

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

Requested by the ING2 special committee



# Mapping best practices on transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption: Case studies from selected parliaments



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PE 702.588 - May 2023



EN

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### ABSTRACT

This analysis explores examples of best practices from selected parliaments in the areas of transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption, and reflects on the effectiveness of the analysed approaches and their possible applicability for the European Parliament (EP). Findings confirm the need for the establishment of an independent European Union (EU) ethics body, granted investigative and enforcement powers with full transparency of enquiries, decisions and/or proposals as a pre-condition for its effectiveness and regaining citizens' trust in the work of EU institutions. Stricter rules should be applied for Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and EP staff regarding post-employment lobbying activities, along with more comprehensive and consistent disclosure of data on meetings with lobbyists, including foreign (third country) entities. In addition, mandatory training for all MEPs on integrity, transparency, accountability and anti-corruption standards should be introduced. Finally, more effective mechanisms of citizens and civil society engagement in the EP work should be introduced as a way of further strengthening the EP's accountability and improving its responsiveness to citizens' concerns.

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This paper was requested by the European Parliament's Special Committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation (INGE 2)

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## **VERSION**

English-language manuscript completed on 26 May 2023.

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## List of abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
APPG	All Party Parliamentary Group
CE	Committee on Ethics
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DoJ	Department of Justice
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
FARA	Foreign Agents Registration Act
FITSA	Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act
GRECO	Group of States Against Corruption
HATVP	High Authority for Transparency in Public Life ( <i>Haute Autorité pour la transparence de la vie publique</i> )
LDA	Lobbying Disclosure Act
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCE	Office of Congressional Ethics
OECD	Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

# 1 Introduction

This in-depth analysis serves to provide Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) with examples of best practices in the areas of transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption from selected parliaments. After various cases of corruption were uncovered in the European Parliament (EP) during December 2022 and given various shortcomings in the EP's own rules, this analysis aims to consider medium- to longer-term measures, issuing recommendations for reforms of rules on transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption, building on the EP's resolutions and the best practices of other parliaments and institutions<sup>1</sup>. The key research questions are: (i) What are good practices of transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption in parliaments around the world which can serve as examples for implementing reforms in equivalent areas within the EP? (ii) Which measures and reforms should be envisaged by the EP in these areas?

This analysis will consider the EP's President's own proposals for institutional reform, previous EP resolutions<sup>2</sup>, relevant studies as well as other publicly available sources, as a framework for the discussion of best practices from other parliaments. The areas of transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption are closely related and directly affect the trust of citizens in the work of the European Union (EU) institutions. In each of these areas, best practices are identified based on a comparative analysis of approaches in EU Member States, member countries of the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (and their Global Parliamentary Network), analysis of reports of the Council of Europe's Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO), but also innovative practices identified through the work of the Open Government Partnership Initiative<sup>3</sup>.

The analysis of selected practices includes comments both on formal rules and the effectiveness of chosen implementation mechanisms. Wherever possible, the assessment also points out potential loopholes, which exist even in best practice examples, overviewing the pros and cons of selected approaches and their possible applicability to the EP context and rules for MEPs, EP officials, political group staff as well as accredited parliamentary assistants.

This work is structured in a way that facilitates the identification of key issues under the broad and intertwined categories of transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption. Moreover, good practices are highlighted that can serve as incentives for selecting possible policy options for reforms in the EP.

Having opened with a discussion on the essential topic of proactive transparency and public oversight of investigation and enforcement activities in case of alleged violations of rules, the analysis then considers how parliaments actively monitor their own activities and how the public can engage in the process. Next, the transparency of outside activities, roles and paid work undertaken by MEPs is analysed as a critical component of parliamentary ethics. This is followed by a discussion about the post-employment prohibition of lobbying, including the 'cooling-off' period and 'revolving door' rules, with an overview of approaches and measures to prevent former Members of Parliament (MPs) from using their political connections for private gain. Regulatory scope for the lobbying of foreign entities in parliament is then addressed, looking at how different parliaments operate in this regard. Closely related to that, the following

<sup>1</sup> European Parliament, [Decision on setting up a special committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation \(INGE 2\), and adjusting its title and responsibilities \(2023/2566\(RSO\)\)](#), P9\_TA(2023)0030, 14 February 2023.

