

# ***NATIONAL REPORT***



**COUNTRY:**  
***France***

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# **1. SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL SPORT SYSTEM/ARCHITECTURE**

The architecture of sport in France is schematically based on two pillars.

The French State is responsible for the coordination, control and support of sport. Although other ministries could be involved, the Ministry for Sport and the Olympic & Paralympic Games that has a central role in setting the objectives of the national sport policy and establishing its legal framework. Four key action areas are identified:

- development of sport for all
- organisation of elite sport
- prevention in sport, protection of athletes and the fight against integrity violations
- the promotion of sport professions and the development of sport employment.

The Ministry for Sport and the Olympic & Paralympic Games works at national level in collaboration with other ministries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of National Education or of Health for example) and other national authorities. It also works on the international influence of French sport and participates in the regulation of sports activities at European and international levels.

The second pillar is the French National Olympic and Sports Committee (CNOSF) which represents the sport movement and in particular the federations in France and abroad. It is the privileged interlocutor of the public authorities and civil society.

It seems important to remember that the actions of these two institutions are carried out at the regional, departmental and local levels thanks to decentralised institutions.

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

France sought to structure a formalized sport diplomacy. It is important to highlight the fact that one had previously existed but was not officialised as such. For example, after the First World War, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered that “ensuring the prestige of France was a priority objective and sport could contribute to this”, thus making sport “a matter of State”.<sup>1</sup>

Current French sport diplomacy has really developed since the beginning of the 2010s. This strategy was expressed in speeches but also through the creation of specific initiatives.

Indeed, in November 2013, on a joint initiative of the Ministry of Sports and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a specific post specialised on sport diplomacy, attached to the Quai d’Orsay, was created. Jean Lévy at the time, and Laurence Fischer today is in charge and carries the 5 objectives of French diplomacy aiming at:

- Making French regions more attractive in order to host major international sporting events, particularly by supporting French candidacies; it also implies the development of the tourism industry.
- Supporting the work of Business France and France Sport Expertise

<sup>1</sup>Alfred Wahl, « Sport et politique, toute une histoire ! », Outre-Terre, 2004/3 (no 8), p. 13-20. DOI : 10.3917/oute.008.0013. URL : <https://www.cairn.info/revue-outre-terre1-2004-3-page-13.htm>

in order to promote the businesses and expertise of the French sports sector and strengthen their position on international markets;

- Promoting French expertise in the areas of:
  - o training and education,
  - o sport as a tool for health and gender equality,
  - o sport as a lever for the development and structuring of civil society,
  - o promoting projects which make a lasting impact on the population;
- Encouraging the use of French at sporting events, especially the Olympics, in collaboration with the International Organisation of the Francophonie (OIF);
- Implementing the provisions of the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Legacy Plan in collaboration with the Interministerial Delegate for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (DIJOP).<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, in December 2012, the CNOSF launched the French Committee for International Sport (CFSI), chaired by Bernard Lapasset, (vice president of the CNOSF and president of World Rugby) with 3 defined objectives:

- to consolidate the influence of French federations in their international environment, by providing them with engineering support, guidance and advice;
- to strengthen the influence of French sport on the international scene;
- broaden the scope of French sport by creating synergies with players from other sectors.

However, this structure slowly disappeared after the Games were awarded to Paris. A new structure taking up some of these objectives was relaunched in October 2021 by the Ministry of Sport: “French Sport Touch”, with the aim of “federate to win”, establishing a collaboration between the Ministry, CNOSF and the business community.

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

The French sport diplomacy governance is relatively complex to analyse. Although diplomacy is traditionally carried out by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Sports and the Ministry of the Economy, in the name of economic diplomacy, also claim a role and a place within this strategy. In addition, other actors, public and private, also want to take part in this strategy.

- Regarding the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is worth noting the French specificity at the European Union level of having a thematic ambassador dedicated to sport diplomacy. Since 2013, this post, attached to this ministry, has had the objective of promoting sport within the entire French diplomatic network, notably through embassies, “Alliances françaises” and “Instituts français”, and many other institutions through initiatives. The aim is to put sport at the heart of the diplomatic network around the world. The imminence of international sporting mega-events such as the Rugby World Cup 2023 or the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games also encourages the development of actions around this topic. Francophonie and sport for development are also key.

