



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

## ***Promoting a Strategic Approach to EU Sport Diplomacy***

### ***Executive Summary & Recommendations***

***December 2021***

#### ***Research Team***

*Professor Richard Parrish (Edge Hill University, UK)*

*Dr Antoine Duval (TMC Asser Institute, Netherlands)*

*Silvija Mitevska (formerly TAKT, Republic of North Macedonia)*

*Associate Professor Carmen Perez-Gonzalez (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Spain)*

*Associate Professor Vanja Smokvina (University of Rijeka, Faculty of Law, Croatia)*

*Professor Albrecht Sonntag (ESSCA School of Management, France)*

*Professor Thierry Zintz (Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium)*

*Dr Andrea Cattaneo (Edge Hill University, UK)*

#### ***Associate Partner***

*Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS): Council of Europe*

#### ***Academic Reviewers***

*Associate Professor Stuart Murray (Bond University, Australia, and the Academy of Sport,  
Edinburgh University, UK)*

*Dr Simon Rofo (SOAS University of London, UK)*

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors (the research team), and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

## *Conclusions and Recommendations*

Since the High-Level Group on Sport Diplomacy published its report in 2016, the EU has taken its first tentative steps at practicing sport diplomacy. However, these steps have been ad hoc and lacking strategic orientation. The arguments for becoming more strategic are now compelling:

- The EU and its Member States have an enviable sporting heritage. As sport plays such an important role in European society, why does it not play a more prominent role in the EU's foreign policy? After all, EU diplomacy is meant to reflect what is best about European society.
- The EU has a maturing foreign policy and a Global Strategy. Lessons from Australia and the U.S. highlight that sport has a proven track record of reaching wide audiences and amplifying diplomatic messages. Sport can help the EU achieve its foreign policy goals in a rapidly changing and increasingly unstable international environment.
- The EU has existing expertise and capacity to develop and implement a sport diplomacy strategy. Article 165 TFEU equips the EU with the basis to act, the European Commission has acquired in-depth knowledge of sport and has built strong relations with the sports movement, the European External Action Service (EEAS) is well placed to assist with the delivery of such a strategy and the EU possesses a range of financing instruments, such as Erasmus+, that can support sport diplomacy initiatives. A sport diplomacy strategy can also build on knowledge acquired in the development of EU cultural and educational diplomacy.
- The Member States of the EU are increasingly turning to sport to amplify their own diplomatic messages. Where appropriate, the EU voice should be heard in these strategies. EU action can complement national efforts by adding consistency and coherence. It can help with their formulation (through the sharing of best practice), and it can assist in securing better outcomes and impact (by assisting with implementation, providing a wider platform and sharing resources).

- The EU is being left behind by some of its partners and competitors who now routinely deploy sport as part of their diplomatic repertoire. Why would the EU not want to use all available means to help secure its goals?

In light of the above, this study recommends the following:

## **Recommendations**

### *The Principles:*

1. The Commission, Council and Parliament should adopt and implement a sport diplomacy strategy. In doing so, they should take note of best practice, notably the sport diplomacy strategies of Australia and the U.S.
2. A value-based networked sport diplomacy model should be considered, with a broad network of public and non-state actors involved in mostly people-to-people and grassroots engagements.
3. The EU's sport diplomacy strategy should seek to complement and add value to the established and emerging sport diplomacy strategies of the Member States. Member States have many valuable pre-existing social, political and economic links with various parts of the world, but collectively, there are many shared values, thematic interests and geographical priorities, and these should be clearly defined and acted upon in an EU sport diplomacy strategy.

### *EU Institutional Considerations:*

4. As sport possesses a pronounced cross-cutting character and can be employed to advanced goals in a wide range of fields, including external relations, sport diplomacy should be mainstreamed into the work of all EU institutions and services, especially those with an external facing remit such as the EEAS, DG International Partnerships (INTPA), DG Climate Action (CLIMA), DG European Neighbourhood and

Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR), and Commission Service Department, Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI). A new specialist body (most likely located within the Sport Unit of DG Education, Youth, Culture and Sport (EAC) should play a central role in coordinating EU sport diplomacy activities and events and it should support and facilitate the training of those who are to be involved in the delivery of the EU's sport diplomacy strategy.

5. The EU should make further use of its experience of Structured Dialogue on Sport to ensure participation and cooperation on sport diplomacy issues with key stakeholders.
6. Sport diplomacy should be more systematically integrated into the work of the EEAS and a sport diplomacy portfolio should be established within it, with named individuals responsible for the co-ordination of sport diplomacy activities. The establishment of an EU Sport Diplomacy Platform, or equivalent, should be considered to provide training, support and advice to EU Delegations and to co-ordinate their activities. Sport related initiatives should be incorporated into the tasks carried out by the EU Special Representatives in troubled regions and countries.

*Sport Diplomacy as an Expression of EU Values:*

7. An EU sport diplomacy strategy should reflect the EU's core values (such as democracy, rule of law, human dignity), thematic interests (such as peace, development, human rights, environmental protection, security) and geographical priorities (such as Western Balkans, Eastern and Southern Neighbours, China etc). The messaging should avoid the narrative of the exportation of 'superior' European values.
8. Bilateral relations between the EU and sports governing bodies (SGB), such as the signature of memoranda of understanding and the provision of financial support, should become conditional on the official commitment of the SGB in question to respecting human rights and the implementation of a human rights policy and human rights due diligence process in line with the UN Guiding Principles.

9. The EU should set up a working group including relevant stakeholders (such as SGBs, civil society organisations, labour unions) to exchange best practice on the safeguarding of human rights during Mega Sporting Events. Furthermore, the working group could also have the responsibility to independently assess the human rights risks of upcoming Mega Sporting Events and to advance concrete proposals to tackle them, which would then be endorsed by the EU.

*Relations with International Organisations:*

10. The EU should seek partnerships with organisations that already have considerable international outreach and credibility, such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe, and seek to complement actions being carried out by these organisations.
11. The EU should step up project-based cooperation with UNESCO, explicitly linked to sport through strong reference to the Kazan Action Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals. It should do so especially through engagement with the MINEPS and CIGEPS instruments.
12. EU Member States should ensure the Commission is systematically invited to meetings working on sport-related conventions proposed by the Council of Europe, such as the Anti-Doping Convention, or other major sports-related documents. While Member States representatives change over time, the Commission could provide the necessary continuity in such collaborations.
13. The EU should pro-actively approach the Council of Europe with the suggestion of joint funding activities, for projects or actions on major issues advocated by the CoE, which happen to overlap with values and standards promoted by the EU itself.

*Practical Considerations:*

14. Athletes and former athletes (envoys) are a valued asset and should be trained and deployed in an EU sport diplomacy strategy as they can be effective messengers.
15. Sport related matters should be incorporated into the design and implementation of EU external relations strategies, including within the framework of Accession, Association, Co-operation and European Neighbourhood agreements. The Commission should monitor the implementation of such agreements and liaise with key actors, such as the EEAS, to ensure fulfilment of the sport related objectives.
16. The EU should financially support collaborative projects, research activities and knowledge dissemination on issues connected to sport diplomacy. This should include, inter alia, measuring the impact of sport diplomacy; financing collaborative partnerships, and assessing the human rights and environmental impacts of staging mega-sporting events. Under Erasmus+, the EU should consider designating Partner Countries as Programme Countries, so to ensure the full participation of key third states and to ensure sport diplomacy has the means to achieve desired external relations ends.



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