<sup>2</sup> European Parliament, [Resolution on transparency, accountability and integrity in the EU institutions \(2015/2041\(INI\)\)](#), P8\_TA(2017)0358, 14 September 2017; European Parliament, [Resolution of on Strengthening transparency and integrity in the EU institutions by setting up an independent EU ethics body \(2020/2133\(INI\)\)](#), P9\_TA(2021)0396, 16 September 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Open Government Partnership, [Parliaments in OGP – Recommendations](#), 11 May 2022.

chapter looks at regulations on friendship groups in parliament comprising informal networks of MPs and how they can be controlled to prevent foreign interference and corruption. This research then investigates issues of advice, training and awareness-raising activities for MPs as an essential tool for ensuring that MPs are aware of the ethical standards expected of them and have the means to report any observed violations. The final chapter discusses various structures for oversight mechanisms and enforcement of parliament's rules on transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption, as a basis for exploring adequate EU/EP level institutional mechanisms for supervising and implementing all the recommendations made in this analysis. In each of the areas covered, a series of recommendations and proposals for medium- and long-term measures in the EP are highlighted.



## 2 Background

Efforts to improve rules and regulations in the EP's work and that of its Members are part of a long-term process to strengthen democratic culture, Parliament's independence and its accountability to EU citizens. In 1991, Belgian MEP Marc Galle, Chairman of the Committee on Rules of Procedure, the Verification of Credentials and Immunities, was tasked to investigate issues of parliamentary conduct, lobbying and financial interests of MEPs. His initial findings failed to reach the plenary session but in subsequent years the EP managed to adopt various reports regulating *inter alia* the code of conduct, lobbying and the transparency register<sup>4</sup>. Since the Maastricht Treaty entered into force, which gave the EP powers of co-decision in the EU legislative process, the EP has gradually become one of the main lobbying targets for interest groups, by allowing a great number of potential access points for influencing outcomes from the EU's ordinary legislative procedure. Over the years, rules, codes of conduct, resolutions and reports were updated or newly developed reflecting a need for better regulation and more scrutiny of the EP's work but also continually facing a substantial implementation deficit of determined standards. Over the past two decades, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) such as Transparency International and Corporate Europe Observatory, as well as the research and academic community, have been systematically addressing the ailments and shortcomings of transparency and integrity rules that undermine the EP's standing and relevance in the eyes of EU citizens, offering a series of proposals for reform, especially regarding the lobby registry, the transparency register, the code of conduct and revolving doors practice<sup>5</sup>. Many of the proposals from CSOs and academia have been discussed for years, even internally, but the general assessment is that the EP has not considered them sufficiently. The dynamics of reform activities usually intensify as a follow-up to various scandals, thereby generating stronger pressure from the media and general public.

On 9 December 2022, a corruption scandal broke out in the EP. The 'Qatargate affair', as it became known, involved allegations of bribery, corruption and participation in a criminal organisation against current and former MEPs as well as EP staff. On 15 December 2022, the EP swiftly adopted a resolution calling for stronger integrity and transparency within its ranks, denouncing attempts at foreign interference and calling for the establishment of a special committee tasked with identifying potential flaws in EP rules on transparency, integrity and corruption. It also voted to set up a committee of inquiry that would be responsible, *inter alia*, for: (i) investigating action by non-EU countries who are suspected of attempting to influence the EP through corruption and other improper action; (ii) making the transparency register mandatory; (iii) introducing minimum 'cooling off' periods for senior EU officials and former MEPs; (iv) bringing the staff regulations in line with the protections provided in the Whistleblower directive; as well as (v) emphasising the roles of the European Public Prosecutor's Office, the EU Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, Europol and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) in the fight against corruption<sup>6</sup>.

