

# **‘The Only Game in Town?’: Football Match-Fixing in Greece**

## **Introduction**

Match-fixing is often presented as a vague term that describes sport-related illegal dealings between powerful people behind closed doors. The motivation for match-fixing can vary from purely economic benefits, which can be direct or indirect, to sport benefits depending on the circumstances. The history of match-fixing is a very long one. According to the journal *Archaeology* (1996 cited in European Commission, 2012: 10), the first documented case of match-fixing seems to be that of Eupolos of Thessaly who bribed three of his boxing competitors in order to win a gold medal at the Olympic Games of 338 BC. Nowadays, although it is extremely difficult to measure the extent of match-fixing, it seems that football is the primary context of fixed matches although other sports such as cricket, basketball, tennis, sumo, horse-racing, and snooker seem to have fallen victims of the practice (see, for example, Carpenter, 2012; The Guardian, 2013a; The Guardian, 2013b; Gorse & Chadwick, n.d; Qureshi and Verma, 2013; Brooks *et al.*, 2013).

Football match-fixing is often associated with ‘organised crime’ in media, academic, and other literature. In Declan Hill’s (2010) journalistic account, *The Fix*, what is described in the activities of a Chinese businessman, Ye Zheyun, who was involved in match-fixing in Belgium buying off football clubs with financial problems and gaining significant amounts of money from the Asian betting markets. Ralf Mutschke, FIFA’s head of security, suggests that “organised crime recently switched from drug trafficking to match-fixing” and that “the business of match manipulation [is] irresistibly attractive to international organised crime” (Mutschke, 2013: ix-x). Moreover, references to ‘mafias’ infesting the world of football and using it as a money-making and money laundering platform are commonplace (see Feltes, 2013; UNODC, 2013; INTERPOL, 2013; Goal.com, 2013).

Football match-fixing in Greece has a relatively long history, however, from the late 1990s it has been considered as a serious problem for the sport in the country. Match-fixing (and general corruption) in football was brought to the public eye through the disclosure and extensive publicity the ‘paraga’ scandal received. The ‘paraga’ (literally, ‘The Shanty’) scandal, was structured around a mechanism of fixing matches by selecting specific referees for specific matches in order for specific clubs to benefit, and involved a number of clubs’ Board of Director members, Governing Bodies officials and professional referees (Eleftherotypia, 2011). By the time the scandal was exposed in 2002, outcome uncertainty within the league had reached extreme low levels, causing significant competitive imbalance among the clubs. This imbalance did not only lead to the creation of ‘big’ and ‘small’ teams as Szymanski and Kesenne (2004) suggest, but also to the formation of ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ clubs. As Schmidt and Berri (2001) explain in their analysis, since the performance on the field in professional competitive sports has a direct impact on their financial income, the gap between these two groups is affected by the competitive balance or imbalance of the league or competition.

Likewise, the minimised outcome uncertainty in Greek football led to high levels of competitive imbalance within the professional leagues of the sport, leading to the creation of ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ clubs, with the gap between these two categories being widened year after year.

Another way to underline this competitive imbalance within the league would be to examine the level of probability of determining the winner of the league, as Buzzacchi, Szymanski and Valletti (2004) suggest. Taking into consideration that the Greek Championship has been won by the same club 15 times within the last 17 years, outcome uncertainty has reached an extreme low level in Greek football, with the Super League often being characterised as a monopoly (Eleftherotyia, 2013a). It is worth mentioning that in a study conducted by the same newspaper on outcome uncertainty in football leagues around Europe, Greece ranked on the final position of the 50 European Championships list.

Despite the history of the phenomenon in the country, however, as well as the publicity the 'paranga' received in the early 2000s, Greece has only relatively recently been identified as one of the hotspots for football match-fixing on an international level. Following the recent scandal exposure of fixed matches in Greece in 2011, also known as *Koriopolis* (a pun name on the Italian scandal *Calciopolis* and the Greek word 'korios' or phone-tap), detailed information about numerous matches played in the 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11 seasons that attracted UEFA's attention were brought into the public eye. According to UEFA Betting Fraud Detection System (BFDS), more than 40 matches were found 'exceptionally questionable' (Proto Thema, 2010). These included Super League (first division), Football League (second division) and National Cup matches, involving more than 26 football clubs. Soon after, legal action was taken against individuals involved in the process, with a number of club officials facing lifelong bans from any football-related activity, and football clubs either relegated or excluded from European competitions (UEFA Europa League) and the Super League itself for their involvement in the scandal. In May 2013, the number of people facing charges exceeded 200, with some of them having already been imprisoned for their involvement in the scandal (Eleftherotyia, 2013b).