<sup>2</sup> Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/sports-diplomacy/>

- The Ministry of Sports also plays an important role in representing France at the European and international levels. Through the actions and statements of its ministers or its international relations office at political or technical meetings of international organisations, it also participates in the definition of French sport diplomacy.
- The French National Olympic and Sports Committee, through the former CFSI, its “parcours ambition Olympique” with various training courses on the diplomatic stakes of sport and the geopolitics of sport, also seeks to better understand contemporary international sport and how France can pursue its actions.
- It is also worth noting the creation of the National Sports Agency, an institution created in 2019 to renew the model of sport in France. It will work on the development of sports practices but also on the development of high level and high performance.
- The French Development Agency, a state-owned industrial and commercial entity, took an increasingly important place since few years when it has made sport a strong focus of its action and especially sport and development, especially in Africa. 5 actions are particularly targeted: the development of local infrastructures and animation, the reinforcement of the associative and sports fabric, school sports, governance and sport and gender. Since 2019, more than 150 projects have been supported, committing more than 110 million euros.
- It is also worth noting the growing importance of key actors working on economic issues in the development of French sport diplomacy, particularly through economic diplomacy. For example, Business France or the economic interest grouping France Sport Expertise are internationally minded while SPORSORA or structures like Union Sport et Cycle are more focused on the national market.
- As France is a centralised state, the role of cities and local institutions is not predominant within the French sport diplomacy. Nevertheless, Paris, as the capital and future host of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, nevertheless has a special place and voice in the French sports landscape. Although various initiatives can be launched in certain cities (Marseille, Lyon, Bordeaux and Lille), they are not necessarily part of a fully-fledged French sport diplomacy.
- Lastly, athletes are engaged on sport diplomacy on an ad hoc basis, called upon to participate notably through official trips by French representatives abroad and the organisation of bilateral initiatives or exchanges. However, even though their voices are becoming more and more important, their speeches remain relatively limited, sometimes held back by their federations in the name of the apolitical nature of sport.

## **4. TOOLS OF SPORT DIPLOMACY**

As mentioned earlier, French sport diplomacy is shapeshifting. National experts note mainly diplomatic and political efforts to attract mega-events. Indeed, in addition to recurring world-class sporting events such as Roland Garros and the Tour de France, France has hosted and will host some of the biggest international sporting competitions, including the men’s Euro football tournament, the women’s Euro handball tournament, the women’s World Cup football, NBA matches, the World Ski Championships, Ryders Cup, the men’s World Cup rugby, and of course, the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

It should also be emphasised that the performances of French athletes and teams also ultimately benefit French sports diplomacy by highlighting the training and coaching system as well as the infrastructure. In this way, exchanges are regularly organised between sports players, thus strengthening French influence in international sport.

Regarding sport diplomacy activities implemented in collaboration with less developed countries, national mentoring or training programs are considered an important tool and are developed as are partnerships for sports competitions. Sports exchange programmes are also an interesting tool that could probably be used to a greater extent.

We should also mention the launch of various calls for projects such as the “International Sport Cooperation” for federations and institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of Sport. This initiative allows the Ministry’s bilateral agreements to be brought to life, but also encourages organisations to carry out projects with priority countries.

Finally, given the importance of economic diplomacy in recent years, companies can also be considered as relevant tools for sport diplomacy.

## **5. SPORT DIPLOMACY’S FUTURE**

While French sport diplomacy has sought to structure itself since 2013, three major weaknesses need to be mentioned.

On the one hand, the multiplicity of French actors with various ministerial institutions (Ministry of Sport, Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Ministry of the Economy), sports bodies (National Olympic Committee and the National Sports Agency), personalities (Ambassador for Sport), structures (French Sport Touch), bodies not linked to sport (Business France, French Development Agency), claiming a place within this sport diplomacy makes understanding the role of each one relatively complex. In addition to this confusion, there is also a risk of duplication and even contradiction.

On the other hand, the relatively limited means deployed to implement this diplomacy should be highlighted. The lack of human and financial resources are thus elements that weaken the various initiatives that can be implemented.

Finally, launched at the time of a reflection on a bid for the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, this sport diplomacy was able to be deployed and show its effectiveness. Nevertheless, many projects, initiatives and discussions are still mainly focused on the now very near future of 2024. Despite various mobilisations, the post-2024 orientations of this policy remain unclear and give rise to fears that the momentum will be lost.

As a result, the main challenge for French sport diplomacy will be to think about the post-2024 period and to structure more formally the areas of development for the coming years, so as not to lose the benefits of the efforts made over the past ten years. This challenge is all the more important as we have witnessed the rise of new state actors on the international sports scene over the last ten years and competition between states is becoming increasingly fierce. As an important player on the sports scene, France must try not to lose ground and must build on this legacy.

Despite their involvement in the field of sport and diplomacy, several national experts were not aware of the reflection and deployment of a sport diplomacy at the European level. This lack of knowledge shows, for them, that there is still a long way to go to achieve this.

Several national experts consider that the deployment of a European sport diplomacy would allow them to influence the current discussions on sports governance reforms. Following the example of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the coordinated response of European states, including in the field of sport, a collective push for reform could move some lines.

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- **Magali TEZENAS DE MONTCEL**, CEO SPORSORA.
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