

# ***NATIONAL REPORT***



**COUNTRY:**  
***GREECE***

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

Greece is the home of the ancient Olympic Games, which is why, during the parade of nations, Greece is always called first and is among the few countries that has constantly participated in all Summer Olympic Games. In line with such a unique legacy and tradition in sport, athletic activity is declared an institution by the Greek Constitution (art. 16<sup>1</sup>), which places it under the protection and highest supervision of the State.

Constitutional recognition guarantees the right to free development of sports activities, and empowers the legislator as regards the regulation of and support for organised sports and competitive activities. Under the Constitution, State regulation and grants, both of which are framed by law, are directed towards several aims that are relevant to sports activity: free development of personality; free individual or collective sport action; and through these, the establishment of sport education, and contribution to the social, cultural, financial and political life of the country.

The structure of sport governance in Greece is built around the Ministry of Culture and Sport, which hosts the General Secretariat of Sport (GSS). The GSS is responsible for the strategic planning and implementation of the country's sports policy, within the framework of the constitutional obligation of the State to protect, supervise and provide financial support for sports. The Secretariat is responsible for tasks such as: developing and implementing national sport policies, promoting participation in sport, optimising use of public sports facilities and funding national sports federations.

The GSS brings together and funds the different National Sports Federations, the individual governing units of sports; they are aimed at developing and promoting sport and are in charge of distributing GSS funds among the sport clubs and associations connected to them.

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

There is no formal process for promoting sport diplomacy in Greece, as there is no strategy or effective coordination between the ministries and the organizations. There is no guidance from the government, and no coordination under a governmental umbrella.

Greece is starting to acknowledge the power of sport in promoting a different culture and approach to international relations, but it is still underestimated.

The few efforts made in sport diplomacy are mainly dedicated to promoting the idea of and need for a peaceful world, coherently with the tradition of Olympic values. Sport is therefore connected to issues such as conflict resolution, but also to climate change, gender issues and more socially-oriented missions. Sport diplomacy is never connected to objectives of economic growth.

<sup>1</sup>Art. 16 comma 9, Greek Constitution "Athletics shall be under the protection and the ultimate supervision of the State. The State shall make grants to and shall control all types of athletic associations, as specified by law. The use of grants in accordance with the purpose of the associations receiving them shall also be specified by law."

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

There is no efficient governance for sport diplomacy, as the few actors involved in the related activities operate without any concrete, constant connection.

The main State actor is the Ministry of Culture and Sport, and more specifically the General Secretariat of Sport, which has a department in charge of international relations: the “Directorate of Sports for All, Promotion, Development of Sports Scientific Support and International Relations”. The operational objectives of this Directorate include: the organization, implementation, monitoring and support of Sports for All Programmes and the development of sports at the Panhellenic level; support for and development of sports tourism and alternative sports; promoting the country’s international sports relations, and connecting with World and European Sports Organizations and Institutions. Within this Directorate, the Department of International Relations, European Politics and Olympic Affairs of Sports and Cultural Promotion is responsible for:

- Cultivating and developing public and international relations and organising events.
- Promoting transnational relations and representation in international institutions and other bodies.
- Collecting information and statistics on sports issues at the level of the European Union and the Council of Europe for International programmes and sports policies as well as informing the competent Departments of the GGA.
- Providing information and statistics on the country’s sports to the European Union and the Council of Europe and to other International Institutions in which we participate as a Member State.
- Operating and supporting the work of the Observatory for Women, Sports and Physical Education under the auspices of UNESCO (NPID).

This list of functions highlights the lack of efforts towards the development and dissemination of awareness of sport diplomacy and its potential, as well as the lack of formalized national coordination of sport diplomacy. Nevertheless, the perception of sport diplomacy experts is that this Ministry is focused on national sport, and puts less energy into sport diplomacy.

