabian Gulf, Qatar achieved independence from the United Kingdom in 1971 (Britannica, 2025). The country is the leading global supplier of liquefied natural gas and ranks as the third-largest oil producer (Brannagan and Giulianotti, 2018: 3). Massive natural gas reserves have made Qatar one of the wealthiest nations in the world. With an area of 11,610 km<sup>2</sup>, the country currently ranks fourth globally in terms of GDP per capita (Parliament, 2021: 1). As of August 2022, the population of Qatar is 2.94 million. Interestingly, foreign workers make up 87% of Qatar’s population, with most originating from developing countries in South Asia (Brannagan, Reiche, and Bedwell, 2023: 902). In this regard, Qatar boasts the highest migrant population ratio in the world (Zayadin, 2021). The political system in Qatar is a ‘constitutional monarchy’ (Britannica, 2025), where the monarch holds ultimate power. The Al Thani family has governed Qatar since 1867, with Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani serving as the Emir since 2013 (Brannagan et al., 2023: 902). Sheikh Tamim is recognized for his leadership in steering Qatar through the 2017 economic and political embargo imposed by neighboring countries, managing the coronavirus pandemic, and overseeing infrastructure development for Doha’s hosting of the 2022 World Cup (Parliament, 2021).

Since the early 2000s, Qatar has sought to break free from its ‘autarky’ and elevate its international standing through diplomatic and economic initiatives (Lo, 2023: 38). In 2008, Qatar launched its ‘Qatar National Vision 2030,’ aiming to build a thriving and sustainable knowledge-based economy (Lo, 2023: 33-34). In other words, Qatar embarked on a large-scale nation-building initiative to transform the state into ‘an advanced country’ by 2030 (Government Communications Office, 2025). The pillars of economic, social, environmental, and human development form the foundation of Qatar’s nation-building project (Brannagan et al., 2023: 903). As outlined in the social development pillar, Qatar aims to promote ‘tolerance, benevolence, constructive dialogue, and openness toward other cultures,’ all within the framework of its Arab and Islamic identity (Brannagan et al., 2023: 903). Additionally, Qatar’s National Tourism Sector Strategy 2030 is guided by four principles. The priority focuses on honoring Qatar’s Arab and Islamic identity and moral code, fostering family values and social cohesion, and staying aligned with local traditions and cultural values (Dun, 2014: 192).



The Al Thani family prioritizes sports to enhance Qatar's international reputation, safeguard national security, and foster a positive global image (Çetin, 2022: 42). The president of the National Olympic Committee of Qatar, Sheikh Abdulrahman Al Thani, argued that:

We believe that the returns of sports are greater than politics. In fact, by organizing sports organizations with high brand value on our soil, it is possible to achieve progress in a few years that can be achieved in 20 years. (As cited in Çetin, 2022: 42).

To build reputational capital by hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Qatar has embarked on a massive initiative (Dorsey, 2022: 1). Hosting the World Cup provides Qatar with an opportunity to advance its goals and showcase its modernity and progress, including its use of cutting-edge technologies (Henderson, 2014: 286). In this context, Akşar argues that the Qatari government views the World Cup as a crucial instrument for nation-building (2022). Furthermore, Qatar aims to use the revenue from natural gas to diversify its economy and grow other sectors. In this regard, the World Cup is seen as a key opportunity for the Qatari government. The primary objective is to boost the country's global visibility, showcase its potential and prosperity, and attract foreign investment (Athl, 2022).

Qatar is the first Muslim, Arab, and Middle Eastern nation to host the tournament. Since nearly 1.7 billion Muslims worldwide comprise about 25% of the global population, it stands to reason that Muslim nations would host the event more frequently (Ataman, 2022). Lahm claims,

The approach of holding a World Cup in a new region is the right one. In 2010, it was held in Africa for the first time. Before that, I had traveled to South Africa, still a player at the time, to get to know the host country and the circumstances in which I would be playing. A World Cup could also have made a positive contribution to football culture in the Middle East because there are countries with football traditions there (2022).