In the accompanying document that was sent to the public prosecutor initially investigating the case of match-fixing in Greece along with a transcript of wiretapped conversations among the actors involved, there is reference not only to the reasons why these individuals were arrested but also that these individuals constituted a 'criminal organisation' with hierarchy and rigidity, connections with individuals in several countries (Cyprus, Italy and Germany), a monopolic position in the market and attempts at laundering money from the criminal activities. An aspect, however, that lacks clarity is the way and process it occurs as well as the actors this process involves.

Following the aforementioned scandal exposure, a vast amount of information regarding football match-fixing was made available to the public. Numerous media presented various intriguing though scattered details regarding the way match-fixing was 'organised' and managed and the means or resources used in the process, as well as the communication channels and actors within this process. Some media sources were even able to secure recorded (by the National Intelligence Agency) phone calls between a number of the key actors involved, as well as the actual detailed legal case files, providing new and accurate information on the issue. It is worth mentioning that the estimated number of recorded phone calls regarding the scandal exceeded 39.000 in the beginning of 2012 (Vima, 2012).

The aim of the current article is to provide an account of the social organisation of football match-fixing in Greece. Among other, this article responds in a more structured manner to a relative scarcity of *empirical* studies on the issue, and to Habermas and Sheehan's (2013) 'hope' that new initiatives for the study of manifestations of sport-related crime issues are developed (see also Petropoulos and Maguire, 2013; Cheloukhine, 2013). What we try to do in this article is highlight the complexity of the situation with regards to match-fixing around the

globe by focusing on the case of Greece. This case study constitutes a potential template for research on an international level. In the following sections we will present: (a) the *methods and data* used for the study; (b) the *actors* involved in match-fixing: All, direct and indirect, key and secondary actors will be put forward in order for a clear and concise picture of match-fixing in Greek football to be presented. Through the analysis, it is made clear that not all actors participate intentionally in football match-fixing. On the contrary, according to the data available, it is suggested that some actors have operated unintentionally either as pressure levers or by ‘turning a blind eye’. Nevertheless, they will be presented in a forthcoming section, since they play a part in the elaborate match-fixing web; (c) the *process* involved in match-fixing. Towards the end of the article we will attempt at discussing the findings by locating them within the contemporary football-related and non-football-related situation in the country and beyond.

## Data and Methods

In this effort we utilised three main sources of data. Firstly, we used the telephone conversations that were the result of wiretapping by the National Intelligence Agency (*Ethniki Ypiresia Pliroforion - EYP*) in relation to the latest football match-fixing scandal (2011).<sup>1</sup> These wiretapped conversations were able to offer abundant information about the broad range of actors and groups involved, and identify patterns of social organisation across a number of cases many of which were related to one another. In addition, the document accompanying the transcribed conversations offers information about the offences individuals were charged of and, very interestingly, the authorities’ perceptions of the match-fixing schemes as ‘criminal organisations’.

Secondly, we collected, examined and analysed the published media sources which allowed us to obtain information not only on the process behind football match-fixing, but also on the key actors involved. The content of newspaper articles found on the internet was used. Because match-fixing covers a wide range of phenomena and because we were interested in many aspects of match-fixing such as activities, structures, and the general context in which match-fixing takes place, in every newspaper’s electronic archive, we used combinations of a number of alternative and relative search terms: ‘match-fixing’, ‘criminal organisation and football’, ‘network and football’, ‘money laundering and football’. Articles from five newspapers were selected, namely *Eleftherotypia*, *Kathimerini*, *Ta Nea*, *To Proto Thema* and *To Vima* from April 2010 to December 2013. In addition a large number of local newspaper articles from the researchers’ personal archives were used for the same period. There are more than 80 newspapers nationally circulated in Greece today (including financial/business and sports newspapers most of which are tied to the major football clubs e.g *Prasini* with Panathinaikos FC, *Ora gia Spor* with AEK FC etc.). However, the aforementioned newspapers are political and had the highest circulation (see European Journalism Centre, 2010). The newspapers mentioned above were chosen for the particular research because they represent a range of political affiliations and proclamations without belonging to the two extremes, and because they are non-sport and non-tabloid newspapers that are circulated throughout the whole country. It was decided that non-sport and non-tabloid newspapers would be used only as there is a greater possibility for more informed accounts to be found in this type of newspapers (see Sparks, 2000).