On 8 February 2023, EP group leaders endorsed a reform plan proposed by President Roberta Metsola as being the first step towards rebuilding trust in European institutions and their decision-making abilities<sup>7</sup>. It followed the Conference of Presidents meeting on 12 January 2023 to initiate a wider reform process aimed

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of initial EP efforts to regulate lobbying and MEPs' code of conduct, see European Parliament, [Lobbying in the European Union: Current Rules and Practices](#), Directorate-General for Research Working Paper, AFCO 104 EN, April 2003.

<sup>5</sup> A useful compilation of various proposals of reforms of EP rules in these areas is available in: O. Costa, [Transparency in the European Parliament. Ten proposals to restore confidence](#), *Observatoire d'éthique publique*, 9 February 2019.

<sup>6</sup> European Parliament, [Resolution on suspicions of corruption from Qatar and the broader need for transparency and accountability in the European institutions \(2022/3012\(RSP\)\)](#), P9\_TA(2022)0448, 15 December 2022.

<sup>7</sup> European Parliament, [Group leaders endorsed the reform plan](#), Press Release, 20230208IPR72802, 8 February 2023.

at strengthening integrity, independence and accountability of the EP<sup>8</sup>. Some steps proposed are: a 'cooling-off period' for MEPs' lobbying activities once they are no longer in office; a mandatory registration in the Transparency Register; a ban on friendship groups with third countries where official Parliamentary interlocutors already exist; and a revised declaration on financial interests. On 14 February 2023, the EP further empowered the Special Committee on Foreign Interference renaming it as a 'special committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the EU, including disinformation, and the strengthening of integrity, transparency, accountability in the EP'. Responsibilities include scrutinising the covert funding of political activities by foreign actors and donors as well as non-state actors and identifying shortcomings in the EP's rules on transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption<sup>9</sup>.

In a plenary debate on 16 February 2023, the EP adopted two new resolutions. The first called for further integrity reforms on top of those already proposed and a swift establishment of an independent ethics body. The resolution includes calls for: better implementation of the Code of Conduct; detection of potential loopholes in the European institutions' rules and procedures; as well as a review of existing regulations that apply to Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)<sup>10</sup>. The second urged establishment of an independent EU ethics body by recalling the EP resolution of September 2021, which already supported the setting up of such a body. The Commission is requested to draft a proposal defining the structure and powers of this body by the end of March 2023<sup>11</sup>. On 17 April 2023, the EP Bureau took a first implementing decision with respect to the President Metsola reform plan, which introduces a six-month cooling off period for former MEPs who during this time are prohibited from any lobbying or representational activities. If, after a six-month period, MEPs decide to pursue lobbying or representational activities with the EP, they are obliged to register in the Transparency Register, which as a result will withhold their access rights and facilities to which they are entitled as former MEPs<sup>12</sup>.

In the ongoing crisis, the Socialists and Democrats are most affected as all those involved in the Qatargate scandal belong to their political group. To underline their uncompromising stance of 'zero tolerance' for corruption, they have issued a 15-point plan aimed at: ensuring that the current transparency and ethics rules are fully implemented; as well as closing potential loopholes, thereby creating a culture of genuine transparency and accountability in the EP<sup>13</sup>. The Greens and the Left strongly agreed; they demand strict rules and tougher measures to root out corruption and regain the trust of people in European institutions<sup>14</sup>. The European People's Party group sees potential for corruption and undermining of democratic institutions in the work of shady NGOs. Hence, they call for additional scrutiny of NGOs to limit the potential for non-transparent lobbying and influence peddling. They also proposed the creation of a European

<sup>8</sup> European Parliament, [Meeting of the EP Conference of Presidents](#), Video, I235718V, 12 January 2023.

<sup>9</sup> European Parliament, [Decision on setting up a special committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation \(INGE 2\), and adjusting its title and responsibilities \(2023/2566\(RSO\)\)](#), P9\_TA(2023)0030, 14 February 2023.

<sup>10</sup> European Parliament, [Resolution on following up on measures requested by Parliament to strengthen the integrity of the European institutions \(2023/2571\(RSP\)\)](#), P9\_TA(2023)0054, 16 February 2023.

