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Sport Diplomacy in the European Union: The Development of a Soft Power Strategy

Abstract

This paper examines the emergence of sport as a tool of the European Union's (EU) soft power, due to its popularity and cost-effectiveness. Public diplomacy is gaining momentum and is increasingly used by state and non-state actors as means to influence the behaviour of others. The EU is developing its sport policy, laying the foundations for what could become a formal sport diplomacy strategy in the future. Using a qualitative methodology combining content analysis, case studies and interviews, this paper studies the benefits of an EU sport diplomacy strategy and the form it should take. It argues that for the EU to gain a comparative advantage over other state and non-state actors, it should adopt a hybrid sport diplomacy strategy that is based on soft and smart power and reflects its norms, values, and unique structure. Key actions it should consider are collaborating with international (sport) organisations and developing grassroots projects. This thesis also provides recommendations for a future EU sport diplomacy strategy.

Keywords: European Union, sport diplomacy, soft power, strategy, grassroots

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INTRODUCTION

On the 16th of January 2022, Serbian tennis player Novak Djokovic was expelled from the Australian Open tournament due to his vaccination status not being compliant with the legal requirements of the State of Victoria, thereby triggering a diplomatic incident between Australia and Serbia (Henley & Pantovic, 2022). This huge controversy highlighted the impact of sport on international politics. The relationship between sport and diplomacy is an understudied field of research, mainly due to both concepts being studied as separate disciplines (Parrish & Zintz, 2019). However, since the early 2000s, the sport has increasingly been regarded as creating spill-over effects that go beyond the competitions themselves (Cha, 2016; Parrish &

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Zintz, 2019; Sonntag, 2020). The increased interest in the relationship between the concepts of sport and diplomacy has led to the emergence of the concept of ‘sport diplomacy’ and is the driving idea behind this research project. The concept now includes non-state actors, such as the European Union (EU), which is seen as a newcomer by traditional sports diplomacy actors (Katsarova & Halleux, 2019; Sonntag, 2020). However, according to Articles 6 and 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the EU only has limited competencies regarding its sport policy (Foster, 2019; Katsarova & Halleux, 2019). Paradoxically, the European continent is home to some of the most competitive national sporting leagues, ‘Sport Mega Events’ (SMEs), and some of the most powerful international sports federations and organizations: the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). There is potential for the EU to harness these continental assets and add a new dimension to its projection of soft power, defined by Nye (2004) as the use of non-coercive means by state and non-state actors to obtain desired foreign policy outcomes. The gap on which this article focuses is explicitly stated in the introduction of the 2021 EU report promoting a strategic approach to EU diplomacy: sport plays an important role in European society, yet it is not formally part of the EU’s foreign policy (Parrish et al., 2021). Non-state actors, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) or the Council of Europe, as well as several state actors, have successfully developed sport diplomacy strategies, and the EU is lagging even though it possesses the institutional capacity to build a plan of action (Constantin et al., 2021).

Therefore, how can the European Union (EU), a hybrid power actor in international relations, benefit from a sports diplomacy strategy? This article aims to fill a gap in the literature on sports diplomacy, and more specifically on EU sports diplomacy. It does so first by highlighting the benefits for the EU of pursuing a well-defined sport diplomacy strategy and second, by providing concrete recommendations for such a strategy, based on three existing models. The core hypothesis is that although its impact should not be overstated, sports can be a useful tool of soft power for the EU. It will be argued that the EU does not possess exclusive and legally binding competencies in this policy area and should adopt a sports diplomacy strategy based on different levels of governance. Grassroots sport, which refers to all non-professional physical activity, represents an innovative and more participatory approach, while cooperating with international sport organizations is also crucial, as they are the main power holders in sport (Garamvölgyi et al., 2020). Not only would both approaches be beneficial for the EU’s foreign policy objectives, but they are relatively low-risk and low-cost, thus in line with the concept of soft power, the theoretical framework underpinning this research. This article employs a mixed qualitative methodology, as the EU can exert soft power in numerous ways and combines text and document analysis as the principal method, followed by case-study analyses. Core readings are selected from a range of academic sources: books, newspapers, journal articles, EU treaties, and government reports, enabling the construction of a comprehensive picture. The main argument is developed throughout five core chapters, which proceed as follows.

I. SOFT POWER AND ITS PLACE IN THE EU'S FOREIGN POLICY

a) From 'power' to 'soft power'

Power can be understood as the ability to achieve desired outcomes and influence the behavior of others (Nye, 2004). Traditionally, a great power in the world order was measured by its strength in wars (Nye, 1990). However, by the end of the twentieth century, power was measured less in terms of military capability and more in terms of factors such as technology, education, and economic strength and growth (Nye, 1990). Other non-state actors, such as international organizations, possessed these increasingly 'powerful' resources, enabling them to influence the behavior of others (Nye, 1990). Power is gradually shifting away from being exercised via traditional means, and the world is evolving into a 'softer world', a concept Joseph Nye defined in 1990 as outcomes achievable without coercion (the stick) and through inducement (the carrots). Soft power cultivates compliance using various policies, qualities, and other factors of attractiveness that both state and non-state actors may possess (Gallarotti, 2011). The United States of America's (USA) invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the more recent chaotic withdrawal of its forces from Afghanistan in 2021 demonstrated the negative impact and the consequences of a failing hard power strategy (Nye, 2004). What becomes important in this new world order is winning the peace and asserting one's image as a positive actor, rather than trying to influence the behavior of others through destructive means, as seen with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

b) 'Smart power'