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter, referred to as: EYP – Ethniki Ypiresia Pliroforion (2011)

Finally, in order for some ‘grey’ areas to be clarified, informed actors from the realm of Greek football (e.g. individuals working within football clubs) have been also interviewed offering their valuable insight on the matter. These informed actors were accessed by the first author who used to work for a major Super League club and a Football League club. Since the anonymity of these informed actors will be kept throughout this article, they will be referred to as *interviewees* in the rest of the text.

As with any study the current study presents some limitations, which should be acknowledged at this stage. The first one has to do with the fact that the wiretapped conversations by the Greek National Intelligence Agency are the result of law enforcement activity, which in turn is the result of resource restrictions, the competency of agents, organizational priorities, and wider political priorities (see Kinzig 2004). Creating theoretical frameworks based solely on such data can give the impression of a stable community, rather than a volatile market-based series of fluid and mutating collaborations (Hobbs 2013; Hobbs and Antonopoulos, 2013). As any product of the state derived from largely unaccountable agencies, wiretapped conversations need to be carefully handled, and should always carry a disclaimer that “the content of this file are the fruits of police activity” (see Kitsuse and Cicourel 1963).

The second set of limitations are related to media sources. When media sources are used as sources of technical information about any manifestations of ‘organized crime’, they should be treated very cautiously for a variety of reasons. Not only do they most often refer to those cases which the authorities came across, thus ignoring cases of ‘successful’ schemes, but they also tend to present the issues relating to the actors or the activity/market itself in a sensational and morally charged manner something that has a limited analytical value. Moreover, search engines which material is drawn from, depend on the researcher providing keywords, a process which may lead to the exclusion of reports that are peripherally relevant but extremely important for the wider context of the study (see Jewkes, 2011).

Finally, in relation to the interviews with the informed actors, one can never be absolutely certain about the validity of the accounts although practices such as ‘cross-checking’ and ‘member checking’ that we have employed can significantly contribute towards eliminating untruthful accounts.

## **The Social organisation of Football Match-Fixing in Greece**

### ***Actors in the football match-fixing business***

Greek football clubs are structured differently in comparison to most European ones regarding their ownership and administration. All clubs participating in the top two national divisions, Super League and Football League, are privately own, with their main shareholder keeping an active role in the everyday running of the club. The shareholder is often voted by the Board of Administration in the role of the ‘President of the club’ who, in most cases, acts as the equivalent of the CEO or the Chairman. In some occasions, the elected President is not the shareholder, but a person acting on behalf of the main shareholder, representing their interests while managing both playing and non-playing aspects of the football club. It needs to be underlined that although a *Fit and Proper* test has been passed as a law of the Greek Government in 1999, Law 2725 of 1999 (Efimerida Kyverniseos, 1999), it is currently not actively applied, allowing for *anyone* to be involved in the administration of the sport.

Accordingly, accusations have been made that over the last few decades various individuals with ‘improper’ or even criminal past and ‘questionable’ motives have entered the Greek football industry and even acquired powerful roles. The available data offers some information as to which actors appear in the match-fixing business and how collaborations emerge in the first instance, usually within the business of football. Similar to other contexts (and other illegal businesses), not all actors are present in all match-fixing schemes. The different roles are as follows:

*Club Presidents*, along with other elected members of the top level of the clubs’ administration, appear to be the main group of primary actors in match-fixing. They also appear to be the most successful ‘match-fixers’ (see also Hill, 2009). According to numerous recorded phone-calls that were made public over the summer of 2011, these key actors could be even presented as match-fixing *initiators* in Greece. It is worth mentioning that a number of Super League and Football League Presidents and Board of Directors (BoD) members currently face legal actions over the match-fixing scandal that even resulted in the imprisonment of some of them. One of them is Makis Psomiadis, owner of Kavala FC, and an individual with a long history in criminal justice as he has been charged for gold smuggling, embezzlement, blackmail, tax evasion and has allegedly had a role in torture squads during Greece’s military Junta of the late 1960s/early 1970s (Dabilis, 2011). The way in which Presidents, shareholders and board members have participated in match-fixing and more details on their role will be presented in a following section. The term ‘Presidents’ will be used in this study to describe this first group of actors purely for the readers’ facilitation.

