



International Agreements Committee

Uncorrected oral evidence: Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions

Thursday 9 July 2026

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Johnson of Lainston (The Chair); Lord Anderson of Swansea; Baroness Anelay of St Johns; Baroness Blower; Lord Boateng; Lord German; Lord Hannay of Chiswick; Baroness Lawlor; Lord McDonald of Salford.

Evidence Session No. 1

Heard in Public

Questions 1 – 9

Witnesses

Moses Swaibu, former footballer, founder and CEO, GameChanger 360; Dr Madalina Diaconu, Associate Professor, University of Neuchâtel.

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Examination of witnesses

Moses Swaibu and Dr Madalina Diaconu.

Q1 The Chair: Good morning, everyone. Thank you very much for joining this inquiry into the Council of Europe's Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions, which is better known as the Macolin convention; it is particularly relevant in the light of all the major sporting fixtures that are going on at the moment around the world.

I am pleased to welcome on behalf of the committee our two witnesses today. Moses Swaibu is a famous former footballer and now the founder and CEO of GameChanger 360. He brings to this meeting an extremely high degree of understanding of the problems around match-fixing, which he encountered, and of how we can solve them. Thank you very much for being with us in person; it is extremely good to have you with us.

Joining us online is Madalina Diaconu, an associate professor at the University of Neuchâtel, who has made it her business over the past few decades to build a high level of expertise. She has contributed significantly to the drafting of this treaty and has a very good understanding of the legal ramifications of such treaties. I thank both of you very much for joining us.

My first question is for Moses. Can you talk briefly about your experience of match-fixing, which you have been open about, have written books about and talked about, and the broader systems behind it, both as a footballer and since? I know that this point will be developed more in our discussion but how do you see the relevance of this treaty? You have been a great advocate, since the situation some years ago, of removing or reducing corruption in sport. Is this treaty a useful way of going about that? Again, thank you for joining us; we look forward to hearing your views.

Moses Swaibu: Thank you all for having me. Before I start, my journey into professional sports started when I was 16. I was a young boy playing for my school at the time. I went for a trial with Crystal Palace at 16 years old; that is relevant to the conversation we are having today. I have had no education with regard to frameworks or how to deal with certain issues.

Going from attending a public school in Croydon to going into an elite environment was quite a shift and a change in terms of geographical location—that is, where I come from and the community. More importantly, I was going into an environment of mentors, structures, big brothers and discipline. Although I had that framework, I was well endowed to adapt to scenarios. I was travelling from London Bridge to East Croydon every day in a generation where there was no social media. Stylistically, it was very much an old-school way of navigating through London at that time. It was not until I left Crystal Palace and moved to Lincoln City at 19 that I had my first real interaction with life and society

outside London. I was 19 years old in professional sport, experiencing different elements of culture and different teammates.

One thing that was quite common was not really knowing or understanding what people were going through. A teammate introduced me to the world of match-fixing for the first time at Lincoln City. It was a word I had never even heard of. At the time, I knew that it was morally wrong; I was 19 but, more importantly, I just wanted to play football. Years later, I found out that he had a gambling addiction and everything else, but, at the same time, I did not have the power or confidence to go to Chris Sutton, my first team manager, and say, "Hey, the teammate who introduced me to match-fixing is the captain".

So, in the first instance, I turned around and said, "No", but there were no reporting tools in place for me to approach anyone confidently in the club and say, "Hey, I think we have a problem". Bear in mind that there was €60,000 in a changing room in Northampton. Years later, I was let go by Lincoln City. I dropped down into lower-level football, and the structure that I once had at Crystal Palace was gone; it was non-existent.

In my second interaction with match-fixing, again, a teammate approached me and said, "Look, we have a game coming up. More importantly, do you want to meet these match-fixers?" Going back, in 2011, you will have seen that there was a scandal around players who were caught up in a match-fixing ring moving to Australia. Two years later, I got caught up in the same ring. So, the second time, we went ahead and fixed the game.

That was my first real introduction to highly organised crime. As I navigated this journey, at each and every layer, this criminal syndicate took me in like a child, if that makes sense. It built the same mechanisms that are used in sport: teamwork and togetherness. That is how a lot of the manipulation is carried out in the wider world and why it is relevant today. It is about the nuances of manipulation and its mental and psychological effect. It was not violent or dangerous, but I believe that systemic change and frameworks are needed. A top-down, bottom-up approach is needed; that goes to your question on the Macolin convention.

