



STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY HOCKEY ASSOCIATION 2021-2026





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FOREWORD

**FUTURE OF HOCKEY
IS IN EDUCATION !**

The ongoing worldwide crisis caused by COVID-19 virus only highlighted the vulnerability of existence of professional athletes, especially those, who decided on their careers early on and opted out of obtaining higher education. A portion of these talented athletes would however choose dual career of athlete - university student, if such option existed at the time of their decision.

In 2012, the European Commission published the EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes and recommended policy actions in support of dual careers of athletes, including athletes enrolled in universities.

https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/sport/library/documents/dual-career-guidelines-final_en.pdf

This document was prepared in collaboration with experts from EU Member States. The main purpose of this document and other initiatives and guidelines published by the European Committee is to inspire EU Member States and assist them in formulating and adopting guidelines on dual career of students - athletes. The document urges responsible Ministries on national level to adopt specific measures that would help talented athletes avoid situations, in which they are forced to choose between education and sport.

Regarding politics, the European Commission highlights the need of inter-sectoral and interdepartmental approach on state level involving authorities as well as NGOs in organization of dual careers of students - athletes

and their joint approach to create and ensure functioning of dual careers through common policy. The document of the European Commission addresses the issue of dual career of athletes - university students and points to the lack of opportunities for symbiosis between higher education and career in sports, not to mention the inability to choose from various fields of study in majority of the Member States.

The European Commission calls for cooperation between political subjects and NGOs including students - athletes on European and trans-national level, in order to exchange know-how and experience related to accessibility of dual career for students - athletes from the EU Member States and other countries.

The European University Hockey Association (EUHA) agrees with many arguments presented by the European Committee. Therefore, the Association has defined the following objectives: support of existing university teams, assistance in creating new university teams in the EU, provision of participation and exchange of university students in the regular university hockey league EUHL (European University Hockey League), integration of university hockey into the overall sport and education system of the European Union allowing students - hockey players to enjoy all benefits of educational, sport, social and ethical experience related to university hockey.

Purpose of this Strategic Plan is to provide a brief plan of action to achieve the aforementioned vision divided into specific objectives. It includes specific actions to be taken in order to meet those objectives.

OUR STORY SO FAR

The European University Hockey Association (EUHA) is a non-governmental and apolitical organization actively supporting and promoting sport among young people with focus on development and promotion of sport activities, specifically ice hockey, among university students. Some of the organization's objectives include improvement of physical and mental health of young people and overall development and promotion of physical culture. The main and regular outcome of EUHA activities is organization of a regular competition called the European University Hockey League (EUHL) that creates unique opportunities for young students - athletes to develop their dual careers and allowing them to be successful in both, sport and education.



The EUHA founded the league in November 2013 as the first regular international university hockey league in Europe. Since its foundation, more than 29 university teams from 9 Member States of the European Union (Slovakia, Czechia, Austria, Poland, Hungary, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia and Romania) participated in the EUHL. Vision of the EUHL is to build a strong all-European league with larger number of participating countries and teams (Austria, Germany, Sweden, Finland, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Slovenia, Latvia, Estonia, etc.) divided into divisions within the area of max. 700 kilometers in order to decrease travel and other costs. Horizontal expansion will always be preceded by vertical expansion, in the form of intense support of students - athletes' dual career. In this context, the dual career embodies functioning symbiosis of professional sport and quality education in various fields of study.

Another objective of the EUHA lies in the support and development of education for members of the Association. The EUHA aims to contribute to overcoming inter-cultural, informational and communication barriers. Moreover, one of its goals is to cooperate with state and non-governmental institutions of the EU Member States and actively assist with activities of civic associations, foundations

and other entities with similar goals. The EUHA still plans to build infrastructure of European university hockey through its partner - daughter associations. A good example of existing partner associations is a number of existing daughter associations SUHA (Slovak University Hockey Association), ACUH (Association of Czech University Hockey) and LSHA (Latvian Student Hockey Association) that are responsible for creating new university teams, obtaining government aid/funding and assisting with participation of their university teams in regular international university hockey league - EUHL. With increasing numbers of university teams, the EUHA and its partner associations will seek other opportunities in creating new divisions within the EUHL. The EUHA has already received a number of Slovak national grants and 1 project funding within the Erasmus programme (European Commission) for its project the EUHL.