*Football players*, as expected, play an important role in the overall progress of the sport. Their ability to perform well has a direct effect to each match result and the overall success of their club. Their performance, however, is not always a result of their training, abilities, and skills. According to the data available, there have been numerous accusations of players underperforming during matches in order for the desired result to be achieved (EYP – Ethniki Ypiresia Pliroforion, 2011)<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, allegations were made regarding the timing of a goal scored, suggesting that there was an ulterior motive apart from the club’s success in the match. Since betting topics have increased rapidly, their involvement in match-fixing has become even more difficult to identify, with yellow cards, passes and misses (items that could otherwise be overlooked) being possible profitable subjects, suspicion over players’ involvement is still rising. Even though fewer legal actions were taken against football players, they appear to be key actors in the match-fixing process in Greece. The way in which they are involved in match-fixing raises the question of intention on their behalf, with some cases underlining the pressure they were under in order to participate in match-fixing schemes. It is worth mentioning, however, that according to the data available and the interviewees’ accounts, there seems to be no analogy between a player’s age, career or nationality and his involvement in match-fixing, with both successful and newcomer, Greek and non-Greek players being accused of participation in match-fixing (EYP – Ethniki Ypiresia Pliroforion, 2011).

*Referees* play an important role in the outcome of each match and the overall success of the sport. Their training and education accredited by European or Global governing bodies, UEFA and FIFA, respectively, ensure that the decisions made during a match are objective, unbiased and justified, with no trace of favouritism towards either of the clubs. The referees’

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<sup>2</sup> A recent report reveals that 12.8% of Greek football players interviewed admitted that they had been approached to fix a match within the past year, and 64% of them said they were confident that matches in their league were fixed in the last year (Kovac, 2014).

performance and decisions are under constant scrutiny by both national and international governing bodies, which evaluate them annually, ensuring at the same time that their actions are always driven by a sense of duty towards the sport. The pressure referees are under is not limited, however, to the governing bodies (see Cheloukhine, 2013). Having the power to considerably influence the outcome of a match puts referees in the focal point of the media, the fans', the football clubs' shareholders' and the players' interest. Taking all the above into consideration, it is highlighted that the importance of referees' role lies within their ability to ensure that their decisions are always unbiased and justified. This ability, however, is often questioned. Numerous accusations have been made over time regarding referees' decisions, with some of them proving to be nothing more than fans' exaggeration. A number of these accusations, however, have attracted more than the public attention, urging the national and international football governing bodies to take action against them. Over the last few years, several referees have received both minor and major penalties in Greece, with some of them even losing their license. Due to their important role in the outcome of each match, referees are considered key actors in the match-fixing process. Their role, however, cannot be viewed as the one of the initiator, but more as one of a passive nature (see To Vima, 2012; Dabilis, 2011).

*Bookmakers* have attracted considerable attention since their role in the sport industry has created an on-going debate. The legality of their profession has been questioned numerous times with new legislation and ruling being passed regularly by both legal bodies and sport governing bodies. Football-related legislation has accepted bookmaking but introduced strict guidelines regarding its operation and advertising within the sport. These measures, however, have proven powerless against modern *on-line* bookmaking (see Cheloukhine, 2013). Following technological advances and their rapidly increasing use, such as home and mobile internet, bookmaking could not be limited to licensed companies within the country, allowing fans to bet their money on a Greek match result using an international betting company situated on the other side of the globe (see Naftemporiki, 2013). The operations this company follows or the odds offered for each match result could not be, therefore, assessed or controlled by the football governing bodies, creating a lucrative incentive for match-fixing. Additionally, the evolution of bookmaking in modern football allows for odds to be offered for numerous possibilities apart from the result of a match. Half-time result, number of goals scored, number of passes or misses, number of yellow and red cards or even players' injuries are being offered as betting topics. With the number of betting options rising, match-fixing becomes increasingly difficult to detect. Bookmakers have been identified as key initiators of the match-fixing process, acting both directly and indirectly on the matter. Legal actions were taken against bookmakers and bookmaking companies following the recent scandal exposure in Greece, where some individuals were even imprisoned (Eleftherotypia, 2013b).

*Illegal agents* ('*paranomoi praktores*'). The particular term is used in the official documents by the authorities to identify those individuals who operate on behalf of some club Presidents by (a) placing high bets on the games that they have knowledge they are manipulated in legal betting shops throughout the country; (b) placing bets in international, online betting companies (see Aquilina and Chetcuti, 2014). The illegal agents effectively place the bets in order to protect the identity of the Presidents involved in manipulated football games, and they are trusted individuals who work in one of the Presidents legal businesses or are (extended) family members. The illegal agents are getting paid for each winning bet they place for the President (EYP – Ethniki Ypiresia Pliroforion, 2011).