If you look at it from an international point of view, with all the countries potentially ratifying this convention, there is not enough systematic influence from where we are today in the digital world—a world where young people are the future of this nation and these countries. More importantly, fundamentally, this should be taught in the school system as early as physical education in primary school. We can look at manipulation and ask, "What does it mean to be integral and have integrity?" That is very important, but that framework is not robustly designed. You can see from what is happening in the Premier League and, currently, the World Cup that the word is, in my humble opinion, a tick-box exercise. However, in the UK, we have the opportunity to establish something across the board that includes stakeholders and policyholders as well.

To answer your question on where society sits today, are we moving with the times or are we still thinking as we were 20 years ago? What I see—Dr Diaconu will attest to this—is that we need to include different stakeholders, different mindsets and different people, and act as sport does. Sport is free for everyone, especially football. It is a community-based game where the language should be colloquialised. It has culture and influence. We need to look at prisons and other systems and ensure that, where there is football or sport, people are involved. We need to consider the weapons that we now have in this digital space. For example, there are cryptocurrencies, technologies and different areas where criminal influencers live in our society. I believe that we are in a position of strength and that, to move forward, we need to take a practical look at what this all means.

On the Macolin convention, we need to ask questions around the cultural influence from these countries, because that kid living in Portugal in a favela and that kid living in south-east London are playing the same game, but it is a completely different mindset demographic. If we look at case studies and research, how much data and information are we getting to understand human behaviour, including reporting and risk? Within that risk ecosystem, we can build a framework. For example, if you have a young Moses Swaibu at 18, look at his background, his family, and his siblings: what were the influences around him that shaped this opportunity for crime and corruption?

The Chair: As a supplement, I should declare my interest, which is relevant to the debate. I am on the board of a data business, and the systems it is building are now being used by polymarkets and prediction markets. I do not think that there is a conflict of interest there.

The point is that the idea of broadly fixing a match at 1-0 is history. Now, we are looking at very specific intra-match points where people can bet on whether someone will get a red card half way through, whether they kick the ball from the halfway line or whatever. As you say, it is interesting that the focus should be as much on the big multinational criminal syndicates as on the players themselves, such as the vulnerability of a 17 year-old player being offered huge amounts of money in a junior football league. Do you think that something such as the Macolin convention or what the UK is doing is enough to support the players in a cultural sense? Do you feel that, in English and British football, there is an understanding now, as compared to what there was when you were first approached 20 years ago?

Moses Swaibu: I am going to be really open with everybody in this room. Honestly, I believe that it has gotten worse. If we look at the line of polymarkets, a lot of these commercial companies are for-profit companies. When you look at companies such as EPIC Global Solutions, as well as mental health awareness and the NHS, you have to strip everything back. How does one view crime? What are the laws behind this crime? In 2013, I knew that, if we were caught, we would be

penalised. However, I did not know about the criminal element and the likelihood of getting a conviction if we were tried for bribery.

Before we get to the line of polymarkets and data, you have to understand the negative effects and the psychology of what actually happens in sport. Say a player has broken his leg. Say this player was once a top-tier star but he is now in prison. Say another athlete now has an opportunity to play for Crystal Palace's women's team. It can be about whether a sport is underfunded.

You also have singular sports. It is not just football: look at tennis, too. If you look at this through the eyes of the criminals, you now have one of the biggest open markets across Asia pinpointing polymarkets where you can bet on literally anything. The fact is that they exist. They are enabling young children to gamble and bet through ads and technology; more importantly, they are being faced with algorithms where they cannot pay for their college and education. Once we look at amateur sports, we realise that 99% of these athletes drop out into this ecosystem. Not everybody comes from a family or background that can enhance them.

Although the Macolin convention may see oversight at the top, I believe that we also need to build from the bottom and meet in the middle. I believe that, under the framework, you will have more people coming forward to report, much more awareness and more regulated commercial companies. These companies must ensure that they are doing the right thing on compliance and risk. It is about making sure that mitigation is fully understood by everyone in the UK if there is, say, a breach of integrity or an issue with betting and gambling. It does not affect just football; it affects the entire country and its reputation, and it goes far beyond access.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Lord Boateng, you may want to direct your question to Madalina in order to give her an opportunity to introduce herself.

Q2 Lord Boateng: Thank you, Mr Swaibu, for your important evidence. Professor Diaconu, Mr Swaibu has indicated that, in his view, the situation is getting worse. Do you share that view? Do you also take the view that we are seeing the problem change in its nature in some ways—that is, shifting into new regions and sports, and through more highly sophisticated methods? What is your take on this issue?

