

## European Championship co-hosts to be pleasant surprises for fans: UEFA

ZURICH -- Soccer fans will be pleasantly surprised by 2012 European Championship co-hosts Poland and Ukraine, UEFA tournament director Martin Kallen said Tuesday.

Kallen said that up to 400,000 expected visitors will be impressed while exploring the host nations, which have had troubled preparations since being awarded the event in April 2007.

"I think the fans will go to discover these two countries," Kallen told delegates at a conference. "People will be astonished and saying, 'I didn't know.' It is something new."

UEFA's optimism reflects the progress made by Poland and Ukraine after early planning was hampered by infrastructure delays, a worldwide economic crisis and political change in both countries.

However, the first European Championship hosts from eastern Europe still need to complete airport terminals in Gdansk and Donetsk, and find more places for fans and guests to stay.

"There is still a lot to do but at the end it will be good soccer, and for UEFA it will be good for European soccer," Kallen said.

Long-standing concern about rebuilding Kiev's Olympic Stadium, which will host the July 1 final, was settled and the venue will host its first international match on Friday when Ukraine plays Germany.

Poland's National Stadium in Warsaw will be the last of the eight venues completed this month. The ground hosts the opening Euro 2012 match on June 8.

Kallen said he was "optimistic" that all 1.3 million match tickets would be sold, and that UEFA's visitor target could be reached depending on results this month and how the 16-nation draw falls on Dec. 2 in Kiev.

The Swiss official said many more fans would travel from neighboring countries if Germany is drawn into a group based in neighboring Poland, and Russia is drawn to play in Ukraine.

"We need some luck with the draw," he said at the International Football Arena gathering.

Swedish fans will likely travel in bigger numbers by ferry to Gdansk if it is placed in Group C, while Czech Republic supporters would have a short trip to Poland if their team beats Montenegro in a two-leg playoff which begins Friday.

Kallen said the tournament would really "vibrate" if Poland and Ukraine advance to the knockout stage.

"It's important that both teams go as far as possible," said Kallen, who is organizing his third monthlong Euros after Portugal staged it in 2004 and Austria and Switzerland co-hosted in 2008.

UEFA is working with both governments to ease the movement of fans into Poland and Ukraine from across their border.