*Enforcers* (also known as '*bravi*') are an extremely important set of actors in the football match-fixing business in Greece. They are usually hired or subcontracted to complete a job on an *ad hoc* basis, and they are often involved in protection and extortion activities in relation to establishments of the nocturnal economy as well as the protection of illegal activities such as the cocaine market in specific suburbs of Athens. What they are asked to do is to intimidate or threaten football players or referees and to vandalise property of 'disobedient' actors. In some cases, enforcers legally work for a football club as member of the security team. In some occasions, enforcers accompany the Presidents when the latter attempt at setting a deal (EYP – Ethniki Ypiresia Pliroforion, 2011).

*Football Managers* and *Player Agents* have acquired to important roles in today's modern football industry. Managers have been often identified as the key to the success or failure of a team. With valuable and indisputable strategic football skills managers have earned their position as the most valuable non-playing individual on the bench of a club, with their salary sometimes matching or even exceeding the one of a star footballer. Player agents, on the other hand, were introduced to the sport as a result of its continuous commercialization over the past two decades. Acting on behalf of the players, agents have often been regarded as more than a mere representative of the player, with their responsibilities and power over the players' decisions increasing over time. Even though both groups do not often attract public attention, their positions within the industry are highly regarded. According to recent data we obtained, both Managers and Agents have been involved in match-fixing, with their roles in the scandal however, being kept rather vague and unclear. While a number of individuals face charges over the scandal, both groups appear to be mostly unwillingly involved, while acting as secondary actors or intermediates between the Presidents – initiators and the Players (see EYP – Ethniki Ypiresia Pliroforion, 2011).

*Sport media/Press.* According to our interviewees, a topic that has not attracted enough attention yet is the relations formed between individual members of the Press and Bookmakers. It is suggested that these relations involve reporters in profitable match-fixing, however, since these accusations cannot be supported with substantial evidence and there has been no legal action against them, the Press is considered an indirect, passive or secondary actor in Greek football match-fixing (see To Vima, 2013a). It is worth mentioning that both the Press and the Fans are often used as a pressure mechanism during the intimidation process of the parties that are unwilling to participate in a match-fixing, according to the interviewees in our study.

*National football governing bodies* have a regulatory or sanctioning role, while acting as the 'eyes and ears' of their international counterparts in Greece. Some of these bodies are in charge of the leagues football clubs participate in, such as the Super League and Football League/Football League 2, while others are responsible for the referees' training and match allocation, such as the Hellenic Football Federation (*Elliniki Podosfairiki Omospondia – EPO*). It has been suggested that governing bodies' tolerance over the last few years has allowed football match-fixing to grow to an enormous extend. Individual members of Greek governing bodies have been accused of 'turning a blind eye' or even actively participating in match-fixing. For instance, once of the main protagonist of the *Koriopolis* scandal, Vangelis Marinakis, was both the Hellenic Football Federation's vice-president and the President of Olympiakos F.C. (Niculescu, 2014). The fact that there has been legal action against members of the above-mentioned bodies, followed by numerous accusations of favourable behaviour towards specific football clubs raises the question of their integrity or the criteria according to which these individuals were originally chosen/elected in those positions. It is very interesting to note that the

Greek football is organised on the principles of ‘self-governance’ and ‘autonomy’, where the Greek government has very little –if at all – involvement, and the football regulatory bodies are responsible for the running of the leagues without the fear of any regulatory actions from the Greek state.

Having examined all actors involved in match-fixing, the process that takes place will be presented along with details on each actor’s role. The actors, as introduced above, have been identified as directly or indirectly involved in the process, depending on the level of their association with football match-fixing. According to the interviewees, not all actors are willingly involved in the process, with some being forced to participate, as it will be clarified in the following section.

### ***The process of football match-fixing in Greece***

Before the football match-fixing process description begins, there are various parameters that should be taken into consideration. The web of actors described above does not have a firm or entrenched nature. On the contrary, its success is based on its flexibility and the actors’ improvisation. Since various parties are involved in interlinked relations, each match embroils different people, and not all parties are willing to participate in match-fixing, generalising the process might lead us to incorrect conclusions. The data available, however, provide us with the opportunity to pinpoint the main steps of match-fixing, by identifying the relations formed between the parties involved and the chronological order in which they take place.