In the area of international cooperation, the EUHA signed a tripartite agreement on cooperation with the **Russian Student Hockey League (RSHL** - associating more than 120 university teams) and the **American Collegiate Hockey Association (ACHA** - associating more than 460 university teams). The parties have agreed to develop and maintain partnerships through mutual collaboration and acknowledgment of each other as members of global university hockey community, mutual support of student hockey leagues, amateur status of its players, as well as exchange of students, coaches, referees and other persons involved in university hockey. The EUHA, the ACHA and the RSHL agreed to officially acknowledge each other as international associations and committed to regularly organize international tournaments for select teams and the strongest teams from individual student leagues. This cooperation offers another benefit for students - athletes in providing them the opportunity to study abroad and giving them the experience of a fair sport confrontation with students from other countries. This in turn helps them to erase communication and cultural barriers and broadens their horizons in the field of sport diplomacy - a skill much needed in the current times.



VISION FOR 2021 - 2026 (OUR MILESTONES)

Regular university hockey league that would supplement educational and sport system in Europe was missing until foundation of the EUHL, making it a unique and pioneer project in the European geographical area. Organizing this league ensures students - athletes have more opportunities in their dual careers.

Our vision for 2021 - 2026 is to ensure sustainable environment for the EUHL and its vertical and horizontal expansion.



Regarding the vertical expansion, the EUHA plans to achieve the following:

- create an environment that facilitates dual careers for talented young hockey players, who are not forced to choose between pursuing education and hockey.
- minimize number of players leaving the EU (for other countries), attract and keep more talented students - athletes and increase standard of the EUHL
- increase awareness of dual career opportunities for students - hockey players in higher education among students - hockey players in secondary schools, parents, hockey clubs' management, coaches and teachers
- allow young students - athletes a smooth transfer to senior professional hockey, e.g. bridge junior and senior hockey for so called "late bloomers", players peaking later than average but achieving high performance in older age.

Regarding the horizontal expansion, the EUHA plans to achieve the following:

- ensure long-term functioning of the regular university league - EUHL in its current geographical scope with the possibility of expansion, provided it is financially sustainable long-term
- support and assist with creating new university hockey teams in as many EU Member States as possible, with these new teams emerging as part of projects of hockey associations, Ministries of Education and dual careers of students - athletes in countries of the EU
- continue efforts to improve international cooperation with other student university hockey leagues, participate in international sport and expert conferences and meetings in order to exchange know-how and experience within and outside the EU.

The vision for 2021 - 2026 shall be implemented through the following objectives:

OBJECTIVE 1: FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF THE EUHL

Long-term financial sustainability is crucial for keeping the EUHL and the EUHA running, because neither is a self-financing entity. This means that the EUHA and the EUHL need direct financial aid of the European Union in order to secure their future and be able to effectively support the dual career system of students - athletes in Europe.

Eight years after founding the EUHA and the first season of the EUHL it is more than clear the EUHA and the EUHL are not able to self-finance. This is due to the fact that the be all and end all of university hockey is the amateur status of student - athlete and dual career of student - athlete must be provided in environment protected from unlimited influence of commercial sponsors and betting companies. Particularly the possibility to bet on university games can have a negative impact on young adults including students - athletes, who might be tempted to influence game results. Moreover, these young people are exposed to risks of betting and developing addictions leading them down the path of criminal behavior. Therefore, university leagues must be protected, and the funding needs to be secured from other sources, excluding commercial sources entirely.

Considering current situation, it is safe to say that university teams will undoubtedly fight for their existence due to lack of funding from sponsors, who are retracting their funding as a result of economic crisis caused by COVID-19. It is essential that the EU seeks ways to financially aid university sport and thus minimize the influence of betting companies on university sport.

Direct and regular financial aid from the European Commission is necessary for building common values presented in the Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the European Union Work Plan for Sport (1 July 2017 - 31 December 2020).

<http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9639-2017-INIT/en/pdf>

Aiming to secure its financial future, the EUHA calls for the European Parliament and the European Commission, as well as all relevant government institutions to facilitate talks about future existence of the EUHL and asks for meetings to discuss specific actions. This would help to avoid the collapse of this successful and popular project that embodies objectives of the European Commission in the area of dual career of university students - athletes and has a great reputation in the world of sport and academia.

Depending on the amount and duration of regular funding, the EUHA will either focus on stabilizing the functioning of regular university league - EUHL in its current geographical scope or, in case of a positive economic standing and sufficient funding, it will also aim to expand the EUHL into other regions and countries. The funding will be also used to cover the costs of other objectives, as described in detail further below, such as increasing awareness of dual career of university students - hockey players, attracting and keeping talented players in the EUHL and developing international cooperation with other student university hockey leagues, participating in international sport and other expert conferences and meetings facilitating exchange of know-how and experiences within and outside the EU.

