

# The Slovak Esport Association Was Born

Interview with Karol CAGÁŇ

## Karol Cagáň

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Karol Cagáň is president of the Slovak E-sport Association and currently also a partner at the event agency Yvents, which apart from many other events hosts by far the two biggest eSports events in Slovakia. As of November 2018 he was elected as president of the Slovak E-sports Association that he, together with his friends and partners, helped to establish. In his private life he is an outgoing person whom has a great passion for both psychology and worldly affairs.

## Interviewer

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Nikola Kaňuková is an internal PhD student of the Department of digital games at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava. She professionally focuses on the issue of digital games implementation into the education of seniors. She is also interested in regional media, and has been acting as the editor of news and promotional content for Mestská televízia Trnava (Trnava City TV) for three years.

**Nikola Kaňuková (N. K.):** Last year the Slovak Esport Association (SAEŠ) was established and you were at the very beginning of it. Later you became President of the Association, so introduce a little how it all began.

**Karol Cagáň:** I began as a student of IT namely Networking at the Faculty of Informatics and Information Technologies in Bratislava and I was stationed at the dormitory called Mladost' and there was a student organisation Ynet which was in charge of the internet there. Basically, the students do the entire internet work so they have one of the fastest internet in Slovakia because they use the newest technologies. So I was hyped in and wanted to join. One day we had a meeting and some guy came out with the idea why not be organizers of a small tournament for the players and people who live in the dormitory. So a bunch of us gathered and we started to organize the events. Our first event was in the canteen in the dormitory and 60 players attended and maybe 10-15 spectators so it was a very small event and from then it got bigger and bigger and has not stopped. So we ended up organizing the biggest eSports tournament in the Slovak republic. After some time I met with Eduard Winkler who was the owner of the Dota2 team and also an entrepreneur in IT and the e-shop. I wanted him to become a partner of my events so I got into contact with him and once we were out he was talking about an idea to make eSports official and that was exactly what we were thinking about so we came around and started to create it. We reached out to the Slovak Olympic Committee. They were already familiar with the idea of creating an eSports federation in the Slovak republic. They had the status prepared and legal structure and we said: OK, let's team up with them and expand our team a bit. Then I invited another friend of mine, Ivan Trančík, who has a data analytics company selling data analytics to almost all major computer games studios around the world so he has a lot of contacts and he was gladly willing to help us. So we came together and we basically took the status and we formed the Association and filed the application to the International Esport Federation (IESF) where we became the first country from the V4 members of the IESF fully recognized which is for us personally a great pride as all other countries of V4 are still struggling to get their membership. So we are very happy to get through this process which was not easy. At the end of October 2018 we organized an assembly where we invited all the members and we had the first official and democratic election where I was confirmed as the president. We have still some open positions we are trying to recruit as much as possible and that is the story of how we began.

**N. K.: It is half a year since then, so where is the SAEŠ now?**

**Karol Cagáň:** We did not want to do anything by ourselves. We wanted to ask the Committee about our most important steps. So we have been talking about lot of things because eSport is a new thing. You do not know what the best thing you should do first is and obviously, the Association has very limited resources, financially very limited and of course, limited in time. We all have our jobs and responsibilities and a low amount of time we can dedicate to the Association so we need to find priorities. And the first thing we are going to do is a national representation or a national team that will fight and represent the Slovak republic at the IESF Worlds Championship, which we luckily have secured funds for because it is expensive. We need to fly all the way down to South Korea and it is not the cheap task to do. But luckily with the support of the Bratislava Self-Governing Region we have enough funds to make it. Right now we are waiting for the games to be announced and we are trying to find the most transparent way to form this team. We do not want to do a competition because we are afraid that not all of the best teams will participate in

the competition so we are thinking about how to do it so. This is quite difficult process. We have been talking with many event organizers, celebrities like streamers, players and nowadays it is not official so I cannot tell you more about players. This is the first priorities, the representation.