The match-fixing process resembles a simple web, where various dyadic ties that are “criminally exploitable” (von Lampe, 2003: 10) are formed, sometimes overlapping each other. The available data shows that these relations can be either short-term or long-term with a repetitive nature (EYP – Ethniki Ypiresia Pliroforion, 2011). In either case, the main means used in order for these relations to be formed between actors appear to be intimidation or reward. The former includes threats against one’s physical safety, family, career, property and possessions, while the latter mainly comprises of financial benefits and future favourable treatment within the football industry. Even though *serious* threats are rarely pragmatized, interviewees suggest that there is an increasing rate of intimidation used in match-fixing, especially in Football League (second division) matches.

In more detail, Club Presidents appear to be the ones initiating the entire football match-fixing process (Skokas, 2011; see also Cheloukhine, 2013 for a similar account on Russia). Their actions take place according to the following steps which are presented in a chronological order. Firstly, Club Presidents contact each other before a match involving their clubs takes place. If a desired outcome is agreed between them, the match-fixing process can begin. The result is often agreed on using the above-mentioned means on other actors: intimidation or reward. If the relation between the two Presidents is one of a long-term nature, reward is used instead of intimidation, making the match-fixing process faster and significantly simpler. When the relation between the two parties is relatively new, or in the case one of them is not willing to participate, intimidation is used (see Georgakis, 2011). After the desired result is agreed upon, each President acts *independently* approaching other relevant actors. Our study interviewees, for example, emphasise that Presidents who agree on a desired result for a match are not always the Presidents of the two clubs participating in the specific match that is to be fixed. On the contrary, depending on the target match, Presidents who appear to be irrelevant to the clubs in question are often involved in order for the desired outcome of match-fixing to be achieved.



Secondly, when the officials of each match (e.g. referees and match inspectors) are announced by the governing bodies, Presidents evaluate the possibility of approaching them. Their evaluation is based on each Referee, information available about him (or her), the presence of possible common acquaintances, and the likelihood of them participating in match-fixing (see also ESPN, 2011). Since this evaluation is a subjective process based on individual characteristics, there is no relevant information available to be presented. The choice of match officials, however, has often raised questions within the industry, with accusations made that Presidents have been able to use their power over governing bodies' officials and arrange for specific Referees to be chosen for particular matches. Once contacting the match officials is decided, one President is responsible for ensuring the Referee is informed of the desired result. The relation between the two parties is secured by either threat or reward (see To Vima, 2013b) with data suggesting that the former is more commonly used. In most cases short-term relations are formed between Presidents and Referees, mainly due to the fact that each match has a different group of officials. According to the interviewees, when it is evaluated that a Referee will not be asked to participate in match-fixing, this step is omitted, ensuring that the officials will not be aware of the fixing of a match.

Thirdly, *on the day of the match*, players are contacted in order for their role in the process to be clarified. According to data available, the Presidents approach players of their clubs directly informing them of the desired result and the relevant details (Skokas, 2011). Enforcers are accompanying the Presidents in this step, acting as a pressure level to the players and ensuring that any agreements made will be taken into serious consideration and honoured. In rare occasions where the first step of the process provided above did not result in an agreement, the President of the rival club approaches the clubs' players, in order to ensure that a well-running business relation is formed with them. This relation guarantees the desired result, even if the President of a club or the Referee of a match are not involved in match-fixing. It is worth mentioning that the number of football players approached in each match varies from a few to the whole team. Their involvement also varies within the same match, with some players being asked to actively achieve the desired result while some are encouraged to 'turn a blind eye' (EYP – Ethniki Ypiresia Pliroforion, 2011). Threatening the physical integrity of the football players is an integral part of the process in order for some reluctant players to be persuaded and often – although this has been the case in Football Leagues 1 and 2 only – the presidents threaten that they will not pay the players their legal salaries and bonuses. Interviewees in this study underline that this step of the process takes place directly before the match and can even involve the manager of the team. In some occasions, individual players are not contacted directly but through their agent. Notably, it was suggested that this phase can even occur in the locker rooms of a team, in an indiscreet way and only a few moments before the match starts. Both the managers' and agents' involvement is limited to rare occasions and under specific circumstances, and especially when an agreement cannot be reached quickly or in case a player is not easily approachable. Nevertheless, individual managers and agents face legal action against them and have even been imprisoned over the 2011 scandal raising suspicion over other possibly hidden aspects of their involvement that are yet to be disclosed (see To Vima, 2013a; 2013b).

