

# ***NATIONAL REPORT***



**COUNTRY:**  
***Hungary***

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

Hungary is a small country, but with important sports performances at the international level throughout its history. For this reason, the State pays attention to this area. The governmental body responsible for sports in Hungary is the State Secretariat for Sport, which has been operating under the Ministry of Defence since May 2022. Until the beginning of this year, sport was under the umbrella of the Ministry of Human Resources. This move confirms that sport is still an important 'strategic' sector in Hungary.

The State Secretariat for Sport represents and coordinates the sports affairs of Hungary on national and international levels, prepares and coordinates legal regulations, and implements the national sports strategy. At the same time, this institution takes part in the education and training of sports professionals and endorses the organisation of international sporting events in Hungary.

The legal framework of sport in Hungary is based on the 2004 Act on Sport and the amendments made in 2011, which govern the mechanisms of sport. In 2017, a new and important modification to the laws of sport stated that companies in Hungary could sponsor sports organisations using their corporate tax.

Because the Hungarian state considers the development of the sports sector to be a key priority, it has made important investments in this area, with an estimated \$6 billion over the past 12 years.

The main actors, besides the State Secretariat for Sport, are the Hungarian Olympic Committee (responsible for Olympic sports), the Hungarian Paralympic Committee (which coordinates sports activities for people with disabilities), the National Sports Agency (which organises mega-events and it is also responsible for the management of key state-owned sport facilities and youth sports development), the National Competition Sport Federation (which covers all non-Olympic sports), the National School, University and Leisure Sport Federation (which is responsible for sport for all activities) and the sports federations.

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

Hungary has a formalized national sport diplomacy strategy, with clear objectives and visible actions. The main activities in this area are conducted by the Sports Diplomacy Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary. At the national level, there is a coordinated strategy, aiming mainly "to make Hungary a sporting nation while maintaining its sports nation status" (Garamvölgyi & Dóczy, 2021). To this end, the Hungarian government has invested large sums of money in sport since 2010.

As Bence Garamvölgyi and Tamás Dóczy observed, the sport diplomacy strategy of Hungary is underpinned by five major pillars:

1. Improving the image of Hungary through the organisation of international sports events and conferences;
2. Sport as a tool for strengthening international relations;
3. Representing Hungarian sports interests in international sports federations;

4. Representing the interests of Hungarian sports companies and inventions abroad;
5. Ex-athletes and sports journalists in diplomatic positions. (Garamvölgyi & Dóczi, 2021)

Each of these aspects can be identified in concrete actions. For example, when it comes to hosting international events, Hungary is a very active country. In the last five years, major events like the FINA World Aquatics Championships (two times), the European Youth Olympic Festival, the Judo World Championships, World Wrestling Championships, World Table Tennis Championships, matches of the 2020 UEFA Football Championship, and many others were hosted by Hungary.

These international sporting competitions were opportunities for Magyar officials to strengthen inter-state relations. The most visible example is that of the Hungary-Russia collaboration, and more precisely between Viktor Orban and Vladimir Putin, facilitated by sports events hosted in Hungary.

At the same time, the Hungarian authorities have sought to support the nomination and election of sports leaders to important positions in international sports federations and organisations. For example, Sándor Csányi, president of the Hungarian Football Federation, became vice-president of FIFA in 2018 and vice-president of UEFA in 2019. He is just one of many Hungarian sport officials who play an important role in international federations. There is a direct connection between hosting international events and having people elected to international federations. For example, during the 2022 FINA World Aquatics Championships in Budapest, elections for the FINA commissions were scheduled and Hungary succeeded in having members in five of six of this organisation's commissions. This aspect was presented as a success of sport diplomacy by the Hungarian Swimming Association.

Sport diplomacy was also visible through the promotion of Hungarian initiatives and inventions in sport, like teqball, a sport played on a specially curved table, combining elements of football and table tennis. This sport was invented in 2012 in Hungary and in 2019, Budapest hosted the Teqball World Championships with 160 athletes from 58 countries. To promote this sport, the International Teqball Federation signed an agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which made it possible for hundreds of teqball tables to be donated to organisations around the world and popularized this sport with the help of the Hungarian embassies.

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

Sport diplomacy is well represented by many actors in the Hungarian strategy. The main actor in sport diplomacy is the Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who is very keen on sport and is interested in promoting the Magyar identity through sport. His central role can be seen at every important sports event hosted by his country. In this context, the National Sports Agency, established in 2018 under the guidance of the Prime Minister's cabinet, plays an important role in organising sports events and building facilities.

Another important actor is the Sports Diplomacy Department, created in 2018, which has an active role and establishes connections with other actors at the national and international levels. The umbrella of this institution, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, is a dynamic

institution when it comes to sport. For example, when Hungary launched its candidacy to host the 2024 Olympic Games, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade coordinated activity through its embassies to promote the candidacy and communicated constantly with the Hungarian Olympic Committee, and the organisation committee.

The Hungarian Olympic Committee has a long history of being one of the International Olympic Committee's founders. This legacy is part of the institution's identity, which seeks to work together with other institutions to promote Olympic sports, host Olympic events, and popularize Hungarian sports legends.

Athletes and former athletes are seen as important actors in Hungarian sport diplomacy. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade since 2014 is Péter Szijjártó, an ex-futsal player, so he understands the importance of sport diplomacy. "The Minister has strong connections in sports and he likes to position himself as one of the key actors of sport diplomacy", says Bence Garamvölgyi. Other former athletes have been appointed to positions with diplomatic opportunities. For example, in 2019, Hungary's former Olympic swimming champion, Dániel Gyurta, was named as a senior advisor in sport diplomacy to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and in 2022 he was promoted as ambassador. In 2020, Miklós Górnagy, the world champion water polo player was named foreign trade attaché of the Consulate General of Hungary in New York. Former athletes in Hungary are better represented in diplomacy than in other European countries, considers Bence Garamvölgyi.

Politicians are frequently associated with sports situations. Alongside Viktor Orbán, other political figures have connected their activity with sport diplomacy. In this context, media outlets close to the government are more involved in promoting sport diplomacy actions and its results. "The general editor of the Nemzeti Sport daily newspaper also acts as a sport diplomat to promote the heritage of Ferenc Puskas", explains Bence Garamvölgyi. He considers that Nemzeti Sport is close to sport diplomacy and that it follows government activities in this direction.

Local authorities are involved in organising sports events. Budapest municipality has the leading role, but other cities like Debrecen, Szeged, or Győr have hosted important sports events. It is not necessarily something coordinated, but local authorities follow the government strategy because this is how they obtain funding for these events. "Local authorities actively look for opportunities to host events, as was the case with the Swimming World Championships, which were supposed to be in Japan this year, but they had to cancel it because of the Covid situation and Budapest was quite eager to jump in, so it is not just "wait and see", explains Peter Zsedely on how Budapest hosted the FINA World Aquatics Championships in 2022.

The private sector is involved in sport diplomacy actions, through some companies which were stimulated by government legislation to support Magyar sports entities. In the same vein, the authorities have created The SportTech Hungary Program. This initiative promotes Hungarian sports technology innovations for the international market.

The sports federations are important actors in Hungary. For example, the Hungarian Judo Association is an active member at the international level and uses sport diplomacy often. In this respect, through sport diplomacy, in 2019, Budapest convinced the International Judo Federation to relocate its headquarters to Hungary. They both collaborated in 2022 and started the "No Borders" campaign, which offered the possibility for 300 Ukrainian children and 20 coaches to be evacuated to Hungary in the context of the war started by Russia in Ukraine.

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

Hungary has high-level expertise in the field of sport diplomacy, not only at the national level but also on an international scale. In this regard, it should be noted that in 2015, the Hungarian Tibor Navracsis, who was the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, created a European high-level group on sport diplomacy, of which another Hungarian official, Pal Schmitt, former President of Hungary and former athlete, was a member.

Hungary allocates public economic resources to sport diplomacy activities, but also educational resources. "For former athletes, for example, Hungary provides them with the tools to become sport diplomats if they want to be and if they have the talent for that", considers Bence Garamvölgyi.

Facilities represent another important tool, and the Hungarian government has invested important sums of money in them, thus allowing Hungary to host mega-events. Hungary has the facilities, which are well located, and has experience in organising events, so it has some advantages in sport diplomacy, considers Peter Zsedely. In addition, Hungary has invested in facilities in other countries, like Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia. The inauguration of stadiums or football academies by Hungarian government officials in those countries was an opportunity to meet officials from the aforementioned nations.

At the same time, courses and conferences focusing on sport diplomacy have been organised frequently in recent years in Hungary. The Hungarian University of Sports Science collaborates with the Sport Diplomacy Department and other institutions to organise this type of activity. In this vein, for example, in 2022, the Hungarian University of Sports Science conducted a pilot project within the TES-D project organising a workshop on 6 May 2022, entitled "Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Ping-Pong Diplomacy on the Day of Hungarian Sports". On this occasion, important figures of sport diplomacy in Hungary attended the event.

## **5. SPORT DIPLOMACY'S FUTURE**

In the short term, sport diplomacy appears to have the same important role for Hungary, considering that Prime Minister Viktor Orban won his fourth consecutive term as Hungary's Prime Minister. His ambitions in terms of sport diplomacy can be identified in his quotes, like "apart from the FIFA World Cup, which is another matter, there's no major world event that is beyond Budapest's capabilities" (Garamvölgyi & Dóczy, 2021). This suggests that hosting mega sports events remains an important objective. A change in the political regime could influence this strategy.

Another vector of development for sport diplomacy in Hungary is the influence of some national federations at the regional and global level, where they could use their position to promote their organisation and country. This aspect is related to the organisation of important competitions in Hungary. Some examples in this regard are the Hungarian Swimming Federation, the Hungarian Fencing Federation, and even the Hungarian Football Federation.

Sport legacy is an opportunity for Hungarian sport diplomacy, especially when it comes to the results at Summer Olympics. Hungary has many former athletes who are active and visible at the international level and it could use their profiles and performances to strengthen sport diplomacy actions.

If the EU were to have a common sport diplomacy policy, the disadvantages identified are the difficulty to bring together all the national strategies, because of strong nationalism; the difficulty to coordinate such a project, and the laborious implementation due to the legal aspects.

If the EU were to have a common sport diplomacy policy, some advantages mentioned include: knowledge sharing; uniting all European sport heritage; increasing the competitiveness of the European Union; creating a better identity of the European Union; an increase in funding and resources allocated to this area to implement the strategy; and a serious orientation towards grassroots sport diplomacy.

In terms of good practices, Hungarian experts have mentioned the Australian sport diplomacy strategy as a model. France, Japan, and the USA were also pointed out, Colombia was considered an interesting case, and Qatar, although a controversial case, was mentioned for using sport diplomacy. Peter Zsedely added that some national leagues also do sport diplomacy, like La Liga, Bundesliga, or Premier League: "In Brussels, they have dedicated personnel who work with the EU or lawmakers and they use sport power and sport diplomacy".

## 6. INTERVIEWS

- **Bence Garamvölgyi:** expert in sport policies, Managing Director of the Budapest Sports Service Provider Nonprofit Ltd and researcher at the Hungarian University of Sports Science.
- **Peter Zsedely:** Founder and managing director of Sports marketing Hungary, an organisation which operates within the sports business area in Hungary and on an international level.

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