<sup>11</sup> European Parliament, [Resolution on the establishment of an independent EU ethics body \(2023/2555\(RSP\)\)](#), P9\_TA(2023)0055, 16 February 2023.

<sup>12</sup> European Parliament, [Bureau adopts first decision on strengthening transparency and accountability](#), Press Release, 20230313IPR77323, 17 April 2023.

<sup>13</sup> S&D, [Zero tolerance for corruption: 15-point plan to prevent and combat corruption and corruptive political interference](#), 19 January 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Greens/EFA, [Greens/EFA group congratulate new vice president but demand zero tolerance strategy to stamp out corruption, 18.1.2023](#), Press Release, 18 January 2023; GUE/NGL, [How Parliament & the EU should react to the Qatar corruption scandal](#), 12 December 2022.

equivalent to the United States of America (USA) Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA)<sup>15</sup>. Renew Europe also strongly supports the creation of an independent ethics body, while the European Conservatives and Reformists demand deeper reforms as Qatargate is considered to be 'only a tip of the iceberg'<sup>16</sup>.

There is much academic and policy debate regarding improving the work of democratic parliaments in general and the EP specifically. The following paragraphs provide opinions of various stakeholders regarding the ongoing debate to underline that many outside the EP would like to see more ambitious reform steps, all in the name of strengthening the EU itself.

Transparency International EU's director strongly criticised a decision that a cooling-off period for former MEPs should be six months, calling it 'purely symbolic'<sup>17</sup>. Corporate Europe Observatory warned that Qatargate may be used to attack NGOs who scrutinise the work of European politicians<sup>18</sup> while Human Rights Watch criticised attention given to limiting urgency resolutions to 500 words, calling it 'pointless' and 'the wrong cure for the wrong disease'<sup>19</sup>.

A Jean Monnet professor of EU Law described the EP response to Qatargate as 'modest, essentially short-termist and aimed at deflecting attention away from its most damaging effects'<sup>20</sup>. A former staff member of the EP Civil Liberties Committee warns that a foreseen ethics body, without a 'clear framework of rules on transparency, good administration and the prevention and prosecution of corruption' could 'turn out to be yet another fig leaf'<sup>21</sup>. The EU Ombudsman, by contrast, appealed to the EP president, seeking expansion of the EP advisory committee's powers, which monitor the implementation of the Code of Conduct<sup>22</sup>. The head of OLAF suggests that a simple solution for fighting corruption in the EP is to let OLAF in. OLAF has full powers to investigate thousands of EU civil servants, but not MEPs. The head of OLAF sees the current crisis as an opportunity to redefine the relationship between the EP and his agency by way of supporting the EP's accountability<sup>23</sup>.

The various proposals for the reform of EP rules fit into the ongoing broader discussion within the framework of various international organisations, such as OECD, Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), on how to strike the right balance between the preventive and enforcement mechanisms in ensuring the integrity of parliaments and other public bodies.

For instance, the OECD offers numerous sources that serve as educational tools and guidance on how to address problems of corruption and enhance the integrity of public institutions. Building social norms of appropriate behaviour is important, as is any investment in enforcement and resources such as enhancing powers of audit and control offices. They underline a need for strengthening regulations regarding pre- and post-public employment to avoid conflicts of interest, warning that many influence techniques are legal and hard to detect. To regulate lobbying, the OECD recommends a series of actions aimed at building an effective and fair framework for: openness and access; enhancing transparency; fostering a culture of integrity; as well as designing mechanisms for effective implementation, compliance and review<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> EPP, [How to save NGOs from the Qatargate black sheep](#), 1 March 2023.

<sup>16</sup> ECR, [Qatargate: Double standards can't be tolerated](#), 15 December 2022.

<sup>17</sup> M. van Hulten, [Qatargate reforms: European Parliament fails its first big test](#), *Transparency International EU*, 14 March 2023.

<sup>18</sup> H. van Scharen, [Qatargate, authoritarian backlash and Orbán's fleas](#), *Corporate Europe Observatory*, 15 February 2023.

