



Improving the European Parliament's ethics and transparency framework

Correspondence - 27/01/2023

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Ms Roberta Metsola

President of the European Parliament

Dear President,

May I first of all wish you a very happy New Year.

I welcome your determination to restore the credibility of the European Parliament in the wake of the ongoing corruption scandal involving current and former MEPs and non-EU countries seeking negatively to influence the Parliament's work. A scandal such as this is a gift to those who would wish to damage or disparage the entire EU.

While the vast majority of MEPs and their staff behave impeccably, a weak and poorly enforced ethics system enables those who do not to undermine public trust in the democratic values of the EU.

As Ombudsman, I am committed to helping the EU institutions and bodies to improve their accountability, transparency and ethical frameworks. A strong anti-corruption and ethics system must be an integral part of all EU institutions and bodies.

As such, I welcome your draft proposals to improve the oversight and enforcement of the Parliament's ethics rules. In advance of a more detailed assessment, I would like to share some observations, drawn from the experience of the work of my Office.

1. If the aim is to regain public trust, a key element will be to ensure that this process of reform is as transparent as possible. To this end, a timeline of the next steps and further details on how Parliament is intending to following up on the draft proposals would be of great value.

2. I have frequently drawn attention to the damaging effect of 'revolving doors', whereby



politicians and senior public officials bring their expertise, inside knowledge, and contacts to new jobs in the private sector. I therefore welcome the proposal for a 'cooling-off' period for former MEPs before they can engage in lobbying activities vis-a-vis the European Parliament.

3. The Treaties require MEPs to act as representatives of EU citizens. I welcome the proposals to provide greater transparency about MEPs' activities, including by creating a dedicated section on integrity on the European Parliament's website. The proposal to make information on meetings public could be extended to all scheduled meetings of all MEPs and their staff with interest representatives and representatives from non-EU countries regardless of their connection to a report or resolution of the European Parliament. The ban on friendship groups with third countries is also welcome and will help avoid damaging confusion with Parliament's official activities.

4. Diligent and independent oversight and enforcement of existing ethics rules is critical. The Advisory Committee monitors the Code of Conduct but has limited powers. Addressing this implies strengthening the independence of the Committee, granting it powers proactively to monitor, investigate and ensure compliance with ethics rules, and providing it with sufficient resources. There is also scope for greater transparency in the Committee's work, as I pointed out in a recent inquiry . The proposals to require more detailed declarations of interests from the MEPs are welcome. However, it may be necessary to reflect on the methodology for checking these.

I look forward to the detailed proposals giving effect to the general approach you have outlined, to see how the reform will be implemented in practice. I would like to indicate my willingness to cooperate with the European Parliament to ensure that the strengthened transparency and ethics framework can rebuild public trust in the EU's democratic process.

Yours sincerely,

Emily O'Reilly European Ombudsman

Strasbourg, 27/01/2023