Dr Madalina Diaconu: Thank you for the question and for the invitation here today. I totally agree with Mr Swaibu. In the past 20-something years, we have seen, experienced and been able to measure through studies a certain increase in the phenomenon of match-fixing—or competition manipulation, as the convention calls it. I would say that it is getting worse in the sense that the phenomenon is amplifying. We are obviously now facing globalised trade, with an extraordinary increase in online exchanges; Mr Swaibu talked about this. It is now possible to access this kind of service from anywhere and at any age, and to be able

to pay, not to pay or even to defer payment. It has become an increasing problem.

Is it changing in nature? Yes. As Mr Swaibu said, and as I can confirm, we have many studies that show this. In the past 15, maybe 16, years, we have seen a tremendous increase in the infiltration of organised crime into match-fixing. We know that, nowadays, we are no longer talking about the small fixes that have always existed in sports: this team talks with the other team, this player talks with the other player, and they agree to fix either the match result or some micro events during the match. Obviously, that is a serious crime, but it is overall less serious and less dangerous if we compare it to the situation that we know of today: the infiltration of organised crime syndicates. We know that this is a fact and that it is one of the main reasons why countries need a top-down approach. This is where the Macolin convention comes in, because no single sports organisation or sports betting organisation can fight international organised crime syndicates. That is a job for law enforcement and international co-operation in this field, which is precisely what the Macolin convention does.

Let me give you my personal commentary on the Macolin convention. It is a very Swiss convention, all in all, because it does not aim for the stratosphere, like other conventions of its type. It does not create any new supranational bodies or proceedings. It does not aim for the stars; it stays very close to the ground. The convention was made through co-operation between different stakeholders, sports, sports betting and law enforcement authorities. It was made to benefit the everyday work of law enforcement and of the people on the actual field. Again, it is a very Swiss convention. Staying close to the ground is the best way of tackling this phenomenon.

Finally, in one of your other questions, you asked whether we have seen any increase in certain markets or in certain sports. Fifteen years ago, I would have said that, globally, it is mostly football, cricket and tennis that are affected by this. I would also have said that the most deregulated markets, the Asian markets, were a point of concern. Nowadays, I would answer that all sports are concerned. Lately, we have seen match-fixing scandals in sports that are much less susceptible to this kind of phenomenon, such as darts, chess and skiing. We also know that it is happening everywhere, not only in Asia and Europe.

Lord Boateng: I have been told that there has been a 92% jump in recorded cases of suspicious football matches in Africa and that, in North American and central American football, the expansion—a 42% surge—has been fuelled by a considerable increase in the unregulated online sports gambling industry. Mr Swaibu, is that your experience? Do you recognise those figures?

Moses Swaibu: Yes, I am aware of those figures. I will go back before I go forwards. At the time of our match-fixing, the technology was nowhere near where it is today. They were able to use spread bets, algorithms and mathematics for the performance on the pitch. The

technology could not tell you how a player was breathing, what was being said on the pitch or the way they were moving. All of these indicators signal those vulnerabilities and can now penetrate markets in territories such as Africa at the click of a button. So, although there has been a massive increase, and everybody has smartphones and mobile phones, the new match-fixers are in plain sight. They live in society. Law enforcement has not been able to grasp the cusp of what that advancement looks like. In my humble, independent business, we have no conflicts of interest in the work we do; we are not tied to any entities or any illegal betting or regulated companies.

In hearing this evidence and these case studies, we need to understand that this is a highly organised syndicate that is built on the ground. If you have not had that experience and you have not been on the ground, it is hard to comprehend where those numbers are coming from, bearing in mind that we now have international borders, immigration and migration being mixed into and mingled with these communities.

Another way of looking at your question is: how do you tackle the 1 million people now using illegal betting online? Those numbers are very much strategical; they are there in black and white. At the same time, how do we go behind the net and understand, to Madalina's point about the Macolin convention, how we can add law enforcement and intelligence? I believe that that would really strengthen this treaty moving forward, as well as having a singular independent unit that could focus specifically on the area you have just spoken about.

The Chair: That is a very good point. Lord Hannay, some of your question has been covered already, but you may want to expand on this principle.

Q3 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Indeed. You have both, in fact, begun to answer the question I was going to ask: how significant is cross-border activity and international organised crime in fuelling the manipulation of sports competitions? Is international co-operation—that is, co-operation between countries and Governments—required to tackle it? That is the first part of the question.