To achieve this, access to information is important, and Nye (2014) argues for the emerging 'information revolution', where power is shifting from the 'capital-rich' to the 'information-rich'. Channels have diversified, leading to a diffusion of power away from governments to non-state actors (Nye, 2014). The internet has enabled individuals to become soft power actors, as seen with the examples of Wikileaks and Edward Snowden. Soft power is thus also about the control and portrayal of information and how it is broadcast in the media. Such examples can be seen in sports, especially in how an SME opening ceremony is portrayed on television. Non-state actors benefitting from the information revolution do not possess the same power resources as states and are not able to use hard power (Nye, 2004). Soft power, along with military (hard) power and economic power, is an important source of power in a multipolar world (Nye, 2004). Nielsen (2013) argues that the weakness of soft power is when it tries to replace hard power; the two forms of power should be used as complements rather than as alternatives. In 2003, Nye called this complimentary use 'smart power'. Nations "have everything from smart bombs to smartphones to smart blogs" (Wilson, 2008: 113). As states become smarter in how they balance both forms of power, so do non-state actors, such as Al Qaeda, promoting values seen as repulsive by most of the world but still appealing to certain extremists (Nye, 2004; Wilson, 2008). Gallarotti (2011) argues that what really differentiates soft and hard power is the context in which they are used. The distinction between the two forms of power is "one of degree, both in the nature of the behavior and in the tangibility of the resources" (Nye, 2004: 7). Smart power can thus be simply defined as effective soft power that does not involve high costs.

c) What type of power is the EU?

It is relevant to question whether the EU can be considered a soft power or a smart power actor. Not only is there an academic and political debate about what form the EU should take, but there is an ongoing debate about its power structure. The EU transcends Westphalian norms and has evolved into a hybrid form, mixing supranational and international governance characteristics (King, 1999, as cited in Manners, 2002). In the post-Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) era, the Union has been praised for its uniting capabilities, which carry a good deal of soft power (Nielsen, 2013). However, Nielsen (2013) points out that the EU's soft power creates a gap between the expectations it engenders and its ability to pursue its desired policies and fulfill its role in world politics, a phenomenon he names the 'Capability-Expectations Gap'. Therefore, is it adequate to perceive the EU's foreign policy through the prism of soft power? As Portela (2007, as cited in Nielsen, 2013) notes, soft power was not a concept purposefully formulated for the EU, unlike 'Normative Power Europe' (NPE), defined by Laïdi (2008, as cited in Corduneanu et al., 2014: 42) as a "preference for a rule-based system" established through treaties and conditions. Nielsen (2013) argues that normative and soft power share similarities, but their main difference is that normative power connotes the type of power the EU is.

The most important factor shaping the EU's international role is not what it does, but what it is, and in this case, normative power seems more appropriate than soft power (Manners, 2002). An opposing force to NPE is realism, the oldest theory in international relations (Pollack, 2010). The EU is motivated by both material interests and normative values, and the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is used by realist critics as an example of the EU's reliance on hard power (Manners, 2002). The EU does use political and economic conditionality as a normative power diffusion mechanism, but Manners (2002, as cited in Nielsen, 2013) rejects the idea that NPE requires a willingness to use force in an instrumental way. Currently, the military dimension of the EU is geared towards humanitarian intervention, for which it is by far the largest provider: 70% of overseas assistance, four times more than the USA (Nye, 2004; Nielsen, 2013). What stands out when studying the EU is not its military power; it is its narrative of peaceful integration and the 2004 enlargement, which are examples of soft power triumphs (Nielsen, 2013). Lastly, Wagner (2017) proposes the idea of 'Liberal Power Europe' (LPE) to overcome the debate between realists and constructivists. In LPE, only stable democracies can become member states, and the EU institutions themselves have endorsed a liberal-democratic identity. Conceiving the EU as such does prevent a radical reinterpretation of the EU's foreign policy. In its dealings with its near abroad, the EU does act as a normative power. In other instances, it may act as a hard power, such as in its current sanctions regime against Russia after the invasion of Ukraine, even though it remains too early to draw any conclusions on the EU's stance. NPE, LPE, or hard power are not necessarily relevant for stating what the EU partakes in, but for what the EU is, which is still an ongoing debate (Manners, 2002, as cited in Hyde-Price, 2006). The EU is a hybrid form of power, and this article focuses on what the EU does and, more specifically, on how it should embrace the benefits of this unique political structure. Public diplomacy and sport diplomacy are concepts identified here as tools to facilitate the EU's assertion as a dominant soft and smart power actor.

2. THE EMERGENCE OF SPORT DIPLOMACY AND THE EU SPORT POLICY

a) Diplomacy, public diplomacy, or sport diplomacy?