As regards the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we have seen discontinuous involvement in sport diplomacy, depending on the Minister’s personality or specific opportunities, while its standard function is focused on bureaucratic issues (visa and certificates for foreign athletes entering Greece or for national athletes competing in foreign countries). An important example of this Ministry’s full involvement in sport diplomacy is the case of the candidacy for the 2030 FIFA World Cup. In 2018, the Ministry, driven by the role and aura of the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexis Tsipras, took the opportunity of the World Cup to strengthen cooperation in the Balkan region and proposed a joint candidacy for it to be hosted by Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania. As the words of the Minister himself show, this candidacy emerges from profound reflection on the role of sport diplomacy: *“For very many years, we have been accustomed to the Balkans being the powder keg of our region. World War I began in the Balkans. The Balkans were a focal point during World War II. Immediately after, there was nationalism, the war in Yugoslavia,*

*conflicts, hate. This continues even today. Now the message we send, from four Balkan countries, is that we leave behind this period of strife and we join forces for a good purpose, to be awarded a great sporting event. This message is invaluable, regardless of whether we succeed or not.”<sup>2</sup>*

Other relevant actors are the three Olympic institutions based in Greece: the National Olympic Committee, the Olympic Truce Center, and the Olympics Academy. They have developed trilateral cooperation that is driven by their common link to the Olympics and is not coordinated by or with any governmental actor.

As regards other possible actors:

- Local authorities, especially cities relevant for the Olympic Games and the Peloponnese region, sometimes substitute for the government in sport diplomacy, but on ad hoc basis and in exceptional cases. However, they do not have any clearly defined sport diplomacy strategies.
- Sports bodies do not have any role in sport diplomacy. Moreover, there is no coordination for their engagement in such activities and they are not even connected to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In special events, finals or semifinals of most popular sports, they occasionally work together.
- The private sector and the media are engaged in sport diplomacy only in cases of major events in popular sports, and on an ad hoc basis.
- Finally, athletes are not systematically trained in sport diplomacy, as they are not considered likely to promote Greece in the international context through direct and deliberate behaviour/actions. Nevertheless, some athletes involved in the Olympics are trained – for instance by the Olympic Truce Center – to promote Olympic values and the notion of truce. There is no structural training programme in sport diplomacy for athletes and they are not involved as “ambassadors”.

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

The only relevant sport diplomacy activity in Greece aims to attract mega events, for instance the Olympic Summer Games, the FIFA World Cup and the Rally Acropolis.

In cooperation with less developed countries, Greece focuses on mentoring and training programmes, through the Olympic organisations and not at a governmental level, and it funds collaborative projects, exchange programmes and sports fellowships and grants.

## **5. SPORT DIPLOMACY’S FUTURE**

Greece’s major weaknesses in sport diplomacy are the lack of clear acknowledgment and recognition of sport diplomacy’s value and role, and – consequently – the lack of a single strategy and point of reference to stimulate and effectively coordinate the (few) current efforts.

Greece could use its Olympic legacy, which is greatly connected to global values, to promote and be seen as a country that is not only the birthplace of democracy and the Olympic Games, but also one that has influenced some of the global values and principles that drive us today. Greece should showcase and demonstrate that these values are timeless and that it can play a role in their dissemination and understanding even today.

<sup>2</sup>Interview of the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexis Tsipras to the ITAR TASS News Agency with journalist Mikhail Gusman. Link to the interview: <https://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/top-story/interview-of-the-prime-minister-and-minister-of-foreign-affairs-alexis-tsipras-to-the-itar-tass-news-agency-with-journalist-mikhail-gusman.html>

Another relevant use of sport diplomacy is aimed at economic growth, and in particular drawing tourists to less visited areas that could become venues for specific sports events.

Moreover, Greece should leverage sport and sport diplomacy more as a tool to normalize bilateral relations with Turkey; for instance, they could promote joint sports events or competitions, and use these occasions as opportunities to ease relations by leveraging the shared values promoted by sport.

The priorities to be addressed in order to build a sport diplomacy strategy in Greece include dedicated training for diplomats, athletes and sport managers in sport diplomacy, and more structural investment in the local dimension of sport diplomacy.

As regards the possibility of a regional sport diplomacy policy, driven by the EU, the interviewees pointed only to the advantages, asserting that it would be beneficial.

First and foremost, an EU sport diplomacy policy would help member states to realize the importance of sport diplomacy, and it could persuade them to also promote sport diplomacy at the national level.

Finally, if sport diplomacy were on a European level, different national organisations could be connected, we could let them share their different points of view, build a common vision and work cooperatively to overcome problems – even internal/regional ones – through sport. European sport diplomacy would also be very effective externally, in relations with other continents and populations, as a more effective and influential soft tool to promote the EU vision and ideas.

## 6. INTERVIEWS

- **Dr Konstantinos Filis**, Director, International Olympic Truce Centre – Member, Hellenic Olympic Committee – Director, Institute of Global Affairs, Associate Professor, American College of Greece
- **Prof. Dimitris Gargalianos**, Associate Professor, Democritus University of Thrace, Sports Management – Event Management – International Relations of Sport

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