The second part relates specifically to Britain leaving the European Union, which meant that we were cut out of some law enforcement co-operation activities with the European Union, such as SIS II and other instruments. I am not too sure where Switzerland stands on that; it is probably still included because it is part of the single market. Can you say whether you think that the UK being cut out of some law enforcement co-operation activities is hampering the effort to prevent cross-border crime, which both of you have already referred to in your answers?

Dr Madalina Diaconu: Thank you very much for your question, which is right on point. I will start with the first part of your question, to which I feel closer. You asked about the increase of online trading in match-fixing and the implication of organised crime. As Mr Swaibu and I said at the beginning, we know for a fact that organised crime syndicates are behind

a large number of match-fixing schemes nowadays. This is obviously the most dangerous situation out there in the field of match-fixing.

We know for certain that there is an increase. A few years ago, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime released a publication, on which I was happy to participate, where we measured—as much as this can be measured, of course—the implication of organised crime syndicates in match-fixing. We found tremendous infiltration. This is somehow logical because match-fixing offers a golden opportunity for these syndicates: they can not only access this market easily, as Mr Swaibu explained, but make high profits immediately.

More importantly, some crime syndicates can at the same time launder the illegal proceeds of other, even more serious crimes. I am talking about cases of crime syndicates being involved in drug trafficking, human trafficking—especially that of young girls—and money laundering. This is a way not just to gain undue advantages and profits but to launder the proceeds of other horrific crimes. Undoubtedly, this issue can be tackled effectively only through international co-operation. Criminals do not stay in one country, as we know—they travel, benefit from and profit from this new, open world in which we have lived in for a few decades now—so the law enforcement response must also be international.

On the second part of your question, to which I feel less close, I can answer for Switzerland. As you know, Switzerland is not and has never been part of the EU, as the public voted in the early 1990s to stay out. However, we participate in every aspect of the EU internal market not just economically but socially, culturally and in terms of law enforcement. We are not in the same position as the UK is after leaving the EU.

Although this is not my main field of competence, I humbly suggest that, in my view, the UK would probably benefit largely from the ratification of the Macolin convention in order to implement or be able to access some of the measures and instruments that it lost by leaving the European Union. For example, in operational situations where international co-operation and information exchange with law enforcement in EU countries are needed, or when a person needs to be apprehended abroad, the Macolin convention has very useful provisions. Obviously, the EU would also benefit from the UK's presence in these instruments.

The Chair: Let us move on to the next question, which will be asked by Baroness Anelay. Sorry, Lord Hannay, do you have a supplementary question?

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: It is not a supplementary; I just want to hear Moses Swaibu's answer to my question.

Moses Swaibu: I would add that, although I am from and live in the UK, it is important to understand that, in my case, one of the reasons why I changed my life, decided to move forward and chose to bring awareness to this subject was an ex-Metropolitan Police officer. He worked for the FA's Integrity Unit and literally held my hand on the day I came out of

prison. He helped me understand and break down stereotypes by saying, "Okay, I know you've done this and are a part of this, but how can you help and assist us as we move forward?"

You will find that officers who have left the public sector and now work in sport—this is specifically for the UK—understand this world better than anyone because they are on the front line. They have 20 or 30-plus years' experience of dealing with organised crime and international borders. On Madalina's point, these former officers or superintendents have helped me understand how the landscape looks from international borders. Including a group of privatised officers with specialist experience in the areas of organised crime and money laundering would definitely help and assist the Macolin convention, but I have not seen that happen yet in the UK.

Once you understand the landscape and geography of how criminality and prison culture articulate themselves in different areas of sport, you can better understand the robust structures that need to be put in place from the ground up. We are looking at it from the highest level but, at the same time, it is about finding a medium to understand, "Okay, if we're based in the UK, and we have migration and immigration, how do we now close that gap in the net and have specialised officers who could assist on the Macolin convention under that framework?"

The Chair: Were the crime syndicates in the match-fixing with which you were involved national or international?

Moses Swaibu: They were international. During my career, I was approached by three different syndicates. The main syndicates still have a big, globalised foothold in this world of manipulation and have not changed in their practices; they use the same systems and approaches but, with current technology, things have become more digitalised. You need to understand that it means that you need different types of collaborators and individuals who understand that network far and away beyond myself. Even though I am very much at the epicentre, I also know the sweet sciences—if you want to call them that—in terms of how this network operates, moves and manipulates.

