

NATIONAL REPORT



COUNTRY:
Spain

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

1. SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL SPORT SYSTEM/ARCHITECTURE

According to Spanish Law, competences for sporting issues are shared among local, regional and central authorities. At the central level, the National Sports Council is the Spanish autonomous agency responsible for the promotion, planning and development of physical and sports activities, the coordination and support of non-state sporting entities and the coordination of relations between the Spanish Government and the Spanish Olympic Committee. Also, local and regional authorities have assumed and developed their own competences in this field. Article 148.1.19 of the Spanish Constitution¹ states that the Autonomous Communities may assume competences over the promotion of sport and the proper use of leisure. Based on this constitutional provision, all the Spanish Autonomous Communities have legally assumed competences on sporting issues and approved their own legal and institutional sports frameworks.

In 2020, the Royal Decree-Law 15/2020 established the “Spain Global Sport Foundation, F.S.P.” (Fundación España Deporte Global, F.S.P.). The main goals of the Foundation are the promotion, encouragement and dissemination of federated, Olympic and Paralympic sport, as well as the internationalisation of Spanish sport. In order to achieve these aims, it will design projects for the dissemination and national and international promotion of the Spanish sporting model. The Foundation is attached to the National Sports Council, and includes the participation of the Royal Spanish Football Federation (RFEF), LaLiga and representatives of the different Spanish sports federations, as well as official and unofficial competitions.

At the time of writing, a new Sports Act is under discussion in the Spanish Parliament. The text has been promoted and drafted by the Ministry of Culture and Sport through the National Sports Council with the contribution of other Ministries, the Autonomous Communities and a variety of public and private sports actors. The main purpose of the new Act is to adapt the legal framework to the new reality of the Spanish sports sector. Among other new features, it recognises sporting activity as a right, promotes the presence of women in the sector and regulates the figure of the sportsperson and sports organisations. The text makes no mention of sport diplomacy, nor does it include any specific measures in this regard, although it explicitly recognises sport as a way to improve Spain’s international reputation.

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

There is no formalised national sport diplomacy strategy in Spain. However, a report was published in 2019 entitled “Sports Diplomacy as an actor for Global Spain. The need for a model for Spain” [in Spanish] can be considered a first attempt to build a more ambitious plan aiming to design a Spanish sport diplomacy strategy which should be achieved in different phases. This report was drafted by the Spanish Secretariat for Global Spain (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in consultation with other governmental departments, in particular, the National Council for Sports and sporting organisations. The National Council for Sport (Ministry of Culture and Sport) also drafted a document of intentions that systematized an action plan to be implemented in collaboration with Spain’s diplomatic representations abroad. However, it has never been developed. In any case, it should be borne in mind that awareness of the potential role sport can play in the international sphere comes before these initiatives. The establishment of the “Marca

¹Available at <https://www.boe.es/legislacion/documentos/ConstitucionINGLES.pdf> (accessed on July 17, 2022).

España" (Brand Spain) project in 2000 can be seen as the starting point in this regard. This was a public initiative developed in partnership with some of the largest Spanish companies. Not having an overall, coordinated and formalised sport diplomacy strategy as a country does not mean that a good number of public initiatives linked more or less directly to sport as a diplomatic tool cannot be identified.

Improving peaceful relations among nations and enhancing the inclusion of all human beings and communities -also pursued by private sport actors as a part of their corporate social responsibility programmes-, and normalizing or reinforcing diplomatic relations would definitely rank high in Spanish sport diplomacy action. However, the main purpose is still to improve the country's global reputation and promote the Spanish nation-brand. And it is the reputational challenge that shows the biggest need for improvement, as it is an area that usually requires clear public support and direction.

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

As already mentioned, sport diplomacy governance in Spain is decentralised. Different public and private actors are responsible for specific programmes and resources:

- a. In the public sphere, both the State Secretary for Foreign and Global Affairs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation) and the National Council for Sport play a leading role in this field. Along with these central initiatives, local and regional action should be considered. City authorities and local institutions are currently gaining momentum within sport diplomacy beyond participating in the organisation of major sporting events, such as the Olympic Games. Many of them are discovering how fruitful sport can be for their cities in the medium-long term, especially in achieving additional goals (such as tourism). Also, certain regional authorities are developing their own sport diplomacy strategies or have at least become fully aware of the powerful role sport can play regarding their traditional claims for more political autonomy, even if according to Article 149 of the Spanish Constitution the central government has exclusive competence over international [relations](#)².
- b. As for the role of diplomats in the implementation of sport diplomacy strategy/measures, there is no standard/specific training in sport diplomacy within the diplomatic training syllabus, neither before nor after joining the Diplomatic Corps. Involvement of diplomats in sport diplomacy actions basically stems from a vocational choice made by those who are already familiar with the importance of sport or those discovering its power to change and shape social/international relations throughout their career.
- c. Even if Spain does not have a public sport diplomacy strategy, and no specific role has therefore been assigned to the media as real and tangible actors for sport diplomacy, the media have nonetheless been engaging over the last decades when major sports events were at stake. We could thus define media in the sport diplomacy context as an efficient, responsive actor.