Murray (2018) defines diplomacy as a fundamentally important human invention, aimed at stabilizing relations between societies. Diplomacy is the means to a state's foreign policy ends (Cohen, 1998, as cited in Murray & Pigman, 2014; Murray, 2018). Murray (2018) makes a distinction between 'traditional' high-level diplomacy and what he refers to as a 'softer side' to diplomacy, or public diplomacy, involving a larger cast of actors, many of which are non-states: multilateral institutions (UN, IOC), global firms (Apple, Nike), or famous sportspeople, such as Cristiano Ronaldo or Roger Federer (Trunkos & Heere, 2017). The contemporary diplomatic environment provides ideal conditions favoring the appearance of new diplomatic channels and actors (Murray & Pigman, 2014). The process of EU integration since the Second World War is one of its greatest achievements and an example of a successful public diplomacy strategy, a key soft power tool (Nye, 2004). Public diplomacy also makes use of mechanisms short of war to attain foreign policy outcomes but involves direct communication of interests to the foreign public, rather than between governments (Cull, 2009, as cited in Fourneyron & Zintz, 2016; Rofe, 2014; Parrish et al., 2021). From NGOs to citizens, anyone has the power to become a relevant diplomatic stakeholder, and state actors are no longer in possession of the monopoly of power (Melissen, 2011, as cited in Garamvölgyi et al., 2020). Two important aspects of public diplomacy are cultural diplomacy and sport diplomacy, popular channels through which messages can be conveyed to vast international audiences (Nye, 2004; Mai'a & Melissen, 2013; Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2015; Dubinsky, 2017; Murray, 2018; Parrish et al., 2021).

Sport nowadays generates trillions of dollars and affects billions of fans, operating at local, national, and international levels (Manzenreiter, 2008, as cited in Murray, 2018). Murray (2012, as cited in Garamvölgyi & Dóczy, 2021) defines the concept of sport diplomacy as the governmental use of sporting events and sportspeople to create a favorable image among foreign publics. The most famous example of a country developing an official sport diplomacy strategy is Australia (Cha, 2016). The key objectives are to enhance the image of Australia abroad, build linkages with neighboring countries, maximize trade and tourism, and strengthen the Indo-Pacific communities (Parrish, 2021). Similarly, Qatar hoped to achieve comparable results regarding its own foreign policy objectives when it organized the Football World Cup in November 2022, even though it was accused of poorly treating foreign workers (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2015). Likewise, private sport organizations such as the IOC or FIFA are increasingly becoming aware of the political implications of their events and can influence both diplomacy and global governance (Fourneyron & Zintz, 2016; Sonntag, 2020). International sport organizations are occupying a very lucrative regulatory space, which can be explained by the rise of transnational private authority in a globalizing world and the states delegating powers (Meier & García, 2015). International sport organizations are thus able to formally organize themselves, as seen with the creation of the Global Association of International Sport Federations (GAISF), which groups all the international sport federations. This is an important argument for the alleged relative influence of sport diplomacy and a reason why the EU should

collaborate with international sport organizations. This will be further explained in the last two parts.

Critics of sport diplomacy and its alleged efficacy do exist, with sceptics perceiving sport as a parody of international relations, plagued by corruption, violence, racism, and cheating (Murray, 2016). Furthermore, although sport keeps diplomatic channels open, it will not eliminate world hunger and poverty, nor will it contribute to gender equality or facilitate women's rights in fundamentalist societies (Murray, 2016). Another limitation is the temporal reality of SMEs (Murray, 2016). As shown with the 2010 and 2014 World Cups, which respectively took place in South Africa and Brazil, the high building and renovation costs of both countries' stadiums highlighted the potentially disastrous legacy of the World Cups' organization (Cornelissen et al., 2011; Cha, 2016). On the other hand, both sport and diplomacy are embodied by representatives of their states, competing in contests involving secret plays, tactics, and aiming for winning results (Murray, 2018). The growing number of state and non-state actors funding sport diplomacy initiatives points towards a growing trend in the belief that sport is an effective tool of soft power. The EU has made progress in this field, with the Erasmus+ Programme becoming the embodiment of its soft power strategy and a tool to overcome the 'Capability-Expectations Gap', by promoting non-state actors' exchanges and pushing forward its integration project (Garamvölgyi et al., 2020; Parrish et al., 2021). This article sees sport as a triggering factor, from which it will be possible to address other important diplomatic aspects, such as trade or agriculture. The second model in the case studies section is a relevant example of this argument: by developing grassroots projects in the Western Balkans, the EU enables the spread of its values and norms, which will be useful if these states become EU member states in the future.

b) EU sport policy development

Before arguing why the EU should adopt a sport diplomacy strategy, it is important to understand the context surrounding the EU's growing interest in sport diplomacy, at a time when integration has stalled and it is struggling to develop a positive international reputation, although this may change following the EU's reaction to the war in Ukraine (Kaplan, 2014; Fourneyron & Zintz, 2016). While the benefits of sport were already acknowledged in the Commission's 2007 White Paper on Sport – raising public awareness, enhancing sport's visibility, and giving strategic orientation to its role – sport diplomacy was not yet addressed as a concept (European Commission, 2007: 9). The second milestone is the adoption of Article 165 TFEU in 2009: the EU and member states "shall foster cooperation with third countries and the competent international organizations in the field of education and sport" (Foster, 2019: 63). In 2014, sport was formally incorporated into the Erasmus+ funding program, which unlocked European structural and investment funds (€550 million dedicated to sport out of €26 billion for the period 2021-2027) (Constantin et al., 2021; Parrish, 2022). The Erasmus+ Programme is the main funding instrument of the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission (DG EAC) and is an important tool of soft power (European Commission, 2021a). Consequently, Commissioner Tibor Navracsics of DG EAC mandated a High-Level Report in 2015 to assess the potential of a formal EU sport diplomacy strategy (Fourneyron & Zintz, 2016). The main recommendations