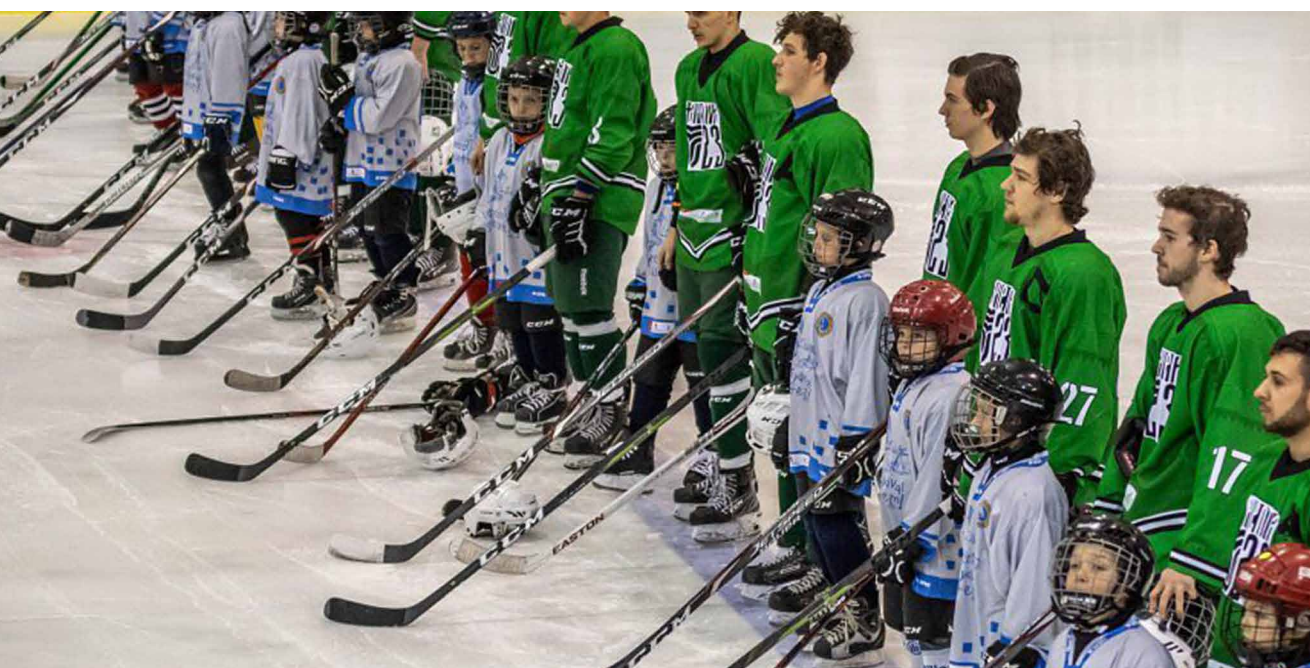
OBJECTIVE 2: RAISE AWARENESS OF DUAL CAREER OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS - HOCKEY PLAYERS