The fourth step of the process takes place *after the match has started* and involves the evaluation and verification of the desired result. According to our interviewees, during the half-time break of the match, all parties' roles are assessed according to the already agreed plan. If the result of the match is the agreed one, no actions are needed. However, if the result is not the arranged one, Presidents ensure that all parties will fulfil their roles in the second half of the

match (To Vima, 2011). This is achieved by a direct contact between the Presidents and the other parties involved. Once again, Enforcers accompany the Presidents in this step, emphasising the power the latter hold in the process. The means used in this contact is a combination of intimidation and reward, with the former being presented as a more successful incentive (Georgakis, 2011). Due to the limited timeframe available for this step, its execution is often indiscreet. This indiscretion has been the reason for the large number of witnesses in this step of match-fixing. It is worth mentioning that various stories have been published regarding intimidation incidents taking place in the half-time break, occurring in both Super League and Football League matches (see To Vima, 2011).

Bookmakers appear to have a double role in this web, acting either directly or indirectly depending on each match. The latter entails advertising exceptionally favourable odds for a match result without any relations formed between them and the above mentioned parties and cannot be considered active participants in match-fixing. The former, on the other hand, includes promoting unjustifiably favourable odds for a match result to a specific audience in combination with strong relations with one or more of the above mentioned actors (EYP – Ethniki Ypiresia Pliroforion, 2011). Illegal agents, as already mentioned above, have only the latter dimension in their role. These long-term relations ensure that the Bookmaker is aware of the result or various relevant details of the match being prearranged and that the odds are agreed upon according to it. These odds are then promoted to the parties involved in match-fixing as a reward for their role in the process. In other words, the odds become both the incentive for match-fixing and the reward for participating in it (Skokas, 2012).

## **Discussion**

Earlier in this article, it was suggested that ‘mafias’ or ‘mafia-type organisations’ are presented as being actively involved in football match-fixing. We are not, of course, in the position to comment as to whether these or similar entities are involved in match-fixing in other contexts or internationally. What our data has shown however, is that in Greece the presence of ‘mafias’ or ‘mafia-type’ organisations in match-fixing is far from the truth. Unsurprisingly, a view of these match-fixing activities as the result of robust, continuous and hierarchical predatory organisational structures is not accurate. What emerges from this study is that the entities involved in the business of match-fixing are *networks* i.e. fluid and dynamic social systems that consist of patterns of relationships among people/actors (Wasserman and Faust 1994; von Lampe, 2003). Football match-fixing does not require a great degree of sophistication, and management of resources or labour. Towards this end, match-fixing networks tend to have a naturally defined horizontal ‘structure’. Participants on these networks many times act on improvisation such as in the case of the outcome of a match-fixing process not being pragmatized by the first half of the match. A number of individuals act as intermediaries who bring together disconnected parts (see Morselli & Roy, 2008) by controlling in a sense all the information asymmetries that make up the networks (see Burt, 1992). What merely exist are individuals or small groups forming temporary collaborations in order for their shared objective, making profit (or ensuring that a club wins which also has financial long-term implications), to materialise.

Overall, the image of the business that emerges from our examination of a series of its aspects from the 2011 scandal does not vindicate the heavy emphasis that orthodox accounts of ‘organised crime’ place on characteristics such as rigid organisation, coordination, hierarchy and

so on. Rather, our findings are consistent with views of match-fixing as a criminal activity being less robust from an organisational viewpoint, carried out by individuals or clusters of individuals that assemble on the basis of opportunity rather than authority. In contrast to other contexts, such as Belgium, the primary actors are not foreigners (see Hill, 2010; Hill, 2013) but native individuals who are embedded in the Greek football industry.

We nevertheless believe that it is possible to return to certain more fundamental questions about the context of match-fixing in Greece and specifically to ask how it is located within the overall political and economic context in the country. By putting emphasis on ‘organised criminal activities’ in football match-fixing the question of the important role of the underworld for the whole business is ignored. There are a number of indigenous conditions that operate as a fertile ground for match-fixing especially in the last 20-30 years or so although it is since the beginning of the 2000s that the problem of match-fixing has grown. Specifically, what has been the case in Greece is that football, since the beginning of the 1980s when the sport became ‘professionalised’ and football clubs in the first, second and third division were transformed into companies, has been used as a platform of action for extremely powerful individuals who use football clubs and the popular support for them not only as an income source *per se* (season tickets, advertisements, merchandise, etc.) which is particularly the case for big clubs but also as a vehicle for tax evasion and money laundering, as a protection shield against the state, and as leverage towards securing state bids (Dabilis, 2011). From the moment football clubs are companies that are to be protected as investments, sport itself becomes a secondary concern.