published in 2016 include some of the following: act in interaction with national governments and non-state actors, make use of the EU's sport expertise to develop partnerships with third countries, recognize the potential of staging SMEs in the EU, and extend the Erasmus+ Programme to non-EU member states (Fourneyron & Zintz, 2016). This report can be considered the third milestone in EU sport diplomacy, as it builds on the legal capacity granted by the TFEU to elaborate what could become a formal strategy, even if it remained a slow-moving process in need of financial engagement (Parrish et al., 2021). Since 2018, the EU has mainly focused on the development of grassroots projects, which are bottom-up initiatives studied in the second model of the next part (Sonntag, 2020). In 2021, Parrish et al. (2021) published "Promoting a Strategic Approach to EU Sport Diplomacy", which is used in this article to make concrete suggestions for the future EU sport diplomacy strategy. In 2021, the EU also launched an advertising campaign with UEFA regarding the EU Green Deal, studied in the first model of the following part. The EU attempts to cooperate with international sport federations and organizations to appeal to civil society, which can be very beneficial and should become one of the main tenets of its future sport diplomacy strategy.

c) Why should the EU adopt a sport diplomacy strategy?

The introduction of the 2021 Parrish report highlights the puzzle this article underlines: sport is very predominant in Europe, but still lacks a prominent role in the EU's external relations (Sonntag, 2020; Parrish et al., 2021). Although the arguments in favor of sport diplomacy are numerous, Mariya Gabriel, the Commissioner in charge of sport among other policy areas, did admit a lack of real strategy (Constantin et al., 2021). The EU Commission's aims are to develop sport diplomacy in three different ways: (1) at the regional level, by bringing the Balkans regions closer to the EU, (2) promoting a new Erasmus+ Programme which includes international partners, and (3) further developing the existing bilateral cooperation between the EU and third countries (Sport and Citizenship, 2020). While sport diplomacy generally involves low risks and low costs, the EU needs to be aware of its potential challenges (Parrish et al., 2021). The EU is a unique hybrid system, and one may ask whether a sport diplomacy strategy could work, considering the supranational context and the limited competencies granted by the TFEU (Parrish & Zintz, 2019). The main issue for the development of an EU-based sport diplomacy strategy is the reaction of the member states, which have already developed their own strategies, such as Hungary, limiting how sport can be deployed at the supranational level (Parrish, 2022). The EURO2020 match between Germany and Hungary became a fight over European values when UEFA refused a request from the Munich municipality to illuminate the Munich football stadium with colors of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender + (LGBTQ+) community, due to the Hungarian government voting a ban on the depiction and promotion of homosexuality to under-18s (Beake, 2021; Constantin et al., 2021). The main limitations of EU sport diplomacy, which were further highlighted by this row, are its potential lack of unity when developing a strategy and the difficulties in being viewed as a legitimate actor (Constantin et al., 2021).

For an official EU sport diplomacy strategy to be adopted, a number of conditions first need to be met: (1) an EU-based strategy should not clash with the national strategies of the member states, (2) it should respect the EU competencies in this policy area and especially the principle

of subsidiarity, (3) it should be a cross-cutting strategy in nature and assist with the implementation process in existing areas of competences, and (4) it should engage with the Erasmus+ Programme (Parrish, 2022). The EU could draw inspiration from its cultural policy, in which it possesses supporting competencies, and act in a ‘smart-complementarity’ way, to add value to the existing member states’ actions, at grassroots or regional levels, for instance (Constantin et al., 2021). The following case-study analysis argues why the EU should focus most of its attention and funding on grassroots projects, as well as cooperating with international sport organizations, such as UEFA, and taking inspiration for the construction of its own action plan from existing strategies.

3. THREE MODELS FOR ONE HYBRID EU SPORT DIPLOMACY STRATEGY

a) The EU and UEFA #EveryTrickCounts advertising campaign

In 2021, the EU launched a public awareness campaign with UEFA about the need to tackle climate change, in an effort to promote the ‘Green Deal’, an EU roadmap of key future climate policies (“European Commission and UEFA”, 2021; Kurmayer, 2021). The advert features famous footballers using football tricks to save energy (“European Commission and UEFA”, 2021; “#EveryTrickCounts”, 2021; Kurmayer, 2021). The video was first broadcasted on television on October 19th, 2021, in 57 countries, during UEFA’s football competitions, as well as on social media (with the #EveryTrickCounts) and in football stadiums (“European Commission and UEFA”, 2021; “#EveryTrickCounts”, 2021). The clip itself cost around €700,000 to produce, which was funded by the corporate communications budget of the Commission and freely distributed by UEFA (Kurmayer, 2021). The advert was estimated to have reached an audience of up to 40 million people per football game, on average (Mathiesen, 2021). Despite the limitations highlighted in the analysis, this collaboration demonstrates how the EU can benefit from associating itself with international sport organizations. Studies will have to be carried out in the future to measure the extent to which this advertising campaign has raised awareness regarding the Green Deal. The EU should use its previous experience to collaborate with UEFA, FIFA, and IOC to harness the power of sport as a means to exercise influence (Sport and Citizenship, 2020; Constantin et al., 2021). Not only would it benefit the EU, but it could also actively push these organizations to make more efforts to comply with international human rights standards (Sport and Citizenship, 2020). A related initiative the EU has already launched is to associate itself with the organization of SMEs, such as the Olympic Games in Paris in 2024 while ensuring that it is not becoming embroiled in political disagreements with its member states and fueling public opposition (Constantin et al., 2021).