<sup>19</sup> C. Francavilla, [European Parliament: Wrong Response to 'Qatargate' Scandal](#), *Human Rights Watch*, 18 January 2023.

<sup>20</sup> A. Alemanno, [Qatargate: A Missed Opportunity to Reform the Union](#), *Verfassungsblog*, 2 February 2023.

<sup>21</sup> E. De Capitani, [Qatargate: The tip of the iceberg](#), *Verfassungsblog*, 10 January 2023.

<sup>22</sup> E. Wax, [Qatargate: EU ombudsman tells Parliament to beef up 'limited' ethics committee](#), *Politico*, 30 January 2023.

<sup>23</sup> J. Barigazzi, [Lemme at 'em: EU's anti-fraud agency wants Parliament access post Qatargate](#), *Politico*, 21 February 2023.

<sup>24</sup> OECD, [Recommendation of the Council on Principles for Transparency and Integrity in Lobbying](#), *OECD Legal Instruments*, 18 February 2010.

In the latest GRECO report, its president points to three principles aimed at preventing and addressing corruption: transparency, oversight and accountability. He warns that 'some of the most attention-grabbing scandals to emerge during the past year have concerned lobbying' and describes a crisis of trust as corruption scandals that flood the public space are not met with an adequate response. The 'shock value' of such scandals is diminishing, public disgrace is brief while those responsible manage to avoid real scrutiny<sup>25</sup>.

The Global Organisation of Parliamentarians Against Corruption, a network of parliamentarians dedicated to good governance and strengthening parliaments as institutions of democratic oversight, initiated a Global Task Force on Parliamentary Ethics and published a Handbook on Parliamentary Ethics and Conduct which describes various approaches to strengthen parliamentary integrity and retain public trust. They place a strong emphasis on the education and training of MPs, stressing that there should be an official, permanent source of guidance and advice, particularly because rules are complex and can be open to interpretation. Finally, due to the nature of their profession, MPs often need to judge personally what is proper behaviour. 'This means that the way in which the institution educates and trains its members, so that they understand and accept the regime, should be an essential part of any new framework'<sup>26</sup>.

The OSCE recommends that the process of drafting or revising a code of conduct should be assigned as much importance as its content. A broad consultative process involving different stakeholders, a process that allows for different opinions, concerns and suggestions to be expressed, builds a basis for a common understanding of what constitutes appropriate conduct and what is misconduct. 'Reforms that are introduced in a hurry, or imposed from outside, are likely to meet obstructions at every turn'<sup>27</sup>.

While there are no internationally accepted definitions of transparency and integrity or commonly agreed approaches to assessing the unethical behaviour of public officials, what follows will briefly refer to the main components of these definitions, which will be used in this analysis.

<sup>25</sup> GRECO, [Anti-corruption trends, challenges and good practices in Europe & the United States of America](#), 22<sup>nd</sup> General Activity Report, March 2022, pp. 6-7.

<sup>26</sup> G. Power, [Handbook on parliamentary ethics and conduct. A guide for parliamentarians](#), Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2010, p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> OSCE, [Background Study: Professional and Ethical Standards for Parliamentarians](#), OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2012.

### 3 Conceptual and methodological framework

Transparency, integrity and accountability are often considered as interconnected concepts, which, along with various public participation mechanisms, constitute important components of the fight against corruption. Transparency is usually defined in terms of promoting information disclosure and access to information as a prerequisite for holding public institutions accountable<sup>28</sup>. This analysis adopts the approach followed by proponents of modern (computer/internet-mediated) transparency as the conduct of public affairs in an open and accessible way, through which public officials can be stimulated not only to perform better but also adhere to ethical standards, thereby preventing corruption<sup>29</sup>.

The concept of integrity can be defined as a set of characteristics such as honesty, probity, impartiality, fairness, honesty and truthfulness in the discharge of official duties, which enhance trust in the work of public institutions - serving as an antithesis to 'corruption' or 'the abuse of office'. Accountability refers to the obligation of public officials to report on the usage of public resources and answerability for failing to meet established performance objectives<sup>30</sup>. In this context, public participation is seen as crucial for empowering beneficiaries and enhancing the accountability of institutions by providing citizens and affected stakeholders with the means of engaging with policy processes.