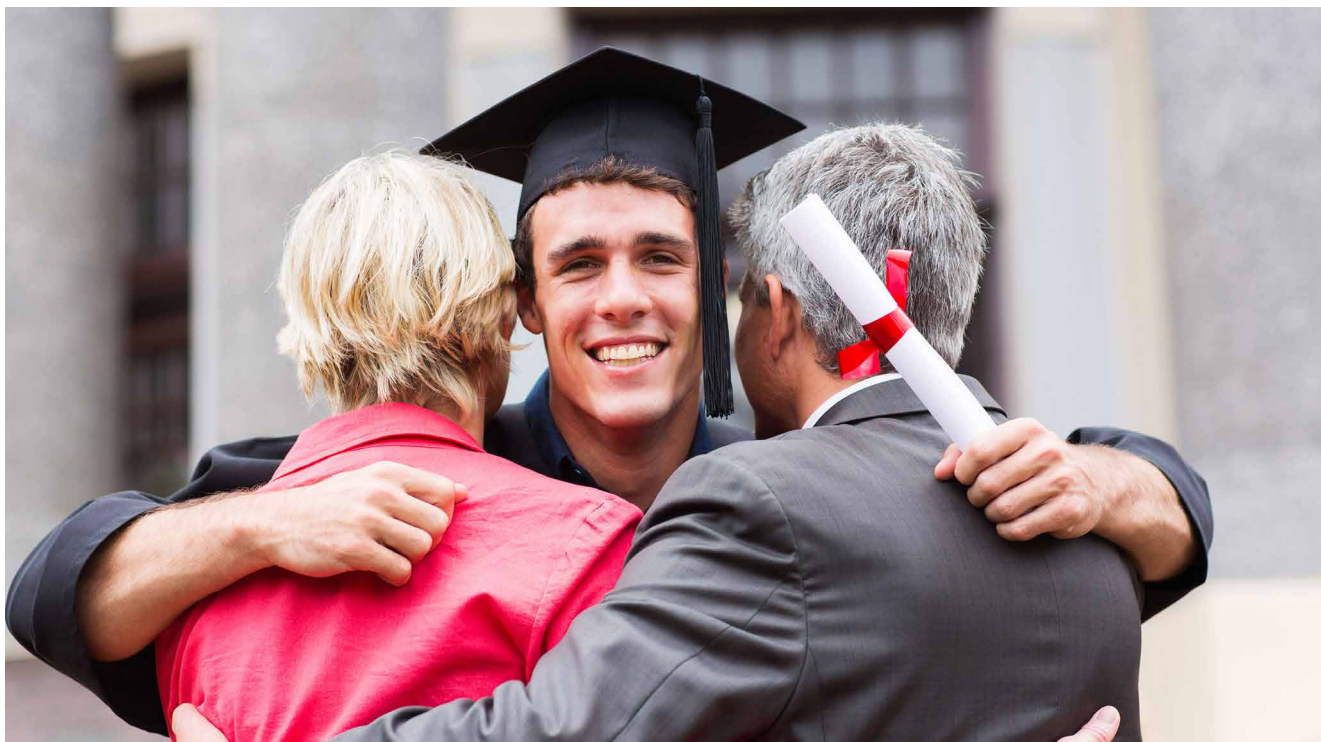
It is known that sport helps children and young adults in developing skills for teamwork, fair-play, respect of self and others, ability to understand and respect rules and develop habits of honest work and good performance.

Sport in the EU and countless other countries is often perceived as presented as vehicle for all these sport and education opportunities for talented children expected to devote their adult careers to professional sport. Many children and young adults therefore lose interest in organized sport, including hockey, assuming it is meant only for future professionals. In other words, many potential talents never even try or tap out early because if they do achieve professional status in elite foreign leagues, they do not see the point in continuing in sport and balancing education as well.

Sport in the EU is currently far removed from its full potential of its educational part that would allow more children and young adults to learn how to succeed in sport and in life. A path that starts at school. One of our main objectives is to raise awareness of dual career possibilities in sport among children and young adults, specifically pertaining to hockey and the EUHL in combination with education in various fields.

In order to not lose such a large quantity of talented young athletes, it is essential to raise awareness of the possibility to balance sport at any level with higher education as allowed with a dual career.





To increase popularity of the EUHL and dual career of students - athletes, the EUHA plans to put spotlight on successful stories of students - athletes to show children and young adults in secondary schools examples of how hard work in classroom and on the ice can result in double success admired by their friends and family, the society at large and the student - athlete themselves.

This objective will focus on the following target groups with the help of brochures, meetings and lectures of the EUHA representatives with:

1. Children in primary schools and young adults enrolled in secondary schools
2. Schools and their employees
3. Parents
4. Coaches
5. Sports associations and national hockey associations

Funding for this activity should be incorporated into systematic funding of the EUHA and the EUHL.

OBJECTIVE 3: ATTRACT AND KEEP TALENT

The second objective of increasing awareness about dual career opportunities of students - athletes directly ties into the third objective of the EUHA, which is to attract and keep talented players and as such increase the overall standard of the EUHL. Increased awareness about dual career opportunities should result in increased numbers of talented players in the EUHL.



However, it is essential to continue working on increasing the standard of dual career and recruit more universities, which will allow students - hockey players to choose from subjects that they are genuinely interested in and offer them conditions that provide balance between school and sport.

Success of the EUHL will therefore largely depend on the ability to attract talented players - students and create a platform for long-term discussion with universities for them to understand that hockey and dual career can attract the biggest talents and ambitious young people determined to establish themselves on competitive labor market. In addition, the players determined to continue on the path of professional hockey can do so with diplomas in their hand, giving them the best shot at successful and long-term professional future. Meeting this objective can simultaneously solve some of the problems the athletes are facing after ending their sport career.