**N. K.: What is the next thing?**

**Karol Cagáň:** The second priority we want to do and it luckily costs no money, is education. We want to organize workshops and meetings for team and organizers as well. Teach them how to get the legal form, because if you want to have a legal team you need to have a legal form. You cannot do it like three of us gather and get to the tournament. That is maybe good for fun, but if you want to have sponsors, if you want to receive even the prize money officially you should have a legal form. People need consulting on how to do it, where to go for accountancy, what papers they need, how expensive it is and all this stuff which is honestly not that expensive and it is quite easy to do, but people do not have information, it is hardly accessible for them. And we want to get out to them, talk to them, explain them what, how and why the legal system works. So this is the education part and thirdly, and for me most important and the one I signed up for, is to build the grassroots of gaming community in Slovakia. This is mainly to encourage and support even the small events, small teams and everybody who wants to do something in this sport. We do provide equipment, computers, and cables, supervisors, marketing help and consulting to one or two organisers per month so it is for me the most important part. But this is the field we need more support in, it means financially or personally so it is very difficult to get there, but I hope we get it. We have a plan on how to do it.

**N. K.: But is it legitimate to say eSport is sport?**

**Karol Cagáň:** Well, it is very good question, the one we have been studying in recent years. And it turns out there are a few steps you need to do to become sport, so we as an Association and representatives of this sport, it is our task to take them. So, that is mainly what we are doing, what is our occupation, to make it a legal, officially recognized sport. So what do you need to do is at first to become a member of international organisation that is in charge of eSports and we have done so, so check. Second one is basically the one we can do nothing about. The International Esport Federation needs to become a member of an organisation called SportAccord. SportAccord is basically an international organisation that has a right to say what sport is and what is not. So these are the guys who are going to make a decision. So the IESF is in talks with them and we have no way to influence this process. But as far as I know it might happen this year. Might. I am very cautious about that. So it is hopefully the second check. And the third is to become a part of a national sports governing body which is an organisation in every country that says: OK, this is a sport and this is the representative body we are going to deal with. In January this year the law changed and this body became The Slovak Olympic Committee. They changed their name to Slovak Sports and Olympic Committee in order to accommodate all sports so even non-Olympic sports can become members. So once you are a member of the Slovak Olympic Sport Committee and your international federation is recognized by SportAccord, you are an official sport. So we have filed the request for application to the Slovak Sport and Olympic Committee and we came into the meeting and said: Here we are, the new age is coming. (laugh) But they were really helpful with providing us with total legal support and right now we are preparing the official application once again.

It is a big document but as far as we consulted with the lawyers of the Slovak Sport and Olympic Committee who I would like to thank by this for helping us, I would say it is very realistic to make it by the end of June which means we are almost a sport.

**N. K.: How does the government support sports which are not Olympic sports? Is there any change in the financial support they offer?**

**Karol Cagáň:** It is not much change in comparison with Olympic sports. The government financial support actually derives from three key criteria. One is the adult sport base which means basically how many adult sportsmen are members of the national federation which is why we want to encourage people to sign up for the federation. The second is the young sportsmen or sporting youth and how many of them we have in our federation. And the last criteria are the medals and scores and the ranks in the world rankings on World Championships. They basically do it by a very transparent process, they put all this criteria in one big form, and they put the all the other sports, except ice hockey and football, they have a special clause governing them, and they just divide money according to the outcome of the form.

**N. K.: Have you already received any financial support from the government?**

**Karol Cagáň:** The government does not yet support us. But we are working on it. There is also a donation scheme, even for non-credited sports. Even if we are not a sport we can get support from the government, but we do not have enough members or results yet to be relevant. So once we got there, we will be, so that is why the world championship is the first priority. But we have very strong support from the Self-Governing Region of Bratislava which does a great job in supporting eSports.