Given the interconnected nature of transparency, integrity, accountability and participation, most of the initiatives and best practices highlighted in this analysis combine a mix of various approaches to the fight against corruption.

This analysis adopts a comparative case study methodology aimed at identifying good practices in transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption in parliaments around the world<sup>31</sup>. This involved the following: a comprehensive literature review; a selection of case studies; together with data and cross-case analysis. The comprehensive review of relevant literature included academic literature and reports by international organisations and CSOs.

The case studies and selected good practices were chosen based on the following criteria:

- *Relevance* to the EP's context and objectives, as well as the broader political and cultural context in which the EP operates.
- *Transferability* and adaptability to the EP's organisational structure, policies, and procedures, as well as other parliamentary systems around the world.
- *Effectiveness* in promoting transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption in parliaments.
- *Innovation of approaches* to promoting transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption in parliaments.
- *Sustainability* in terms of having the potential to be maintained over time, even as political and social contexts evolve.

<sup>28</sup> See for example T. M. Harrison, and D. S. Sayogo, '[Transparency, participation, and accountability practices in open government: A comparative study](#)', *Government Information Quarterly*, Vol 31, No 4, 2014, pp. 513-525.

<sup>29</sup> A. Meijer, '[Understanding modern transparency](#)', *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, Vol 75, No 2, 2009, pp. 255-269.

<sup>30</sup> E. Armstrong, '[Integrity, Transparency and Accountability in Public Administration: Recent Trends, Regional and International Developments and Emerging Issues](#), UN, Economic and Social Affairs', *United Nations*, January 2005.

<sup>31</sup> An overview of world-wide parliamentary practices and tools to oversee policy areas and established forms of cooperation with national institutions is provided by H. Yamamoto, '[Tools for parliamentary oversight: A comparative study of 88 national parliaments](#)', *Inter-Parliamentary Union*, 2007.

- *Accessibility* in terms of being easily accessible and replicable, with clear guidance and resources available for implementation.
- *Diversity* in terms of reflecting diverse practices of parliaments around the world, including differences in size, structure and political context.

All data was collected through desk research, including analyses of parliamentary documents, laws and regulations as well as reports and media coverage. A thematic approach was then applied, focusing on the main issues identified under the key, intertwined areas of transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption.

Under each of the issues discussed, a cross-case analysis was conducted to identify case study commonalities and differences in order to draw conclusions as well as recommendations for the EP.

## 4 Proactive transparency and public oversight of investigation and enforcement activities in case of alleged violations of rules

Ensuring transparency and public oversight of investigation and enforcement activities is crucial in maintaining parliamentary representatives' integrity and ethical standards. Whenever cases of alleged violations arise, proactive transparency and public access to findings from investigations are essential for maintaining public trust in the democratic process, ensuring the accountability and credibility of parliamentary representatives, thereby preventing any risks of creating a culture of impunity. Strengthening parliamentary ethics and integrity thus calls not only for adopting new legislation, but also scrutiny in monitoring the implementation of legislation<sup>32</sup>. Parliaments across the world innovate, reform and modernise. 'They are more and more transparent, inclusive and open to listen to the voice of people'<sup>33</sup>.

In the EP context, the Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members is the main oversight body responsible for giving MEPs guidance on the interpretation and implementation of the Code of Conduct, which, at the request of the President, also assesses alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct and advises the President on possible action to be taken<sup>34</sup>. The Advisory Committee comprises five MEPs appointed by the President from different political groups, who rotate every six months. The key shortcoming in the Advisory Committee's work is structure-related, given its: lack of autonomy and own initiatives; lack of investigative powers/resources; and lack of transparency. Examples from different countries illustrate the importance of full disclosure and public oversight of investigation and enforcement activities.