Q4 **Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** I would like to build on what Mr Swaibu said. We have been hearing about the changes in cultures and technologies, but you just said that the collaborators are still there and are finding different ways to move forward in illegal terms. Thinking about what Mr Swaibu just said about how collaboration actually opens up the market for illegal operations, do you think that the main problem lies principally with sports organisations themselves, with athletes and officials individually, or with the sports betting industry?

Moses Swaibu: I will start by saying that everybody has different interests in sport. FIFA acts differently from the IOC and the Premier League acts different from the National League. This creates a real challenge: how do you understand where rules and regulations lack openness and transparency? If you look at an athlete coming from Africa

or Asia, they are not even aware of the rules because it is not their primary interest. When we look at training and education at that level, you have only a few hours or minutes to interact with staff and players to help them understand the rules and learn what they can and cannot do. In this evolving landscape, where sport is pumped into a commercialised model, we now have to deal with different territories and countries facing the same issues in various ways. Having that collaboration is important for us as a whole.

One really positive thing about the Macolin convention is that, when I first engaged with it, I sat in front of all these judges and helped them understand what this looks like from a legal point of view. If there is a breach or someone is penalised, these people must be brought to justice. I went to prison and had that experience. Actually, we can be much more preventive rather than reactive. We have the Rehabilitation Act. It is about making sure that, across all levels, these stereotypes are understood and broken down into new systems and new words, so that people understand why it seems scary and people who might say, "I don't want to come forward and say anything", know what is going on.

As Madalina will show, although you may be based in Switzerland and be hyper-focused on one element, there is also a massive international network that is focused on the next 10 to 20 years. If we do not catch up with that curve, we are going to fall far behind in establishing these levels of collaboration. I strongly believe in and advocate for this being built into systems and education. That is very important. It has taken me almost 10 years to establish GameChanger 360 just to get it right. It should be a tool for sport, Governments and the ecosystem to identify where a problem is.

In my opinion, it is a problem of culture: if you do not have cultural and emotional intelligence, how are you meant to understand people's minds and psychology? Groups such as the NHS can help with gambling and betting harm, and I know that the PFA and the FA have Sporting Chance and other clinics, but how do we present and promote more people coming forward and using this international treaty to set a precedent? Again, in my humble opinion, the UK is the home of football and is definitely the home of sport. Being able to fly that flag at the highest level would help everybody else understand how far ahead we can become.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: Following on from that, as Mr Swaibu said, we have people who are coming from other countries with different cultures and are perhaps not as educated on these laws. Can you, Dr Diaconu, give a view on the responsibility of sporting organisations and officials? What depths have you seen them go to in trying to ensure that they are up to speed on assisting new players who, after all, come here not really knowing what the future for them is?

Dr Madalina Diaconu: I agree with Mr Swaibu that the problem lies everywhere and everyone has a shared responsibility—that is, sports

organisations, with their athletes and officials, but also the sports betting industry and law enforcement in general.

I am confident in answering this question because, for the past two decades, I have been working an international sports organisation, namely the International Olympic Committee. I am also a member of UEFA's disciplinary committee, and we tackle this very seriously. I have worked with law enforcement such as Interpol and Europol, and, as an active barrister, I have worked for athletes, defending them against match-fixing accusations and, dare I say, exploiting the grey zones where they exist.

With this view, I can confidently say that the responsibility lies with every one of the stakeholders. That is why the Macolin convention has the potential to be so useful: it is the first time a convention regroups all the stakeholders around one table. We are talking about not only the sports world but the sports betting world, which is a different universe, as well as about law enforcement, which we have spoken about previously.

You are absolutely right that it is not about just the aspect of prosecution, which we have talked about a bit more in the past few minutes. The Macolin convention tackles three important aspects, and it has a 360-degree view on the phenomenon.

First, it tackles the question of prevention and education, on which we have already touched. The Council of Europe has been creating instruments in the past few years to help all the countries that sign and ratify the Macolin convention. It will provide them with access to all these resources and tools for prevention and education, such as hotlines and direct access on the field or in changing rooms with the players and their families, whatever their culture and wherever they come from. Secondly, from a legal standpoint, it concerns prosecution and sanctioning. For these reasons, the Macolin convention is the exact instrument that we need to give us, for the first time, a real chance in tackling the phenomenon of international match-fixing effectively at an operational level.

Q5 Lord Anderson of Swansea: You have spoken about having all the stakeholders around the table. Are you happy with the response of the sports betting organisations?