The World Cup is typically held in June or July during the summer. However, despite opposition from European football clubs, the tournament's dates were shifted to November 20-December 18, 2022, due to Qatar's extreme summer temperatures making those months unsuitable for the event (Çetin, 2022: 42). Qatar has worked tirelessly to prepare for the World Cup, spending fifteen times as much as any other nation (Miller, 2022). Qatar invested \$220 billion in infrastructure for the tournament (Craig, 2022), a stark contrast to the combined \$41.5 billion spent on infrastructure for the seven World Cups held between 1994 and 2018, with Russia 2018 being the most expensive at \$14 billion (Athl, 2022). In this context, new golf courses, art galleries, five-star luxury hotels, and high-end restaurants have all been constructed (Akşar, 2022). FIFA and the

government of Qatar have promoted the World Cup as one of the most environmentally friendly international sporting events in history. The organizers built seven new stadiums featuring solar-powered air conditioning systems and utilized climate-neutral technologies to offset the tournament's carbon footprint (Siccardi, 2022). Despite Qatar's challenges in preparing for the World Cup, the event was exceptionally well-run. The infrastructure for the stadiums, transportation, and hospitality sectors was completed on time, and both players and spectators praised the event as a tremendous success (Euronews, 2023). Qatar has effectively used the hosting of prestigious mega-events and the development of world-class cultural infrastructure as a strategy for place-branding (Reiche, 2023: 2). In this way, the country has strengthened its soft power.

Qatar greeted World Cup fans with the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed's hadiths, including "Save yourself from Hell-fire even by giving half a date fruit in charity," "Every good deed is a charity," and "Anybody who believes in Allah and the Last Day should not harm his neighbor, and anybody who believes in Allah and the Last Day should entertain his guest generously and anybody who believes in Allah and the Last Day should talk what is good or keep quiet," and "Make things easy for the people, and do not make it difficult for them, give them glad tidings and do not repulse them." The tournament is being promoted in Qatar with a focus on notable Islamic values and the promotion of universal rights. According to Oyman, while some extreme secularist circles denounce this as religious propaganda, a humanitarian campaign against the rising Islamophobia in Europe is expected to foster social peace (2023: 43).

The 2022 World Cup opened with the reading of Surat al-Hujurat's thirteenth verse ("Human beings, we created you all from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Verily the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God-fearing of you") and the showing of the Story of God with Morgan Freeman (Oyman, 2023: 44). This verse emphasizes the importance of universal human rights, stating that no society is superior to another, and neither women nor men are superior to each other (Oyman, 2023). The event that garnered the most attention likely featured renowned actor Morgan Freeman. During the event, Freeman recited the thirteenth verse of Surat al-Hujurat alongside a young man with a physical disability (Kaplan, 2022). Additionally, each seat in the stadium was provided with a bag containing information on Qatari culture and Islam. The opening ceremony featured a folk dance performance by nomadic tribes, aiming to introduce Arab culture to the global audience (Kaplan, 2022). The Quran, the holy book of Islam, was recited during the opening ceremony; however, many Western media outlets, including the BBC, chose not to air it, which went against the spirit of the games (Ataman, 2022). Protests preceded the World Cup

qualifying matches, with players from the national teams of Germany and Norway adding their voices to the growing opposition to Qatar. During the anthem ceremonies, they wore 'Human Rights' t-shirts (Sözmen, 2022).

### **The EU and Qatar's Perspectives on the 2022 World Cup**

For various reasons, the 2022 World Cup in Qatar may be the most widely discussed one to date. The discussions began as soon as FIFA announced that Qatar would host the tournament and continued until it was over. On the fourth ballot, Qatar triumphed over Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the United States to become the host. Russia, England, the Netherlands/Belgium, and Spain/Portugal were all rejected (Henderson, 2014: 289). Following the decision, allegations of bribery involving FIFA officials surfaced. The European Parliament reiterated its long-standing belief that FIFA's corruption is widespread, institutionalized, and deeply ingrained. It maintains that, despite reform initiatives such as the imposition of human rights requirements, the organization has severely harmed the reputation and integrity of international football (Parliament, 2022a: 4). The U.S. Department of Justice alleged that bribes were exchanged for votes during the awarding of the tournament's hosting rights 12 years ago. However, the 2022 World Cup organizers have strongly denied these accusations (Reuters, 2022). As a result, this decision prompted criticism from many Western countries and the EU toward FIFA. In contrast, some argued that the root cause of this bias was the traditional Orientalist mindset, which views people from the East as inferior. This perspective was echoed by several officials, including Nasser al-Khater, who stated that the West struggles to believe that an Arab Muslim nation can successfully plan an event of this magnitude (Al Marri and Al Ansari, 2023). Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman Al Thani also claimed,

We can say that they are highly racist given that a country like Qatar, an Arab Islamic country, a small country, was able to compete with large countries that consider that they are more deserving of hosting this tournament (As stated in Fadila, 2022).