b) The EU grassroots projects in the Western Balkans

At the grassroots level, the EU launched the #BeActive campaign in 2015 to promote physical activity as part of the European Week of Sport, which has involved 40 million Europeans in more than 100,000 events in 38 countries and has become the largest public-funded sport initiative in the world (Katsarova & Halleux, 2019; European Commission, 2021b). Sport projects conducted by the civil society and supported by the Erasmus+ Programme have

become the most visible sport-related activities of the EU in recent years, and the Western Balkans were added to the campaign in 2018 (Sonntag, 2020; European Commission, 2021b). The Western Balkans dimension of the European Week of Sport aims to increase the number of young women and men practicing physical activity under the official title of 'EU 4 Youth European Week of Sport in the Western Balkans' (European Commission, 2021b). The countries taking part in this initiative are the Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Montenegro, with a total budget of €1 million, shared equally over a two-year period, entirely allocated by the EU (European Commission, 2021b). EU 4 Youth explicitly aims to promote physical activity, develop Western Balkans states' relationships, exchange good practices, and promote European values through sport (European Commission, 2021b; Former DG EAC official, March 9, 2022). In the document laying out the exact EU 4 Youth strategy, a second more implicit objective is written: the promotion of European common values (European Commission, 2021b). To do so, all necessary measures are taken to publicize the fact that the EU funds grassroots projects, highlighting "to the relevant target audiences the added value and impact of the EU's interventions" (European Commission, 2021b: 10). This initiative aligns with the diplomatic aims of DG EAC and the policy recommendations of the Parrish et al. (2021) report: develop sport diplomacy on a regional level inside and outside of the EU, support the implementation of the #BeActive campaign, and consider the benefits of a value-based network (Sport and Citizenship, 2020). The EU uses sport diplomacy to cooperate with civil society through funding small-scale projects. Regular contact points at the grassroots level are essential for enabling the development of diplomatic relations at higher political levels. The Erasmus+ Programme and its affiliated projects give an international dimension to funding opportunities for the EU, which facilitates the process of EU integration. Sport diplomacy thus becomes a tool for the EU to carry out projects that are not related to sport in the first place.

c) The Hungarian national sport diplomacy strategy

The case of Hungary is interesting for this article, as it is the EU member state investing the largest share of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in sport: 2.5%, while the rest of the EU averages 0.7% (Eurostat, 2017, as cited in Martín & Hernández, 2021). This strategy is linked to the concept of 'nation-branding', the marketing process by which companies distinguish their products from the competition (Dinnie, 2008). It is possible, in a respectful manner that acknowledges appropriate limits, to apply this concept to nations and thus treat them as brands. Nation-branding is defined as the blend of elements, including sport, that provide relevance for its target audience and culturally differentiate a nation from others (Dinnie, 2008; Li & Feng, 2021). Hosting SMEs has been used by nations to publicize their place on a global scale, as seen with the United Kingdom (UK) and how it organized the Olympic Games in 2012 (Dinnie, 2008; Sport and Citizenship, 2017; Parrish, 2021). A survey conducted by Grix and Houlihan (2013, as cited in Parrish, 2021) indicated very positive perceptions of the UK's international image after the Games' opening and closing ceremonies. Hungary is aiming to do the same and organizes its strategy according to five pillars.

Firstly, the improvement of its image through the organization of SMEs, with a clear goal in mind: organizing the Olympic Games (Garamvölgyi & Dóczy, 2021). Secondly, it aims to

use sport and especially football as a tool to strengthen the expression of national identity and self-determination (Garamvölgyi & Dóczy, 2021). Between 2013 and 2018, the Hungarian state-funded \$87 million to Hungarian minorities' football clubs in its neighboring countries: Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Croatia, and Slovenia (Martín & Hernández, 2021). The third pillar is the representation of Hungarian interests in international sport federations and links with the fourth pillar: the representation of Hungarian sport companies and inventions abroad (Garamvölgyi & Dóczy, 2021). PBT Fencing, established in 1991, gradually asserted itself as one of the leading fencing equipment brands on the market. The last pillar is the appointment of ex-athletes, such as former Hungarian President Pál Schmitt, a former successful Olympic fencer, and member of the IOC, in (inter)national diplomatic positions (Garamvölgyi & Dóczy, 2021). He chaired the HLG on sport diplomacy in 2015 and drafted the EU report under Commissioner Navracsics, who is also Hungarian (Fourneyron & Zintz, 2016).