Dr Madalina Diaconu: The Macolin convention is a work in progress but, personally, I am quite happy with it because we now have not dozens but hundreds of sports betting agencies, regulators, and operators around the table. They have all agreed to sign a memorandum of understanding and to share their data, their suspicions, patterns and system alerts in live time, whether those are here, in Taiwan or in Argentina. This is the operational co-operation that I was talking about, right on the field and very close to the ground. I am happy to say that basically all of the regulated sports betting operators and agencies have joined this effort. Obviously, it will be a bit more difficult to convince illegal betting operators to do so, but chances are that this is a live instrument tackling

everyone for the first time. It offers a 360-degree view on gathering information from the field, betting operators and law enforcement. That data could be solid information, such as someone's criminal record, or it could be a simple rumour or system alert that pops up on someone's system.

Let us take a true scenario involving a match in the UK and a player from Brazil. By coincidence, hundreds of bets were placed in Brazil on a small event: a yellow card for a player. Such an event does not prejudice the result of the game; because of this, the player does not have the impression that they are betraying their team or coach. These small events are what we call micro-fixing. Without the Macolin convention, it is virtually impossible for UK law enforcement and UK sports authorities to access information from Brazil—they can access some parts of it but not all it—and of course, in the end, the criminals walk free.

The Chair: That is a very apt point.

Q6 Lord McDonald of Salford: I have two questions; the first is for both of you, while the second is a supplementary for Professor Diaconu alone. I start with the question to you both. You have said that the phenomenon is getting worse despite the existence of the Macolin convention. What value does UK ratification of this convention add in tackling the manipulation of sports competitions? In your personal experience, would these measures have made a difference in past cases with which you are familiar?

Moses Swaibu: I strongly agree with your point. What is fundamental here is that we have all these measures but things are getting worse. Clearly, something is not working. When we strip away the fluff—pardon my French—and put it in black and white, we have a problem that is not getting any better. In order to make that problem either go away or improve, we must strip everything back to its origins.

In my experience, athletes today are more sophisticated and intelligent but are still not aware of the rules. They do not know what the Macolin convention is. If you ask a 15 year-old living anywhere in the world, "What is the Macolin convention?", they are not aware of it. Why? There is no social media or public awareness. As I keep saying, it is structured as an instrument of law and understanding for a certain demographic, audience and generation. Match-fixing is getting younger, but our solutions are old and outdated. With respect to the UK and the landscape we currently sit in, we have a massive opportunity to ratify this treaty and build those structures in terms of what this is going to look like for the next generation of athletes, helping them make the right decisions.

However, before we ratify any convention—many of which I believe are tick-box exercises—we need to think about what this actually looks like across the whole ecosystem. Are we tackling the problem of social media? I have not heard anything today around solutions for that. Are we talking about how to develop structures into other areas where we can include other stakeholders? If you look at charities that do an amazing

job around gambling and awareness, these people are right on the front line in terms of understanding what that landscape looks like.

I know that I may be a bit direct but, at 37, I am still having to learn the next version of, "Okay, I'm getting older, but am I using different tools and different elements to understand this world?" The issue is not necessarily just for law enforcement, police, Moses Swaibu, GameChanger 360 and the Macolin convention; it is a societal issue because sport is played on the streets. Take the World Cup right now: everybody is talking about it and wants to be included. Are we creating the right awareness and intelligence around it? That could be as simple as a campaign. A campaign can affect the masses better than these legal structures that nobody understands because, without any athletes, none of this happens. My message to the Macolin convention, which does a great job, is that there is still much more that needs to be done for the future. In the coming years, we need to include the relevant people in the conversation as well.

Lord McDonald of Salford: Let me ask my supplementary question. Dr Diaconu, you were eloquent about what the convention could do regarding prevention, education, prosecution and sanctions. A range of countries have already ratified. There are a lot of theoretical benefits from this co-operation, but is it actually making a difference?

Dr Madalina Diaconu: Thank you for clarifying the question and raising the opportunity for me to say, "Yes, indeed". I will try to answer your supplementary question quickly. The Macolin convention has been around for a while now and is starting to be ratified by more countries—hopefully, by even more in future. So how come the phenomenon we are talking about is still here and increasing? I can answer with one of my favourite historical examples. I have recently been able to consult an extraordinary document that you hold in the UK. It is in the library at the University of Oxford and is a papyrus from upper Egypt from, I believe, 267 AD. It is the first known match-fixing agreement in the world—at least, until now.

The Chair: You must get a copy of it for the report.