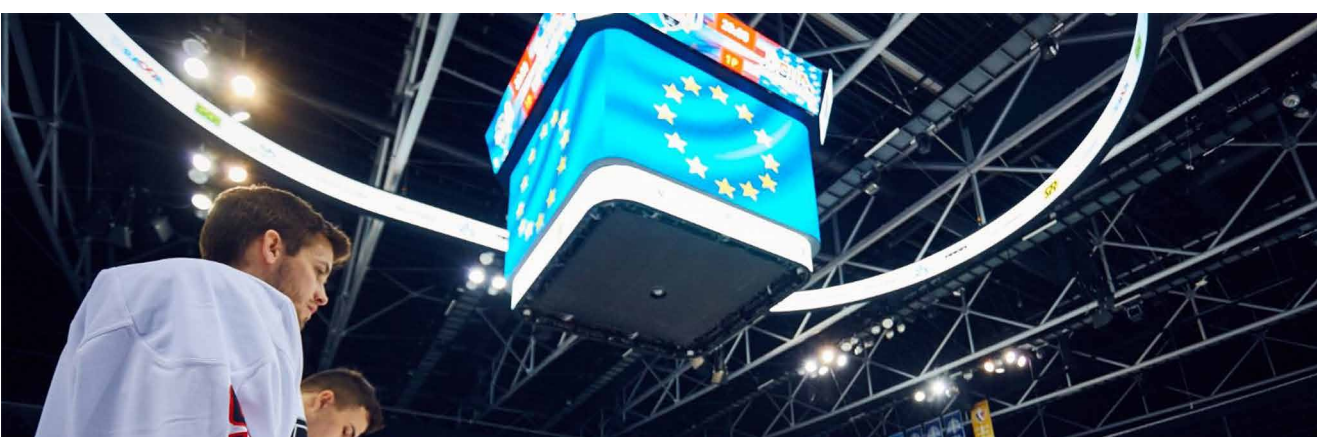
They are often facing challenges with returning to civilian life, because they are only skilled in sport and do not possess other skills necessary for labor market.



To this effect, the EUHA plans to organize regular meetings with representatives of universities as well as conferences focused on issues of dual career, setting up specific actions such as individual study plans, accepting credits related to university teams, introducing benefits for universities related to activities of their students - athletes (within the EUHL - hockey players). EUHA also plans to cooperate with hockey associations in each EU Member States to allow hockey players enrolled in secondary school hockey academies to choose university hockey and dual career. Funding for this activity should be incorporated into systematic funding of the EUHA and the EUHL.

OBJECTIVE 4: CONTINUE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

As it has been already mentioned in the Foreword, the European Commission calls for cooperation between political subjects and NGOs including students - athletes on European and trans-national level, in order to exchange know-how and experience related to accessibility of dual career for students - athletes from the EU Member States and other countries.



The EUHA still plans to build infrastructure of European university hockey through its daughter associations. A good example of existing partner associations is a number of existing daughter associations SUHA (Slovak University Hockey Association), ACUH (Association of Czech University Hockey) and LSHA (Latvian Student Hockey Association) that are responsible for creating new university teams, obtaining government aid/funding and assisting with participation of their university teams in regular international university hockey league - EUHL. With increasing numbers of university teams, the EUHA and its partner associations will seek other opportunities in creating new divisions within the EUHL.

The EUHA plans to continue developing international cooperation and share its know-how gained from eight years of running regular university hockey league with international university hockey community. The EUHA stresses the importance of continuing long-term cooperation with the Russian Student Hockey League (RSHL), the America Collegiate Hockey Association (ACHA), with university teams from other countries of the EU not participating in the EUHL, as well as with the European Commission.

The main goal of this cooperation is to exchange experiences and strengthen sport diplomacy around the world.

After all, sport diplomacy and the opportunity to become a part of international university hockey community is another motivational factor for many students - athletes in their dual careers.

International cooperation and competitiveness in sport between universities help promote the universities themselves and provide them with opportunities to cooperate in science, research and further collaborations.

The EUHA plans to further develop and maintain international partnerships through organizing and participating in international tournaments, meetings and conferences and through exchange of students, coaches, referees and other persons involved with university hockey. To ensure implementation of this objective, it is essential to secure sufficient systematic funding of the EUHA and the EUHL.



CONCLUSION

This plan has been prepared in order to initiate discussions with the European Parliament and the European Commission, whose bodies play an important role in defining and implementing dual career of students - athletes and whose aid is essential for the future of the EUHL project.

For the approval of the Strategic Plan 2021 - 2026 and financial aid from the EU, the EUHA prepared a specific plan of action (Work Plan) with corresponding budget that is annexed to this document.







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