In comparison, the EU still lacks an effective action plan. Due to its unique political structure and the Erasmus+ Programme, the EU has the potential to surpass the Hungarian's sport diplomacy budget, as well as being able to cooperate with international organizations, such as UEFA, and develop grassroots projects in its candidate countries. National governments can pursue collaborations with international bodies as well, but the EU has a greater reach. The three models described above can be linked to strategies the EU has either already put into practice (the first two models) or from which it may inspire itself when developing its own plan of action (the third model). The aim of this part was to build on three existing areas of focus of sport diplomacy, to then highlight the most suitable one for the EU.

4. TOWARDS AN EU SPORT DIPLOMACY STRATEGY

As argued in this article, the EU's functioning mirrors characteristics of various political systems, and it is unclear whether the EU should be classified as a (supranational) state, an international organization, or an intergovernmental organization (Manners, 2002, as cited in Hyde-Price, 2006). To benefit from its unique hybrid structure, the EU should adopt a strategy that targets different levels of governance, ranging from local to international. The first part of this chapter highlights the limitations of each of the three models studied above and argues why the EU's sport diplomacy strategy should not be based solely on any single model.

a) Limitations of the respective models

In the first model, the #EveryTrickCounts advertising campaign, the EU and UEFA asserted that it does not matter who emits the greenhouse gases; they all have the same negative impact ("EU and UEFA team up," n.d.). This claim has been criticized for shifting the burden onto individuals rather than companies, creating a distraction from the systemic shift required to reach net-zero emissions (Kurmayer, 2021; Mathiesen, 2021). The Corporate Europe Observatory referred to this advertising campaign as a massive goal for the EU, as the clip was broadcast during a football competition sponsored up to February 2022 by Gazprom Russian state-owned gas company, one of the world's biggest emitters of CO₂ (Kurmayer, 2021;

Mathiesen, 2021). This highlights a broader issue: the economic ties between international sporting organizations and the oil and gas industry. In May 2011, undercover journalists reported that some of FIFA's Africa Committee members had been bribed by Qatar to vote for the 2022 Football World Cup to be held in that country (The Guardian, 2011, as cited in Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2015; Meier & García, 2015; Murray, 2016; Parrish, 2021). On the other hand, the EU has committed to certain normative principles, such as the rule of law and the protection of human rights, thereby engaging in incompatible governing practices (Nielsen, 2013). Focusing solely on collaborating with international sporting organizations is risky for the EU, as such collaborations may undermine its reputation.

The second model is the most promising out of the three, and the EU should consider a values-based network model that encompasses public and non-state actors involved in grassroots projects. This approach is appealing due to its cost-effectiveness, its alignment with both soft and smart power, and its innovative bottom-up approach (Jacob Schouenborg, 2020, as cited in Sport and Citizenship, 2020; Parrish et al., 2021). However, the effects of such projects are spread across numerous areas of action: increasing the number of women and men practicing sport, increasing the number of organized sport activities, promoting physical activity, and fostering the EU's common values, which could undermine its overall efficiency (European Commission, 2021b). In order for grassroots projects to become an effective and far-reaching tool of soft power, and for the EU to benefit from its multilevel impacts, they should be complemented with other actions targeting higher policy levels and form part of a hybrid strategy.

The combination of the first two models with the third one appears more challenging due to the incompatibilities between the Hungarian national sport diplomacy strategy and the EU's hybrid strategy. The EU's limited competencies in the field of sport (Article 165 TFEU) empower the EU only to support, coordinate, or complement sport policy measures, with the EU acting as a subsidiary (Katsarova & Halleux, 2019). Another limitation relates to the nature of the strategy: national sport diplomacy does not function well in a supranational context (Parrish & Zintz, 2019; Sonntag, 2020). During SMEs, playing for one's nation is considered a great honor for athletes, which is difficult to replicate at the supranational level, as there are no national affiliations (Murray, 2016). The third limitation is the difference in scope between the nation-states and the EU's objectives regarding sport diplomacy. While Hungary aims to organize the Olympic Games, the EU focuses on grassroots projects.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the Hungarian sport diplomacy approach, while being a prominent example in Central and Eastern Europe, remains controversial. The development of sport in Hungary leads to funds being withdrawn from culture and community events, and by choosing to focus mostly on elite sport, it neglects grassroots initiatives (Garamvölgyi & Dóczy, 2021). Funding Hungarian minorities' sport clubs also leads to tensions and an increase in nationalistic reactions by supporters in neighbouring countries when local teams play against teams considered "Hungarian" (Garamvölgyi & Dóczy, 2021). Finally, the presence of Hungarian sports leaders in international sporting federations has declined in the last decade (Garamvölgyi & Dóczy, 2021).

Therefore, bearing in mind these limitations, it appears more legitimate for the EU to develop a hybrid strategy, based on a combination of the three models, as this would enable it to express its institutional capabilities to the fullest while making the most of its limited com-

petencies. It would also allow the EU to look beyond the traditional state-centric approach and mark a demarcation with national sport diplomacy strategies, making its strategy relevant and unique (Parrish, 2022).

b) How can the EU benefit from a sport diplomacy strategy?