In France, the High Authority for the Transparency of Public Life (HATVP)<sup>35</sup> puts a strong emphasis on the full disclosure and publicity of the decisions made during investigations of potential violations of parliamentary ethics and integrity rules. The public can access HATVP decisions and findings. This public access to information<sup>36</sup>, as well as investigations into MPs' financial interests ensures a high level of accountability and oversight, which ultimately helps to maintain public trust in the HATVP's work. A recent study based on an information provision experiment showed that proactive communication and information on the HATVP work and investigations had meaningful, positive impacts on French citizens' perceptions of the HATVP, political transparency and representative democracy. More particularly, the greatest impacts were found among initially distrustful and poorly informed citizens, underscoring the potential for communication and information to change any political perceptions and attitudes of the once disillusioned<sup>37</sup>. By contrast, the findings of research conducted by Transparency International also indicate challenges posed by the poor quality of asset and interest disclosure data, as well as the HATVP's insufficient capacity to verify submitted data such as MPs' asset and income declarations<sup>38</sup>. Responding to a possible lack of institutional resources for adequate investigation and enforcement, in strengthening

<sup>32</sup> F. De Vrieze and V. Hasson, [Post-legislative scrutiny. Comparative study of practices of post-legislative scrutiny in selected parliaments and the rationale for its place in democracy assistance](#), Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, et al., ['Indicators for democratic parliaments, based on SDG targets 16.6 and 16.7', Preliminary version](#), WFD, European Commission and INTER PARES, NDI, UNDP, UN Women, CPA, Directorio Legislativo, April 2022.

<sup>34</sup> For more information on the work of the EP Advisory committee, including annual reports, see European Parliament, ['About MEPs'](#), webpage, nd.

<sup>35</sup> High Authority for Transparency in Public Life, ['Ethic of Public Officials. Regulation of Lobbying'](#), webpage, 2023.

<sup>36</sup> French High Authority for Transparency in Public Life, ['Public Searchable database of decisions'](#), webpage, nd.

<sup>37</sup> For more information see B. Monnery and A. Chirat, ['Trust in the fight against political corruption: A survey experiment among citizens and experts'](#), Working Paper, *EconomiX*, University of Paris Nanterre, 2023.

<sup>38</sup> R. Kergueno and J. Vrushi, ['Debugging Democracy – Open data for political integrity in Europe'](#), *Transparency International*, 2020.

public monitoring and re-use of available open data on the integrity of public officials, a platform Integritywatch.fr is now operated by Transparency International France<sup>39</sup>.

In Croatia, there is also transparency of decisions and sanctions via the Commission of Prevention of Conflict of Interest<sup>40</sup>. They are made publicly available on their website, which contains a detailed argumentation of any decision made by the Commission<sup>41</sup>. The use of proactive transparency has proved to be critical in ensuring public officials and representatives are held accountable. The full disclosure of documents can also help safeguard the Commission's independence, especially when exposed to increasing pressure from high political officials<sup>42</sup>. A similar approach can be found in Canada where the Commissioner for Conflict of Interest and Ethics makes investigation reports publicly available<sup>43</sup>.

The United Kingdom's (UK) Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards maintains a transparent website that provides information about all ongoing investigations and complaints against MPs. This includes not only details of the alleged violation but also evidence collected by the Commissioner during an investigation process. In addition to providing access to evidence collected, this website also publishes responses from MPs under investigation<sup>44</sup>, thus ensuring that the public has a complete picture of the investigation, including any defences or explanations provided by the MP in question. The website also provides access to relevant emails, which can shed light on the MP's decision-making process and provide additional context to the investigation. By providing full disclosure of evidence and responses, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards demonstrates a commitment to transparency and accountability. This allows the public to make informed judgments about the actions of their representatives and promotes a culture of ethical behaviour among MPs. Ultimately, this fosters greater trust in the democratic process and ensures that MPs are held accountable under the highest standards of integrity and ethics.

