



PRESIDENT PLANS TO SPEND €22K ON GOVERNMENT JET FLIGHTS TO EUROS

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President Michael D Higgins will travel to Euro 2016 in France at huge expense to the taxpayer after he was given clearance to use the Government jet for two separate trips to the games.

The Sunday Independent has learned Mr Higgins will fly into Paris tomorrow on the Government's Lear jet ahead of Ireland's opening match against Sweden.

The President and his entourage will then use the Government jet to attend Ireland's final group game against Italy in Lille on June 22.

Based on six hours of travel between Dublin and the French cities at a cost €3,780 per hour for using the Lear jet, Mr Higgins will clock up a massive €22,680 travel bill to attend the Euros.

Junior Sport and Tourism Minister Patrick O'Donovan is joining the President on the Government jet for tomorrow's game but it is unclear who will accompany him for the game against Italy.

Transport Minister Shane Ross will travel to Ireland's second game against Belgium in Bordeaux, but he will take a commercial flight.

Mr Ross is also travelling to the Italy match but he is attending in a personal capacity and at his own cost.

The President's spokesman said flying on the Government jet was not a "regular occurrence" for Mr Higgins but would not comment further on his travel plans for security reasons.

A spokesman for Enda Kenny confirmed that the Taoiseach's office granted the President permission to use the jet.

He said the Taoiseach has "no plans at present" to attend the European Championships but "wishes the team all the very best" ahead of the group games.

In a statement yesterday, Mr Higgins sent his "best wishes" to both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland teams competing in the games.

He also expressed the country's "collective pride" in having Ireland manager Martin O'Neill and his assistant Roy Keane represent Ireland on the international stage.

"Many of us look forward to a feast of skill, talent and passion, as well as to the sheer celebration of the art of football at this tournament, this 'rendezvous' in France," he said.

"The beauty of soccer lies not only in the athleticism and skills of the players, but also in its ability to bring out the best in people, players and spectators alike, and Irish supporters have a great reputation for how they support their team abroad," he added.

Mr Higgins said sport is "so much more than entertainment" as it brings countries together and helps "bridge cultural, linguistic or ethnic divides".

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