In addition, the CEO of the World Cup 2022, Nasser al-Khater, said:

European countries feel they have a monopoly over the World Cup. Europe has hosted 11 tournaments out of 22 tournaments; of course, it refuses that a country like Qatar or an Arab Muslim country hosts a tournament like the World Cup (As stated in Fadila, 2022).

### ***Criticism of Migrants' Labor Conditions in Qatar***

Since Qatar was chosen to host the World Cup, the West has closely scrutinized the Gulf nation. Western politicians have made critical remarks, and some misleading headlines have appeared in the media. Although the event is a football tournament, discussions in the West have centered mainly on topics unrelated to football. This focus persisted even after the tournament began (Fadila, 2022). The conditions for foreign workers in Qatar during the preparations for the 2022 World Cup became the second most discussed topic. Attention was quickly drawn to the workers' substandard safety and welfare conditions in constructing the World Cup infrastructure (Siccardi, 2022). Human rights organizations, European governments, and segments of the U.S. and European media have criticized the working conditions of migrant laborers on World Cup construction sites in Qatar in the years leading up to the competition. These conditions are characterized by structural violence, unsanitary living environments, legal uncertainty, and exploitation (Bianco and Sons, 2023: 97). Reportedly, 6,500 migrant workers have died in Qatar during preparations for the World Cup. Later, the headline was updated to read, '6,500 migrant workers have died in Qatar since the World Cup was awarded,' in the respected British newspaper, *The Guardian*, which published the story in February 2021 (Fadila, 2022). However, according to Qatar, 37 workers have died while building stadiums, with only three of those deaths being directly related to their work (Sözmen, 2022).

The European Parliament expresses regret over the injuries and deaths of thousands of migrant laborers during World Cup preparations. It urges Qatar to fully enforce new legislation protecting workers' rights and to eliminate the remaining aspects of the kafala sponsorship system, including penalties for worker absconding (Parliament, 2022a: 4). The European Parliament has consistently raised concerns about the treatment of migrant workers in Qatar. In two resolutions on EU trade relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council, adopted in 2008 and 2011, the Parliament denounced what it called the 'deplorable situation' of migrant workers. In November 2013, it passed another resolution specifically addressing the conditions of migrant workers in Qatar. The Parliament again highlighted the plight of migrant workers involved in constructing World Cup infrastructure in a 2015 resolution on high-level corruption cases within FIFA (Parliament, 2021: 4).

Although Qatar initially resisted such criticism, arguing that it was an unjustified interference in its domestic affairs, the country's leadership shifted tactics in 2017. Since then, Qatar has implemented labor law reforms and declared that migrant workers' conditions would be greatly improved, demonstrating greater sensitivity to external criticism (Bianco and Sons, 2023:

97). To monitor labor reform progress, the International Labour Organization was granted permission to establish an office in Qatar in 2018. As a result, workers were allowed to quit, change jobs, or leave the country without the consent of their ‘sponsor’ (kafil). These reforms ensured that the organization of the World Cup would not be compromised. Qatar also used this strategy to ease external pressure and demonstrate to the world that it is a cooperative and responsive partner (Bianco and Sons, 2023: 97). In 2019, Qatar moved to abolish the kafala system under global pressure. The minimum wage was increased, and an insurance fund for the families of workers killed or injured was established. According to the fund, payments totaling \$271 million have been made this year (Zeigler, 2022). In 2020, the oppressive kafala system was officially abolished, ending the practice that allowed employers to deny migrant workers’ requests to change jobs or leave the country (Siccardi, 2022). The improvement in migrant worker conditions and the increased participation of women in sports in Qatar are both outcomes of the kafala system’s reform, leaving a historic legacy for both the Gulf nation and the World Cup itself (Griffin, 2019: 112). Reforms to the kafala system, better conditions for migrant workers, and greater involvement of women in Qatari sports are important steps toward shaping Qatar’s image as an open, tolerant, and fair society while also contributing to a lasting legacy for both the country and the World Cup (Griffin, 2019: 108). These reforms imply that the Western world’s emphasis on social justice and human rights problems has a civilizing effect on Qatar.