Dr Madalina Diaconu: It is an extraordinary document. It was created by a notary public and signed by both the athletes and their parents. Legally speaking, it is a perfect document and an extraordinary piece of history. To me, that is necessary historical background. It shows that we have been fighting competition manipulation for the 1,700 years since that papyrus was written—or, as King Charles might say, just the other day.

Does the convention work? I believe that it does. If we compare it with recent history, the Macolin convention really has the potential to be a game-changer on the field. I am not talking about the stratospheres here; I am talking about what happens on the pitch.

There is one element of this convention that we have not talked about yet: Article 13, which speaks about national platforms. Perhaps we could talk about it briefly now. It simply means each country participating in the convention setting up a centralised national hub or database. All of the necessary information is stored there and made available to everyone else live. For example, a prosecutor from Birmingham, a sportsperson from Brighton or someone from Scotland—anybody who has information that is useful for a match-fixing case—can feed such information into the database, which is accessible on both a national and international level so that it is efficient.

The good news is that the UK already participates and already has a national platform; it is quite effective, in my view. Like many other countries that have signed but not yet ratified the convention, the UK uses a sort of anticipated application of the convention, if you like. Obviously, as a lawyer, I believe that it is much better to have a confirmed legal base. So, in the UK, things are already being done, but more could be done. More instruments could be accessed, especially in the fields of prevention and education.

Briefly, to convince you of that—or at least try to—let me take Spain and Belgium as two examples of countries that have experienced the Macolin convention fully after ratification. Lately, there have been some very successful operations in both Spain and Belgium with the help of Europol and Interpol. Some very large mafia syndicates have been taken down—syndicates that were responsible for hundreds or thousands of match-fixing events not just in one country, but throughout the world. Belgian law enforcement and the Spanish police were able to access these marvellous instruments provided by the Macolin convention to wrap things up and put everyone behind bars.

The Chair: Forgive me but we need to move on to the next question as we have around 10 minutes left and I want to get everyone in.

Q7 Lord Anderson of Swansea: The convention was concluded in 2014 but did not come into effect until 2019. Many countries have signed but not yet ratified it. Are the deficiencies in the convention, which have been pointed out by seven countries, leading to hesitation and delay? Is there a feeling that it could be improved?

The Chair: Perhaps you, Madalina, might want to answer this question since it is more specifically about the regulatory environment.

Dr Madalina Diaconu: As you rightly pointed out, the convention was opened for signature in 2014 and entered into force in 2019, when the first five countries both signed and ratified it. Since then, we have seen a decrease in the momentum of ratification. Quite a few countries have signed, and we now have non-European countries, such as Australia, Morocco and Brazil, participating. We know that it is a really important tool outside Europe, as is its purpose, but it is true that there has been a loss of momentum in ratification. The reasons for that are diverse; I do

not believe that there is a single explanation for it. It also has to do with the very different regulatory and democratic landscapes of each country.

Let me take Germany as one example. Germany was one of the countries that signed the convention immediately in 2014 but only now, as we speak, is its Parliament on the way to ratifying the convention. Just like the UK, Germany has already been participating in most of the instruments of the Macolin convention—again, though, it is anticipated application of the convention—and more countries are going to ratify soon.

Also, at the EU level, there has been a *secret de Polichinelle*, as we say in French, which is a secret known by everybody: the Malta lockdown. Malta put a lot of effort into trying to delay as much as possible the signature and ratification of the Macolin convention by EU countries. This was for a specific reason: Malta is one of the largest providers of online betting in the world, so the convention has implications for that industry, which is important to the country. It is a well-known secret that this was one of the primary aspects of the delay in the convention's ratification process.

Lord Anderson of Swansea: If you were rewriting the convention today, in the light of experience, would you make any changes?

Dr Madalina Diaconu: I would change only one thing, but it is a formal matter rather than a material one. I would make it a United Nations convention. I would not change any of its contents; I would just make it clearer that this is not just a European convention and is already open for signature and ratification by most countries in the world. However, when I travel to other continents, I sometimes get the feeling that legislators do not feel attracted to the convention because they believe that it is strictly European. It is true that sport is still very Eurocentric. Most sports that we now call international are actually European, and 99% of international sports bodies are European. There is a bit of global reluctance towards the Macolin convention because of that, so, if I had a magic wand, I would change the umbrella of the convention—but not its content.

Q8 **Baroness Blower:** Dr Diaconu, you have already talked about national hubs—you have talked about a lot of the things in my question, actually—but do you think that the UK has the right policy, regulatory and enforcement structures in place to implement this agreement effectively? I should say that I also have another question for Mr Swaibu.

