

NATIONAL REPORT



COUNTRY:
Croatia

AUTHOR OF THE REPORT:
Professor Richard Parrish



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

1. SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL SPORT SYSTEM/ARCHITECTURE

Sport is regulated by the Croatian Sports Act. Governmental competence for sport policy falls within the remit of the Ministry of Tourism and Sport. The Sports Act establishes the basic organisational structure of sport which consists of sports clubs associated in local/regional and/or national sport federations, as well as in local sports communities.

At the top of the sports pyramid sits the Croatian Olympic Committee. It acts as a National Olympic Committee but it incorporates all Olympic and non-Olympic sports - the Croatian Paralympic Committee; the Croatian Deaf Sports Association; the Croatian University Sports Federation and the Croatian School Sports Federation. The Ministry of Tourism and Sport provides financial support to these umbrella organisations, each having their own distinct pyramid structure.

The National Council for Sport is the highest professional body that takes care of the development and quality of sports in the Republic of Croatia. Its members are appointed by the Croatian Parliament. The tasks of the National Council for Sports are, among others, to discuss issues of importance for sport and propose and encourage the adoption of measures to improve sports; to set out guidelines for drafting regulations on the categorisation of athletes and to give opinions and recommendations on draft proposals for regulations related to sport.

Based on the Sports Act the Government proposed, and the Croatian Parliament approved, Croatia's first ever National Sports Program which runs from 2019-2026. The key features of the National Sports Program are: defining sports management, creating conditions to stimulate investments into sports as well as transparent and purposeful spending of funds, maintenance of sports facilities through a creation of a network of sports facilities and construction and maintenance of sports facilities, as well as encouraging and regulating the education of professional personnel in sports, care of athletes as the main stakeholders in sports and providing conditions for recreational sports activities in order to protect and better the health of the citizens of the Republic of Croatia.

2. TO WHAT EXTENT IS THERE A SPORT DIPLOMACY STRATEGY?

Since independence, sport has played an important role in promoting the image of Croatia abroad. However, despite the obvious ability of sport to achieve diplomatic successes, there has been no national sport diplomacy strategy in the Republic of Croatia. At the time of writing, this is changing. For the first time since independence, there is now a national strategic document on sports, which was enacted in 2019 - the National Sports Program (2019-2026).¹ In this document 'sport diplomacy' is mentioned for the first time, under the objective 6.3. *Strengthen the management and administrative capacity of stakeholders in the sports system* Here, under the sub-measure 6.3.4. (*Encourage international cooperation in the field of sport*) the commitment is to: 'Establish a body in charge of sports diplomacy'.² The body is yet to be established but is due in 2023 (although according to the National Sports

¹National Sports Program (2019-2026). Available at: <https://mint.gov.hr/UserDocImages//dokumenti-sdus/docs//NATIONAL%20SPORTS%20PROGRAM.pdf>

²National Sports Program, p. 151

Programme it was planned in 2020). The responsible authorities and executors of the activity are the Ministry of Tourism and Sport & the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. At the time of writing, little more is known concerning the operation of this body (but see below).

3. WHAT IS THE LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT OF SPORT DIPLOMACY GOVERNANCE AND WHO ARE THE MAIN ACTORS?

As discussed above, Croatia is planning to establish a centralised national body, to be established in 2022, whose role is to coordinate the sport diplomacy activities in Croatia. This marks a significant departure from previous practice in which sport diplomacy initiatives were not strategically orientated. The two ministries involved in establishing the national body are the Ministry of Tourism and Sport & the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs.

Given that establishing sport diplomacy as a national priority is a new development, to date diplomats, local public authorities, sports bodies, athletes, the media and private bodies have not played a significant formal strategic role in sport diplomacy.

However, despite the absence of strategic thinking, the potential of sport to achieve diplomatic objectives has been recognised by Croatia. For example, representatives of the Croatian Chamber of Commerce and the Croatian Tourist Board have been known to follow national teams to international events with the objective of building relationships, promoting Croatian brands, attracting new investments, and fostering new cooperation with host economic partners. Sports stars are frequently employed by the Croatian tourism sector to promote Croatia as a tourist destination, for example through promotional videos. Politicians have also been known to associate themselves with sport at major events, best highlighted by the appearance in a Croatia football kit of the President of Croatia, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, at the FIFA World Cup in Russia.

Going forward, it is planned to have representatives of the public sector (economic actors) in the National Body, together with the representatives of the sports governing bodies, ministries and academia representatives.

There is growing academic interest in the area of sport diplomacy in Croatia. For example, the University of Rijeka, Faculty of Law developed the Sports Law, Sport Policies and Sports Diplomacy Centre (SLPD Centre).

4. TOOLS OF SPORT DIPLOMACY

At the time of writing there is no public resource committed to sport diplomacy activities.

On the specific questions concerning the tools of sport diplomacy, the national experts consider that few efforts are made to concretely implement structured sport diplomacy within the country. It appears that there is not necessarily any strong political or diplomatic commitment to attract mega-events, to increase media coverage and international broadcasting, to employ high-profile sports people or to organise trade missions.

They also note that little is currently being done on training for diplomats and athletes, dedicated resources and coordination tools.

Finally, they note that links with less developed countries are still little exploited. Little is developed in terms of mentoring or training programs, sport fellowship schemes and grants, sport exchange programmes, funding for collaborative projects aimed at specific values or partnerships for sports competitions.

5. SPORT DIPLOMACY'S FUTURE

Despite being known throughout the world for its sporting achievements, sport diplomacy has only recently been identified as an important tool in the performance of political, economic, touristic, geostrategic and other national priorities. Croatia is an excellent example of a small country with a large sporting footprint.

Regarding the relationship between an emerging EU sport diplomacy strategy and that of Croatia, one national expert commented: "I do not see any disadvantages. My personal impression is that a common EU sport diplomacy policy could help smaller countries with important sports footprints in developing its potential by a strong tool like sport diplomacy."

The national expert expressed the view that an EU sport diplomacy strategy could help the development of common EU values in EU-27 member states whilst also highlighting national specificities – unity in diversity. An EU strategy would assist member states developing their own strategies. The national expert expressed the view that the use of famous athletes and the staging of major sporting events can assist in promoting Croatia and its values.

6. INTERVIEWS

- Assoc. Prof. Vanja Smokvina; University of Rijeka, Faculty of Law, Sports Law, Sports Policies and Sport Diplomacy Centre.
- Anonymous officials from the Ministry of Tourism and Sport, Croatia.



UNIVERSITÀ
CATTOLICA
del SACRO CUORE



Universidad
Carlos III
de Madrid



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union