There was not enough evidence as to who was the ‘head’ of the ‘paraga’ or who was the highest bidder or best client of a match-fixing network. However, the ‘paraga’ facilitated match-fixing in primarily two ways: firstly, it changed the structure of modern Greek football radically, by minimising outcome uncertainty and, therefore, amplifying competitive imbalance within the top league at any cost (see Eleftherotypia, 2013a; see also Cheloukhine, 2013). The financial implications this entails included the above mentioned creation of ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ clubs and the continuously widened gap between them.

Secondly, the ‘paraga’ was *instrumental in corruption becoming widespread in Greek football* in the presence of self-governance and autonomy of the Greek football in which state monitoring is virtually absent. It created an environment of distrust in which most clubs had to ‘pick sides’ if they wanted to guarantee preferential treatment, better positioning in play-offs, avoidance of relegation, increased chances of promotion or playing in European competitions etc. This pervasive corruption in the world of Greek football has been demonstrated to basically act as providing a comparative advantage to those structures which do not operate according to officially established rules something that is prevalent in other manifestations of ‘organised crime’ in the country (see Antonopoulos and Tagarov, 2012). Inevitably, match-fixing in this endemically corrupt environment, has become a viable, rather short-term solution for many football clubs as well as a way of making sure that money is being made under the enormous financial pressure that most Greek football clubs (even the traditionally powerful ones) face in the current entrepreneurial and financial landscape of the country. One of the reasons for the financial hardship of football clubs, among other, is the reduced attendance in the Greek stadia with an average of 4.328 spectators per Super League football match according to Super League data (Koumbis, 2013).

An important indigenous condition favouring football match-fixing in Greece is politics. Perhaps unlike other contexts, what happens in Greece is that the clubs participating in match-fixing for financial or not reasons are in essence protected against any significant punishment by

the politicians of the locality the clubs are based in. These politicians either act as intermediaries between the club and the criminal justice or sports authorities by intervening to protect the club and satisfy their electoral clientele or –in extreme and rather unusual cases - actually participate in the match-fixing itself (see SKAI, 2013). In 1999, for example, the mayor of Skydra, a town in northern Greece, donated 16 million drachmas (approximately €47000) to the club of the town, Aetos Skydras, 5 million of which (approximately €14600) were to be spent towards bribing actors of a game so that the club is promoted (Eleftherotypia, 2013c). Politicians in Greece owe their very existence to the gray relationships with individuals or groups that help these politicians assume a certain degree of power (the so called ‘client relationships’ or ‘rousfeti’). As it is suggested in Antonopoulos and Tagarov’s (2012) study, the nature of social relationships in Greece is such as to favour gray transactions; especially in areas of the country in which politicians already have extremely good personal relationships with citizens, that means that they are elected by them on the basis of favours, which many times involves turning a blind eye to criminal activities or providing a protective shield to these activities.

Finally, the issue of football match-fixing - and in light of the widespread corruption in the football industry – as mentioned earlier, has to be seen within the wider context of betting practices of the Greek public as well as the whole betting market in Greece which seems to be a relatively healthy one despite the current adverse economic conditions in the country. According to GamblingData (2011), the official Greek betting market is worth in turnover terms more than €2.1 billion per year and is high by international standards. In addition, *spend per person* on sports betting are significantly higher in Greece than other important contexts (e.g. Italy), despite the Greek public only having access to a partial and non-competitive/monopolic sports-betting market (controlled by one state licensed entity, OPAP). If one also considers the *online*, overseas betting outlets for which, unfortunately, no figures are available, it is obvious that the market is huge. Actors in the football match-fixing business do nothing more than diverting money from the market to their own pockets by manipulating results and other aspects of the game that is in their power. In this sense, football match-fixing in Greece appears to be an integral part of a symbiosis between personal greed, aspirations and needs, as well as ferocious market dynamics in the world of football that disadvantage most of the football clubs, their players and their officials who now operate as small and medium entrepreneurs cutting corners in the absence of substantial regulation.

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