The Austrian winter sports federation announced Wednesday that it had released the 35-year-old Hirscher and endorsed his nation change.

"We have of course tried very hard to offer Marcel the best possible and individual conditions in the event of a return to Alpine racing and were able to explain these to him in a personal exchange," the federation, known as ÖSV, said. "Of course, we very much regret his decision to request a change of nation to the Dutch Ski Association but in the end we supported it."

Hirscher was born and raised in Austria to an Austrian father and a Dutch mother, Sylvia. His father, Ferdinand, coached him throughout his career.

"I want to be able to compete again, because that is what I like. This new project is realized best as a Dutchman," Hirscher said.

While there have been Dutch skiers who have competed on the elite level, never has the Netherlands -- a country with no mountains -- had a top racer anywhere near Hirscher's caliber. The nation change allows Hirscher to compete on Van Deer skis -- the brand he helped create with Red Bull, his sponsor. Van Deer is not on the list of brands approved for use by the Austrian federation.

The Dutch Ski Federation said it was "delighted" with Hirscher's choice.

"We will not only profit from his contribution in competition, but also from the wealth of knowledge and experience he will share with us," the federation's technical director Wopke de Vegt said.

Patrick Riml, the ski racing director at Red Bull, said Hirscher plans to enter lower-level FIS races in New Zealand in August to get the necessary points to return to the World Cup circuit and that his main aim is to compete at next season's world championships in Saalbach-Hinterglemm, Austria.

"He's been training the whole season. He's been on snow pretty much every day of the winter testing his equipment," Riml said, adding that Hirscher plans to compete in both slalom and giant slalom.

Hirscher retired in 2019 following his record eighth straight overall World Cup title. Marc Girardelli is next on the men's list with five overall titles. Annemarie Moser-Pröll tops the women's list with six overall trophies, followed by Mikaela Shiffrin with five and Lindsey Vonn with four.

In terms of World Cup race wins, Hirscher's 67 victories are second behind men's record holder Ingemar Stenmark's 86. Shiffrin holds the overall record with 97 wins.

So can he still compete at the highest level?

"He was amazing when he was racing. He was the best one out there," Riml told The Associated Press. "Marcel is Marcel."

I've spent hours studying your performance throughout my career, attempting to integrate bits and pieces into my own movement patterns," Braathen wrote Hirscher on Instagram. "There is one thing I really wish I had the chance to do -- race against you. It's an honor to have you back, and I can't wait to ski with you.

Richarlison, 26, finished as Brazil's leading scorer in Qatar with three goals in four games, although the country exited at the quarterfinal stage following a penalty shootout defeat against Croatia.