### ***Criticism of Non-Democratic Administration in Qatar***

In addition to the mentioned disputes, criticism has also been directed at Qatar’s non-democratic administration (Henderson, 2014: 290). Thus, the governance issue in Qatar became one of the most discussed topics. Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani stated: “The Middle East has been the victim of discrimination against itself for decades. People discriminated against us because they either didn’t know us well enough or, in certain situations, didn’t want to recognize us” (BBC, 2022). Furthermore, observers in Qatar question why similar complaints were not raised, for instance, when World Cup preparation contracts worth 1.5 billion pounds were awarded to British companies or when Qatar purchased a 6-billion-euro Airbus and a 1-billion-euro Rafale aircraft from France. While history can explain the World Cup hosting successes of Mussolini’s Italy in 1938 and Videla’s Argentina in 1978, it is equally questionable how Russia managed to host the World Cup in 2018 during the occupation of Crimea without facing the same level of criticism as Qatar (Athi, 2022). In addition, President of FIFA Gianni Infantino states, “I think for what we Europeans have been doing in the

last 3,000 years, around the world, we should be apologizing for the next 3,000 years before starting to give moral lessons to people” (Ataman, 2022).

### ***Criticism of Gender Roles in Qatar***

Criticism has also been directed at the disparities in gender roles (Henderson, 2014: 290). The European Parliament demands that Qatar’s authorities respect the human rights, freedom of religion, and beliefs of all foreign visitors and nationals during the 2022 World Cup (Parliament, 2021: 7). The European Parliament also urges Qatar to repeal Article 285 of its penal code and any other laws that criminalize consensual same-sex relationships. Additionally, it calls for the enactment of legislation prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (Parliament, 2021: 7). Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad stated that everyone is welcome in Qatar but emphasized the importance of respecting the nation’s culture, principles, and values during his visit to Germany in May 2022. In September 2022, he further assured the football fans would not face discrimination from Qatari authorities (Al Marri and Al Ansari, 2023). However, numerous statements from politicians and the Western media have criticized and undermined the religious and cultural values of Qatar and its people. Additionally, there have been repeated efforts by Western politicians and media outlets to impose their values on the Qatari population (Ataman, 2022). This situation may represent a clash of values between the two parties; however, it also serves as a platform for the EU and Qatar to articulate their core values.

European national teams used the event as a platform to highlight concerns about women’s and LGBTQ rights and inclusivity. Team captains intend to wear rainbow armbands during the tournament, although FIFA has not yet confirmed whether this will be allowed (Siccardi, 2022). The ‘OneLove’ armbands, designed to promote a message against discrimination, faced opposition from FIFA (Reuters, 2022). The organization warned the captains of England, Wales, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, and Denmark that wearing the armbands would result in a yellow card (Reuters 2022). A global outcry ensued when FIFA prohibited players from wearing LGBTQ support slogans, including the ‘OneLove’ armband, and threatened sanctions for those who did (Al Marri and Al Ansari, 2023). In what appeared to be a critique of FIFA’s decision, the German players covered their mouths during their team photo before their opening match against Japan (Al Marri and Al Ansari, 2023). According to the German Football Association, the federations planning to wear the armbands were forced to back down due to ‘extreme blackmail.’ (Reuters, 2022). FIFA regulations state that team gear cannot include political, religious, or personal slogans, statements, or images. Furthermore, each team captain ‘must wear the

armband provided by FIFA’ during FIFA Final Competitions (Reuters, 2022). FIFA also disapproved of the Belgium national team’s away uniform due to the word ‘Love’ printed on the collar and the rainbow-colored trim on the shirt (Reuters, 2022).