As previously argued, the most important factor shaping the international role of the EU is not what it does or says, but what it is (Manners, 2002). Developing a unique hybrid model would be the best way for the EU to ensure that its sport diplomacy strategy reflects its hybrid institutional structure. To appear legitimate, this strategy should be based on diplomatic tools of soft and smart power, as well as on the EU's historical narrative of peaceful integration (Nielsen, 2013). The following recommendations are based upon existing national and international sport diplomacy strategies analysed previously, recommendations of the 2016 HLG report, as well as the resulting published documents. They are grouped into five themes, ranked from least to most beneficial: (1) diplomatic channels, (2) the EU and SMEs, (3) institutional reforms, (4) reforming the Erasmus+ Programme, and (5) collaborating with international (sporting) organizations. These are in line with Parrish's (2022) report recommendations: no competence issues raised, the ability to assist with policy implementation in existing areas of competencies, and to engage with existing financing instruments and frameworks.

1. Diplomatic channels

Sport is often perceived as a cost-effective tool of soft power (Garamvölgyi et al., 2020). Elite sporting events and international sporting successes can raise a region's visibility and improve its image, as seen with the concept of nation-branding (Garamvölgyi & Dóczy, 2021). The EU is not a country but can still increase its visibility by creating a network of sport ambassadors to promote EU values through sport (Fourneyron & Zintz, 2016; Parrish et al., 2021). The EU has already started to use such a strategy, as seen with the #EveryTrickCounts advertising campaign with UEFA. Furthermore, the EU should raise awareness of the potential of sport as a tool of soft and smart power in the foreign affairs ministries of its member states to convince the remaining sceptics (Council, 2016; Fourneyron & Zintz, 2016). A Union-wide enthusiasm for sport diplomacy would facilitate the construction and adoption of a strategy.

2. The EU and SMEs

In 2024, the Olympic Games will be held in Paris, creating enormous benefits for France in terms of public diplomacy (Murray, 2016). SMEs help promote the organizing country, and when they take place in an EU member state, they can also benefit the EU (Dubinsky, 2017). The EU must balance support for the bidding process of its member states while preventing potential conflicts with its member states' national sport diplomacy strategies. This is why it seems very unlikely for the 'EU Games' to ever be organized. If the EU had its own football team, for instance, the combination of fans and national football teams from its member states could have a divisive, rather than inclusive, effect (Kaplan, 2014). Furthermore, due to its limited competencies, the EU cannot organize SMEs. This is also because of the autonomy of sport's international organizations, which do not need the EU's supporting capacities. UEFA has a larger budget than the European Commission's DG EAC Sport Unit, for instance, and

thus has the potential to determine which events will be organized under its auspices. On the other hand, the EU does not finance a structure; it finances projects with a certain duration because it does not have the competencies nor the funds to do so. Constantin et al. (2021) have suggested that the EU should do what it already does in other policies, i.e., add value to its member states' actions through 'smart complementarity'. Doing so would ensure respect for the principle of subsidiarity, provide the most cost-effective sport diplomacy strategy, and prevent any conflicts regarding the organization of SMEs.

3. Institutional reforms

Currently, responsibility for the EU's sport policy lies with the Commission, specifically the Sport Unit of DG EAC (Parrish, 2022). The Parrish et al. report published in 2021 called for greater centralization and suggested that sport diplomacy should be mainstreamed throughout all EU institutions. The EU possesses the institutional capacity to carry out a sport diplomacy strategy, and its institutions, departments, and agencies should become more involved in both its design and implementation (Constantin et al., 2021). DG EAC has taken a first step in that direction by seeking to further enhance its portfolio and by connecting the EU's sport policy to its foreign policy objectives (Barbé & Morillas, 2019, as cited in Parrish, 2022). Sport diplomacy should also be more systematically integrated into the work of the EEAS, with the establishment of a portfolio and individuals named as responsible (Parrish et al., 2021). Doing so links sport to an array of policy areas and confirms the idea of sport as a triggering factor capable of generating spill-over effects. This article agrees with the recommendations of Parrish et al. (2021): the need for a new specialist body, located within the Sport Unit of DG EAC, to coordinate the strategy across all EU institutions. This article goes further and recommends, based on the Parrish et al. (2021) report, to give a greater role to Commissioner Mariya Gabriel. It also calls for more networking to take place between the different levels of governance in the EU, to establish strong connections between the grassroots projects at the local level and the decision-makers at the top level. In the long term, if new countries become members, the EU should mandate a 'High Representative for Sport' or even a 'Commissioner for Sport', appointed with the task of coordinating all areas of sport diplomacy.

4. Reforming the Erasmus+ Programme

The Erasmus+ Programme is the embodiment of the EU's soft power and now includes state and non-state actors outside the EU, such as the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership members, and the South-Mediterranean countries (Constantin et al., 2021; Parrish, 2022). Its successes have been proven with the European Week of Sport. The second model has shown that opportunities to use the Erasmus+ Programme to support international grassroots projects in third countries remain limited, with the Western Balkans receiving lower funds as they are not Erasmus+ partners (Ecorys, 2018). Based on the Parrish et al. report of 2021, this article suggests that the EU should give a broader international dimension to the Erasmus+ Programme. A first reform would be to ease the terms according to which a third country can become a partner. The EU could develop a similar model to the Enlarged Partial Agreement (EPA) of the Council of Europe, to give the same funding opportunities regarding grassroots sport projects to both partner and non-partner countries. The Council's EPA budget for

sport-related policies is topic-oriented, and there are no specific criteria. The EU should also provide additional financial support to research activities and knowledge dissemination on issues linked to sport diplomacy (Katsarova & Halleux, 2019; Parrish et al., 2021).