²The Act on Sport of the Basque Country is an interesting example in this regard. It provides for the approval within one year of a Strategic Plan for herri-kirolak, Basque pelota and rowing that will seek to develop these sports disciplines. The Basque federations involved, the Basque Sports Council and other agents related to these sports must take part in drawing up the plan and it must contain measures aimed at the promotion of these disciplines abroad. This provision is clearly linked to the promotion of the image of the Autonomous Community abroad through sport. The Act is available at: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2011-20657>

d. Taking into consideration the different sizes and powers of each different sports sector/ concrete actor, some specific private entities are currently the ones assuming a significant number of Spanish sport diplomacy actions and efforts. Clubs like Real Madrid or F.C. Barcelona, major federations (such as LaLiga, Real Federación Española de Fútbol) or individual sportspeople and their constellations of foundations and sponsors are the biggest asset in sport diplomacy that Spain can currently count on.

e. Universities and researchers have a residual role that should be enhanced.

Although the National Council for Sport has recently been redoubling its efforts to appear as the coordinating body, effective coordination, with no overlaps or inconsistencies, remains one of the key challenges in the case of Spain.

4. TOOLS OF SPORT DIPLOMACY

Public economic resources available for sport diplomacy activities are scarce in Spain. To begin with, there is no such thing as a national budget dedicated to sport diplomacy, but one-off budgetary allocations for concrete and short events and goals. It is therefore an indeterminate budget. The creation of the Spain Global Sports Foundation does not seem to have contributed to change this situation, given that no significant steps have been taken towards its implementation since its creation.

With regard to the sports diplomacy activities implemented, the experts note mainly diplomatic and political efforts to attract mega-events. Media coverage and international broadcasting, the employment of high-level athletes or the organisation of trade missions remain relatively undeveloped.

Regarding sport diplomacy activities implemented in collaboration with less developed countries, mentoring or training programs are considered an important tool and are developed as are partnerships for sports competitions. Sport exchange programmes are also an interesting tool used sparingly.

To summarise, the most important sport diplomacy activities in Spain are:

- a. Private corporate actions aiming for growth towards new markets.
- b. Public relations spontaneously carried out by top sportspeople and their entourage (foundations and sponsors).
- c. Attempt to organise major sporting events.

5. SPORT DIPLOMACY'S FUTURE

Sports are of great importance in Spain and Spanish sportspeople are generally very well known all over the world, however, this is not the case with Spain's sport diplomacy. The great many actors taking part in sports and in diplomacy require a major coordination effort. An overall sport diplomacy strategy would be the key to success, as well as capitalising on Spain's drive within the sports sphere in many aspects (sports performance; sports management; etc.) into public diplomacy.

The greatest challenges and opportunities of sport diplomacy in Spain are:

- a. Recognising the importance of sport diplomacy as a first-degree diplomatic tool.

- b. Initiating the process towards the completion of an inclusive national sport diplomacy strategy.
- c. Public authorities need to be aware of the potential that our country has in this field (well-known athletes, facilities, climate, historical links with a good number of countries - especially in Latin America).

The National Experts have identified the following possible disadvantages in connection with the existence of an EU common sport diplomacy strategy:

- a. The reluctance to transfer national resources and identities to create a European sport diplomacy actor, as national sports are still considered by many Member States to be one of the most powerful national (internal) binding forces and part of their “core” national identity.
- b. A mismatch between having several more or less independent European sports systems/competitions but just one single sport diplomacy system. Although in reality sports competitions – internal and external ones, such as the Olympics – and sport diplomacy are not strictly the same, they must somehow appear to go hand in hand, or there could be a risk of lacking credibility.
- c. Disparity in the economic interests of national public/private actors across Member States may interfere in the process.

All three national experts agree that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. As for the possible advantages, they mention:

- a. A step forward towards an internally even more united EU. Sooner or later, European teams and individuals representing the EU as a single common entity within international competitions must be put on the table. The advantages are of such a nature and scope (quantitative, qualitative; internal, external, etc.) in favour of a stronger EU that no other measure would be more effective or cost-effective than this. But as long as sport is structured on a national level, states see each other as competitors.
- b. Strengthening EU public diplomacy around the world.
- c. Better economies of scale/Better funding.

Purpose and ambition are very much needed. Most sport diplomacy actions lacking purpose do not achieve any measurable results because they become more process-aimed than purpose-aimed. It is important to be honest and link adequate means to adequate goals. To take advantage of the potential, maybe it is about time to put all actors into action in a coordinated effort.

6. INTERVIEWS

- **Diego Calatayud Soriano** is a Spanish Diplomat. He is the author of the Report “La Diplomacia deportiva como actor de la España Global. La necesidad de un modelo para España”.
- **Belén Lara Martínez** serves as the head of the Projects Division at the Spanish National Sports Council (Consejo Superior de Deportes).
- **Javier Sobrino de Toro** is a Professor of Business Strategy at Universidad Pontificia de Comillas and ICADE Business School.

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of the European Union