**N. K.: You are saying the World Championship is the first priority. But do you think that the Slovak players can be good competition for others?**

**Karol Cagáň:** How I see it, is the same as I saw it in kayakers. When we split as Czechoslovakia they were really quick and they were one of the first who established a national association. They were at the start, still we had gold medals coming from Olympics. That is the case I am trying to make here. If we get ourselves up and running soon enough and we secure the environment soon enough and start to work soon enough we have a good way ahead so we can be at the top and others will be just struggling to catch up. The great example of this was Saudi Arabia that joined this year but they had funding already because they are recognized in Saudi Arabia and now they have the Tekken7 world champion. They had a player who was lower down in the world ranks competing with a player who was in the top ten at the finale. And in part because the Saudi Arabian got a coach who was working on him and preparing him which is not that expensive thing, he won. He is the world champion. So that is for me a good example of if we really do start to work and people do start listening to us and do give us a little bit of money which is needed right now we can get to the top. The point is, if you really want to set up a pro basketball team, it is extremely expensive but eSports right now is at the beginning so for a very low amount of money you can get a lot of music, right?

**N. K.: What games can Slovaks be competitive in?**

**Karol Cagaň:** I guess that culturally speaking and as history goes I believe Counter Strike is our strongest game as even in the world's charts. We have our representation, we have GuardiaN who tops the world charts every year for very long time. So he is a steady performer and we have also a couple of other players going in his footsteps like Styko or Frozen who are extremely good performers and who I believe have the power to represent Slovakia in its best name. And traditionally Counter Strike is more a European title so it is more popular in Europe and the MOBA games like DOTA or League of Legends dominate in the Asian market. So it is basically, I do not know why, it is a cultural thing maybe, so geographically speaking or regionally speaking this is where I see the biggest opportunity. But who knows, sport is a sport, you never know.

**N. K.: Have already any players expressed a desire to be a member of your Association?**

**Karol Cagaň:** From the beginning people had doubts: What is this? Who is behind it? But luckily right now, the official organisers who host tournaments and do have legal form, are by a large margin members of the Slovak Esports Association. Now even almost all teams that have legal form are members as well. We firstly aimed at teams and at organizers and now we are aiming at the public. Every decision can be viewed online because the law obliged us to publish everything we decide, because it is basically a public organisation, so it is public money, which means money of all of us. Even though we as founding members pay most of the budget now but still it is public money. So we just need to build trust and our reputation and I believe that our first world championship will help us with that and once we prove to everybody that we can set up a strong team, maybe bring home a medal, then I believe that public support will come. I believe once they see us, who we are, they will join.

**N. K.: Regularly, you organize the biggest tournament in Slovakia Y-Games, but do you want to reach any other part of Slovakia?**

**Karol Cagaň:** We have very good representation around Slovakia. It is actually one of the criteria to be admitted as a international federation that you have to cover two thirds of your country with your events. We have the Koalan group, which hosts tournaments in Žilina and in Liptovský Mikuláš and then we also have the AKNOR agency, which has Esport Slávia Martin team hosted tournaments in Martin. And we are also in talks with the Paragon tournament which is located in the east, but they do not have a legal form yet. We are trying to find a way to bring them on board. And if there is someone else doing tournaments, feel free to come to us and we will do everything in our power to help them continue doing their work.

**N. K.: Karol, you are a very young guy and you have plenty of experience already. How did you get where you are now?**

**Karol Cagaň:** I am 24 years old and hopefully I am at the end of finishing university to become a Master of Arts. And I just said: OK let's do it! Really nothing special. There are always opportunities and there are people who are just looking for them I am the kind of person who likes challenges and when I saw e.g. the IESF application, it really gave me nightmares, because there were over 40 amendments you have to put in. It is huge

amount of paperwork to be done and it is not just printing and signing papers. But once you know there is a clear way you can set yourself steps and climb up. And I have a huge, really huge amount of people who are helping me, giving advice, so basically I had luck with good people around me.