5. Collaborating with international (sport) organisations

In traditional diplomacy, states are considered the only significant actors in world politics (Nye, 1990). However, the growing influence of public diplomacy has led to non-state actors, such as FIFA, becoming increasingly important in sport and possessing the monopoly of power to govern and regulate world football from the rules of the game to the economic and social dimensions (Nye, 1990; FIFA 2015, Article 1-13, as cited in Meier and García, 2015). These international sport organizations benefit from access to power on a high level due to their control over competitions and their expertise. Consequently, the EU should push for further cooperation with them to obtain a comparative advantage in sport diplomacy over other state and non-state actors. The EU should also seek further cooperation with international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN) or the Council of Europe, in line with both proposal number 25 of the 2007 White Paper on Sport: “the EU will make its best effort to create synergies with existing programs of the UN, Member States, local authorities and private bodies” (European Commission, 2007: 9). The EU is not the first non-state actor to venture into sport-related diplomatic activities (Sonntag, 2020). UNESCO and its Kazan Action Plan, as well as the Council of Europe, are examples of intergovernmental organizations that are active in the field of sport diplomacy (Sonntag, 2020). Furthermore, these non-state actors have not been accused of corruption or disregard for human rights, and the Council of Europe already works closely with the Sport Unit of the European Commission, thus facilitating further collaboration. Cooperating with these international bodies allows the EU to operate on two fronts: (1) the sport rule makers and SMEs organizers (FIFA, IOC, and UEFA) and (2) intergovernmental actors that are also pursuing a sport diplomacy strategy. The EU could benefit from this to a great extent, as it prevents having to target countries individually. Projects such as the joint #EveryTrickCounts advertising campaign with UEFA are a first step in this direction.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has aimed to fill a gap in the literature by highlighting the benefits for the EU to pursue a sport diplomacy strategy and providing concrete recommendations. This has been done according to the concept of soft power, which in turn has enabled the conceptualization of smart power: a form of cost-effective soft power. Consequently, international politics are switching from exclusively high-level diplomacy to public diplomacy, embodied by non-state actors and through which cultural and sport diplomacies occupy larger spaces (Gregory, 2011, as cited in Garamvölgyi & Dóczy, 2021; Pamment, 2013; Murray, 2018; Parrish et al., 2021). The EU, which has gradually evolved into a hybrid form of power, has seen its window of opportunity increase. The three major milestones in its sport policy were Article 165 TFEU, the 2016 HLG report laying the bases for a future sport diplomacy strategy, and the incorpo-

ration of sport into the Erasmus+ funding programme in 2014. However, this article has also established the EU's relative inexperience in the field of sport diplomacy.

To determine how the EU can benefit from a sport diplomacy strategy, this article has studied three models: (1) at the international level, the #EveryTrickCounts EU-UEFA collaboration; (2) at the local level, the 'EU 4 Youth European Week of Sport' grassroots project in the Western Balkans; and (3) at the national level, the Hungarian sport diplomacy strategy. Through a qualitative methodology combining content analysis and case studies, this article has argued that for the EU to benefit to the greatest extent from sport diplomacy, it should adopt a unique strategy featuring characteristics from each of the three models in order to reflect its multilevel political structure and distinguish itself from other international organizations. The EU strategy should reflect core norms, such as the centrality of peace, democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, as well as operate according to soft and smart power. The third model, based on the Hungarian national strategy, is the most limited one. Significantly differing from the EU's political system, it would be short-sighted to consider it as a model to follow. The first and second models also have limitations, such as the risk of undermining the EU's reputation, or the fact that grassroots projects only target civil society, but this article has argued that they remain the most promising and beneficial action plans to follow. Other recommendations include the establishment of intra and inter-EU diplomatic channels, smart complementarity through the support of SMEs organized in EU member states, institutional reforms to favor a collective EU multilevel approach to sport diplomacy, and lastly, the reform of the Erasmus+ Programme.

As argued by Boniface (2021), geopolitical awareness of sport diplomacy will grow, and this article provides avenues for further research. Firstly, it could focus on specific recommendations, such as identifying where reforms should take place in the EU institutions, to assist in the construction of a cost-effective EU sport diplomacy strategy. Secondly, the arguments formulated in this article could be applied to other international state and non-state actors, such as Australia or the UN, through a comparative analysis approach. Thirdly, more research could be undertaken on the last recommendation (collaboration) and analysed from the other end to study how international actors and NGOs collaborate with the EU to achieve their own sport-related foreign policy objectives. Finally, it is worth placing this article in the current political context. The EU and its soft power approach are being challenged by the spectre of remilitarization. Sport diplomacy is carried out to prevent crises, and if other states are not willing to take part in soft power initiatives, it becomes difficult to enforce their participation. Further research could be conducted on the impact of sport sanctions against countries waging wars, using the sanctions against Russian sport as a case study.

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APPENDIX: LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union
DG EAC	Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission
EPA	Enlarged Partial Agreement
EU	European Union
FIFA	<i>Fédération Internationale de Football Association</i>
GAISF	Global Association of International Sport Federations
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HLG	High-Level Group
IOC	International Olympic Committee

LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender +
LPE	Liberal Power Europe
NPE	Normative Power Europe
SME	Sport Mega Event
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics