

NATIONAL REPORT

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**COUNTRY:
Latvia**



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1. SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL SPORT SYSTEM/ARCHITECTURE

The goal of the Latvian national sports policy is to form healthy, and highly physically and mentally developed personalities. The general legal basis of sports organisation and development in Latvia is determined by the Sports Law. The Ministry of Education and Science is the state administrative institution responsible for sports.

The Association “Latvian Sports Federations Council” is the largest representative sports organisations in Latvia, bringing together and representing 94 recognised sports federations, 184 recognised sports types and 1,915 collective members having more than 120,000 people who do sports. It is composed of 87 sports federations, five sports sphere federations and three custom sports federations for the disabled.

The Latvian Olympic Committee (Latvian: Latvijas Olimpiskā Komiteja or LOK) is a non-profit organisation that is the National Olympic Committee for Latvia.

The “Board of Directors of Latvian Sports Education schools” (sport schools) coordinates and manages the implementation of professional sports education programmes in the country through more than 90 sport schools in more than 40 sports.

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

Latvia seems to have a non-formalised sport diplomacy strategy. Usually, sport diplomacy depends on the initiative of certain federations or sports, for example, during major events in Latvia.

Usually, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) is informed about major events or stakeholders arriving. Since 24 February 2022 and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, sport diplomacy has been based on the MoFA’s guidelines, where the main objective is for everyone to show as much solidarity as possible with Ukraine and its inhabitants, to support them. The Latvian sports community welcomes young Ukrainian athletes in basketball, ice hockey, etc. More than 30,000 refugees from Ukraine have arrived in Latvia since February.

The objectives in diplomacy are based on major issues – to support Ukraine and condemn Russia and Belarus at every level. This has been more or less the direction since 2014 (Crimea annexation).

Regarding the sports industry, Latvia also supports sanctions on Russian athletes (worldwide ban) due to Doping scandals at the Sochi Olympics and afterwards.¹

On 28 April 2022, the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia supported amendments to the Sports Law, which provides for a ban on sports teams, athletes, and sports workers participating in competitions and championships in Russia or Belarus.²

¹<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/dec/11/latvia-skeleton-team-to-boycott-world-championships-russia-sochi-doping-scandal>

²<https://eng.lsm.lv/article/culture/sport/latvian-athletes-banned-from-competing-in-russia-belarus.a454390/>

The Ministry of Education and Science calls all sports stakeholders to use sport diplomacy options to condemn the Russian Federation's and Belarus Republic's aggression in Ukraine and not to participate in any events in these countries. Latvia also supported this statement.³

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

Usually sport diplomacy depends on the initiative of certain federations or sports, for example, during major events in Latvia. Furthermore, some stakeholders are not familiar with sport diplomacy (as a definition and in global) and its benefits.

Political or governmental players do not have a specific role and are not engaged in sport diplomacy. However, a few examples can be seen on an ad hoc basis.

Official diplomats do not have a specific role and do not engage in sport diplomacy. They are usually informed about major sports events in Latvia.

City authorities and local institutions/politicians do not have a specific role and do not engage in sport diplomacy. If a local municipality is able to support an event, then local politicians take part in sport diplomacy, but there are only a few examples. The most recent example was when a local city mayor banned Russian and Belarus athletes from coming and competing last May.⁴

Sports bodies try to position Latvia as a safe and trustful country (or partner) to repeatedly host major events. Usually sport diplomacy depends on the initiative of certain federations, for example, during major events in Latvia.

The private sector does not have a specific role and does not engage in sport diplomacy. If we look at some activities of the Russian Federation over the last 15 years in countries of the former Soviet bloc, where the so-called "soft power" of the Russian Federation was exercised through sports, then the main sponsor of the Latvian ice hockey club "Dinamo Riga" (participated in the Kontinental Hockey League (KHL) – also the Russian Men's Hockey Championship) since its establishment in 2008 was a local company "Itera Latvija SIA". This company and its shareholders were affiliated to "Gazprom Export" (a Russian company). Such expressions of "soft power" divide our society, which is also one of Russia's real long-term goals. In April 2022, "Dinamo Riga" suspended its operations.⁵

Athletes do not have a specific role in sport diplomacy actions. They are an "unused resource" (for example, NBA, NHL, and EPL Players (including former players)).

4. TOOLS OF SPORT DIPLOMACY

Regarding the public economic resources available for sport diplomacy activities, they are difficult to evaluate. There are no available resources for the Ministry of Education and Science, but the Ministry of the Economy offers some support through the "Promoting international competitiveness" programme.⁶

³<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-on-russias-war-on-ukraine-international-sport>

⁴[https://www.itftennis.com/en/tournament/w60-liepaja-\(postponed\)/lat/2022/w-itf-lat-01a-2022/draws-and-results/](https://www.itftennis.com/en/tournament/w60-liepaja-(postponed)/lat/2022/w-itf-lat-01a-2022/draws-and-results/)

⁵<https://www.dailyfaceoff.com/jokerit-helsinki-dinamo-riga-officially-withdraw-from-khl-for-2022-23/>

⁶<https://www.liaa.gov.lv/lv/programmas/skv-turisms/starptautiska-kulturas-sporta-pasakuma-izstades-organizanas-veidlapa>

The most important sport diplomacy activity will come in the future. But, the last one was a letter of support from the government to the International Ice Hockey Federation with a view to hosting next year's World Championship 2023 in Riga ⁷ - and the competing candidate (Hungary), for example, could not secure support at this (government) level.⁸

Also, it is important to note that the Latvian Ice Hockey Federation seems to be a good partner to the Finnish Ice Hockey Association and this is their successful internal diplomacy.

5. SPORT DIPLOMACY'S FUTURE

The major weakness seems to be that the strategy is decentralised, and different actors are in charge of specific programmes and resources. There is no or at least very little coordination of all sport diplomacy actors and activities.

Developing a national sport diplomacy strategy is currently a challenge, but it should first be discussed with the MoFA, for example, on how to make it more appropriate. It is also important for other sports stakeholders (such as federations) to come and explain the benefits and issues at stake – to engage in constructive dialogue on sport diplomacy.

In the future, major sporting events should be more sustainable and environmentally-friendly so here the EU could be a pioneer. However, this “one key strategy for sustainable development” depends on the decisions of the big EU countries (since Germany, France, Spain and Italy are “big names” and could act (in sports) on their own).

⁷<https://www.iihf.com/en/events/2022/wm/news/36477/to-tampere-riga-in-23-to-switzerland-in-26>

⁸<https://eprimefeed.com/economy/hungary-refuses-to-host-the-ice-hockey-world-championship-because-of-russia/94441/>



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