### ***Criticism of the Prohibition of Alcohol in Qatar***

Qatar has also faced criticism from Western media for prohibiting the sale of alcohol. This restriction stems from Islamic tradition, as Qatar follows a conservative branch of Islam. While alcohol is legal in Qatar, its sale and consumption are heavily restricted (Dun, 2014: 192). The implementation of Islamic Sharia Law in Qatar, which forbids alcohol, is another source of contention. It also makes public intoxication a criminal offense (Henderson, 2014: 290). However, Qatar initially announced that ticketed spectators could purchase beer at games, starting three hours before kickoff and continuing for an hour after the final whistle, but not during the match itself. Al Khater, the tournament director, explained that designated spaces for inebriated spectators to sober up had been planned to ensure their safety and prevent them from endangering themselves or others (Reuters, 2022). However, on November 18, FIFA announced that alcoholic beer would no longer be sold at stadiums. This last-minute policy change led some supporters to question Qatar’s ability to keep its promises to fans (Reuters, 2022). But, by restricting alcohol in stadiums and offering it only in designated fan zones, Qatar proved that football could exist without being inherently tied to beer (Reiche, 2023: 5). Furthermore, female fans may especially feel safer, which is a surprising outcome for those from countries where women commonly face harassment at football games from drunken spectators (Dun, 2023: 210).

### ***An Overview of Criticism of Qatar Prior to and During the 2022 World Cup***

The West, particularly the EU and European countries, have condemned migrants’ working conditions in Qatar, Qatar’s non-democratic governance, and its human rights record, focusing on issues such as gender equality, hazardous working conditions for foreign workers, and the alcohol ban. Under the guise of ‘freedom of speech,’ the Western response has at times exceeded criticism and veered into outright Islamophobia. In its October 2022 issue, the French weekly *Le Canard Enchaîné* published a cartoon titled “Qatar, Behind the Scenes,” portraying members of the Qatari national team chasing a football in the sand while armed with guns, machetes, and rocket launchers—one even depicted wearing a suicide vest (Fadila, 2022). Weeks before the competition began,

Qatar's Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani described the Western criticism as an "unprecedented campaign that no host country has faced" (As stated in Bianco and Sons, 2023: 98). Furthermore, Ataman states that

The Western reaction and criticism reflect double standards and an imperialist perspective. When other countries, such as France and Russia, applied similar restrictions, most of the current critics remained silent. In other words, whenever a Western state takes action, it is considered rational and welcomes it. However, whenever a Muslim or Arab state takes an action, it is regarded as irrational and criticized. Thus, they still claim the Orientalist perspective and continue to belittle non-Western peoples, i.e., Muslims and Arabs (2022).

Undoubtedly, the World Cup is not a platform for promoting universal or Western values. It is hard to claim that, compared to some other World Cup hosting nations, Qatar is in a remarkable position regarding democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. However, the EU's stance that Qatar should not host the World Cup is questionable. This stance can be explained by using the term of the EU's civilizing ability since the EU feels that a nation it does not consider civilized should not host such a cup. The non-democratic stance of Qatar was extensively discussed. However, a question that may come up is whether democracy is always beneficial for any society.

Furthermore, there has been a discussion about the working circumstances of migrants in Qatar. However, the fact that Qatar has enhanced and reformed worker rights is positive for both the EU and Qatar, particularly after the EU and the West criticized migrant workers' rights. It highlights the practical application of the EU's civilizing influence on this issue. In addition, discussions around gender are very noteworthy in Qatar. The EU ignores Qatar's claim that it is a host open to everyone. This topic was hotly contested, as was the alcohol ban. However, it should be noted that women, in particular, could watch the matches more safely due to the limited sale of alcohol, and fan organizations did not cause much controversy. As understood, in summary, the EU used its civilizing power to approach Qatar on most topics before and during the World Cup, emphasizing that the country should not host the tournament since it does not share its values.