The Chair: Please keep the answer quite brief because we are coming to the end of our session.

Dr Madalina Diaconu: I believe that the UK already has most of the instruments and all of its authorities in place to participate effectively. As I said previously, the UK already participates in the Group of Copenhagen, which is a select group of countries that have national platforms co-operating with others, so the UK is in the top tier when it comes to the application of the Macolin convention. As I mentioned

previously, this convention does not aim to create new bureaucracy, build new structures or make things difficult; it aims to simplify what already exists to the maximum and to assist if there is a need for national improvement.

Baroness Blower: Mr Swaibu, both you and Dr Diaconu have talked about education and training. You talked about it happening as early as primary school, although, in your first answer, you also talked about the fact that you had a sense that match-fixing was morally wrong. When you talk about education, are you really talking about young people having a sense of right and wrong and being resilient in order to stand against things that they definitely perceive as wrong? I do not think that there is space in the curriculum to spend a lot of time on this convention specifically.

Moses Swaibu: I will correct myself: I was talking about the fact that everyone does physical education. Within that, integrity is not just verbal; it can be shown through body language or picking up cones. These soft skills and assets serve as a deterrent, repelling potential manipulation or corruption. It comes down to who you are inside. In my own dealings with professional sport at an amateur level, those things come down to knowing how important the environment is: the kitchen staff, the kit man and all these people who make up England, make up these teams and make the world love sport. That version of education is very nuanced. It does not take a lot of time and effort; it just needs to be reinforced. As we go through a lot of these areas, it is about making sure that the right structures are in place and tick the right boxes, to be honest.

The Chair: I read in the documentation that sports academies have to teach the Macolin convention. I do not know how specific they are but, if you go to Chelsea's youth academy, you are obliged to be taught that match-fixing is illegal. As you said, you knew that it was wrong when you were doing it. The specifics of the convention do not necessarily need every reinforcement. Am I right, Dr Diaconu, that it is a component of the convention that this has to be implemented by sports bodies and sports academies as well?

Dr Madalina Diaconu: That is correct.

The Chair: That is very helpful.

Q9 **Lord German:** This is a bit of a sweeping-up question. Apart from all the things you have mentioned, what else could we do? What is your priority for new actions through either the convention or the United Kingdom's own measures?

Linked to that, I have a specific question for Dr Diaconu. First, I must declare my interest as a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. What has been the role of the monitoring body of the Council of Europe? Quite clearly, it has a monitoring role and a monitoring body. Has it been doing sufficient work to make sure that this

convention is operating properly internationally?

Moses Swaibu: I can answer that briefly. Technology is sufficient and important. One thing you will find in using proprietary data to train new models is that you can now click a button to change languages and build frameworks for that level of understanding. Whether you are really good at academic work or more practical, it builds a robust structure for who you are as an individual.

With all these messages and the Macolin convention's national platforms, to my knowledge, those systems are now being implemented in different ways. It is just about improving the technology and that inclusion for the convention on a mass scale. In my experience, the Macolin convention is doing the right things structurally and continuing to improve those models. The answer, for me, would be hyper-focused on technology and solutions, as well as understanding that great information can come from good datasets. Feeding that good information and data in, and mixing it with the right compliance and regulatory solutions, will enhance things and make for effective change.

The Chair: Would you like to make a closing comment, Dr Diaconu?

Dr Madalina Diaconu: I will try to give my answer in 30 seconds or less. You asked about the role of the Macolin convention's follow-up committee, which exists and works a lot. It actually does too much for my taste. I am not sure whether that is the answer you were expecting but, yes, it is a very active follow-up committee.

For now, its follow-up is limited to the countries that have signed and ratified the convention. We hope that it will do much more work in future as more countries come and participate in the Macolin convention, but it is already doing a lot of work. For example, a few years ago, it tried to enlarge the definition of match-fixing to cover even more offences than were initially included in the Macolin convention. It is doing a lot of work, and I hope that it will do more in future.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed. What a fabulously useful session. Madalina, thank you for joining us from Switzerland. Moses, I speak on behalf of our whole committee when I say how appreciative we are of the journey you have taken. The fact that you are now here giving evidence is of great credit to yourself.

Moses Swaibu: Thank you very much.

Dr Madalina Diaconu: Thank you very much for the invitation.

The Chair: Thank you again, Madalina; we will see you soon. We will now stop the recording.