Qatar, on the other hand, stands up for its principles. One cannot claim that every nation hosting the World Cup is a democracy with good governance. Qatar's opening of the 2022 World Cup with various verses and hadiths demonstrated its emphasis on religious values. Qatar, which considers its lack of democracy a domestic policy issue, further stated that it has established several flexibilities during the tournament but has some limitations on alcohol because of religious sensitivities. Qatar also highlights its religious sensitivities on gender-



related issues and emphasizes that its doors are open to everyone for the World Cup. As a result, by moderately conveying its national and religious values, Qatar has made its mark on the international stage and strengthened its image through soft power elements.

### Conclusion

The study aimed to understand and evaluate the EU and Qatar's perspectives regarding the 2022 World Cup. The EU viewed the event as an opportunity to promote Western values such as democracy and human rights by using its civilizing power. Accordingly, the EU strongly criticized Qatar for its inadequate gender policies, poor working conditions for migrants, and alcohol ban, among other issues. The EU emphasized a non-coercive approach, focusing on disseminating and exporting norms through open deliberation. In contrast, Qatar leveraged its soft power by highlighting its religious values and principles, asserting its sovereignty, enhancing its global presence, and successfully hosting a major international event as the home of the FIFA World Cup.

The decision to award Qatar the 2022 World Cup sparked widespread reactions, particularly due to bribery allegations in the bidding process. FIFA faced significant criticism from the West for selecting Qatar as the host. However, it can be argued that both FIFA and the World Cup gained legitimacy through the successful execution of the 2022 tournament in Qatar. It is important to recognize that FIFA should not serve as a vehicle for promoting Western ideals and standards. While the World Cup was not conceived as an idealistic movement for freedom, it undeniably functions as a powerful social movement, shaping entertainment, culture, and economics on a global scale (Oyman, 2023: 43). The sheiks of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates unintentionally benefited from FIFA's acknowledgment of the game's boundaries in Africa and Asia when they realized they could use football to establish their new states internationally. FIFA expanded the number of World Cup spots available for Asian and African countries during Joao Havelange's presidency (Thani and Heenan, 2017: 1014).

Sports events and international politics are inextricably linked in today's world, with football being a major venue among them. In this context, due to Qatar's record on human rights, labor conditions, and the prohibition of alcohol, the West, particularly the EU and European nations, openly condemned the country. Politics are present wherever there are people, making politics and football inextricably linked. As George Orwell put it in 1945, football is "a war without guns" in addition to being the world's greatest passion (As stated in Athl, 2022). Given that Qatar is the focus of these criticisms, it is reasonable to infer a degree of bias in this attitude toward the country. While Qatar is accused of

violating universal values, the West appears to impose its values on the rest of the world under the pretense of universality. Additionally, Qatar has been subjected to orientalism, hypocrisy, and even Islamophobia (Atlı, 2022). Moreover, for example, if Israel had been chosen to host the World Cup instead of Qatar, anyone with fair judgment would assert that German politicians, as Europeans, would not have been able to speak out about the human rights issues in Israel (Fadila, 2022).

A broader initiative to enhance Qatar's profile both locally and globally seemed to align well with its bid to host the 2022 World Cup (Snyder, 2020: 20). In this context, the study's other finding is that Qatar has actively sought to improve its reputation and promote its cultural and religious identity by hosting the 2022 World Cup. Qatar's decision to host this event to showcase its values demonstrates its strategic use of soft power. Furthermore, the EU has utilized the tournament as a platform to assert its stance on human rights, particularly regarding the LGBT community. In contrast, the Qatari government has used the same platform to defend its cultural and religious practices, emphasizing its sovereignty and its belief that same-sex marriages contradict its values. This dynamic reflects the fact that individuals bring their cultures, beliefs, traditions, and customs to the countries they visit for football, especially during the four-year World Cup cycle that involves group qualifiers (Oyman, 2023: 43).

The conditions of foreign workers in Qatar faced significant criticism. Although the Qatari government initially resisted such criticism, it eventually seized the opportunity to implement meaningful reforms. Consequently, Qatar has benefited from these changes, and the 2022 World Cup has catalyzed normative improvements in labor conditions within the country. In this regard, the World Cup has played a role in enhancing the working conditions of foreign laborers in Qatar. Finally, the study concludes that the West should refrain from imposing its norms, principles, and values on others under the guise of universality. Instead, it should focus on finding persuasive and constructive ways to demonstrate the importance of these values.

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