In the USA, the Office of Congressional Ethics (OCE) publishes reports on its investigations into allegations of misconduct by Members of Congress. These reports are made publicly available on the OCE's website<sup>45</sup>, including information such as the nature of allegations, evidence collected and conclusions reached by the OCE. This allows members of the public to access information and draw their own conclusions about the conduct of their elected officials. Additionally, the OCE's investigations often involve the extensive collection of evidence, including interviews, emails and financial records, which are all disclosed in the reports. This level of disclosure enables the public to understand fully the scope and depth of the investigation, thereby helping to ensure that the OCE's findings are based on a comprehensive and impartial review of evidence. Overall, the proactive disclosure of investigation reports by the OCE is considered to be a critical component for maintaining transparency and accountability in the US Congress. While the benefits of full disclosure and making details of committee deliberations publicly available are self-evident, some authors also discuss possible undesired consequences of full transparency in the US Congress, for instance the potential for greater interference from outside interests in deliberations on appropriate solutions<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> [Transparency International France](#), webpage, nd.

<sup>40</sup> Croatian's Commission on the Prevention of Conflict of Interest, '[Competencies](#)', webpage, 2023.

<sup>41</sup> Croatian's Commission on the Prevention of Conflict of Interest, '[Public Searchable database of decisions](#)', webpage, nd.

<sup>42</sup> N1info, [GONG zbog Plenkovića pisao GRECO-u](#), 1 October 2019

<sup>43</sup> Canada's Commissioner for Conflict of Interest and Ethic investigation, '[Public Searchable database of reports](#)', webpage, nd.

<sup>44</sup> See an example of investigation report and written evidence collected: UK Parliament, [Committee on Standards publishes report on the conduct of Margaret Ferrier MP](#), 30 March 2023.

<sup>45</sup> US Office of Congressional Ethics, '[Public Searchable database of investigation reports](#)', webpage, 2023.

<sup>46</sup> D. E. Pozen, '[Seeing Transparency More Clearly](#)', *Public Administration Review*, Vol 80, 2019, pp. 326-331.



Finally, it is worth mentioning the already established practice at EU institutional level where the European Commission's decision on the post-mandate occupations of its members (based on the advice of the Independent Ethics Committee sought by the European Commission President) are published on the Commission's website along with Committee opinions and are available for public scrutiny<sup>47</sup>. These decisions are also reflected in an annual report about implementing the Code of Conduct.

## 4.1 Lessons learned

The above examples highlight the importance of ensuring transparency as well as public oversight of investigation and enforcement activities to maintain the integrity and ethics of parliamentary representatives. Full disclosure and public access to findings from investigations are essential for maintaining public trust in the democratic process, ensuring the accountability and credibility of parliamentary representatives, thereby preventing risks of creating a culture of impunity, as referred to earlier. The cases of France, Croatia, Canada, the UK and the USA all demonstrate the benefits of proactive transparency in ensuring public officials and representatives are held fully accountable to the public. The full disclosure of documents can also help safeguard the independence of ethics commissions. Some authors also discuss the lack of capacities of independent bodies for systematic and consistent verification of disclosed data – therefore, the public availability of data combined with various CSOs platforms built on the re-used data on the integrity of public officials can prove to be a more effective solution. Others draw attention to the possible undesired consequences of full transparency (e.g. in the US Congress), such as the potential for greater interference from outside interests in deliberations on appropriate solutions. The already established rules of the work of the European Commission Independent Ethics Committee can serve as a minimum standard which could also be followed by the EP's Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members while awaiting a more thorough reform at the level of all EU institutions.

## 4.2 Recommendations and possible measures for the EP

In the EP context, there are certain shortcomings in the transparency of work being undertaken by its Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members. Apart from the publication of a brief annual report with very few details on the content of opinions and advice provided by the Committee based on the request of MPs, the public has not been provided with any information on the substance and effectiveness of the Committee's work. Possible policy options together with medium and long-term measures could include:

- **changing the Rules of Procedures of the Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members to ensure full transparency and disclosure** of information on MEPs' requests for interpretation of the code of conduct and content of the Committee's opinions/advice provided. This is in line with good practice already established at EU level through the publication of decisions and opinions of the Independent Ethics Committee set up by the Commission.
- **ensuring that a potential future independent EU ethics body operates in a fully transparent manner**, with public access to the findings of the investigation reports.

<sup>47</sup> European Commission, [Former European Commissioners' authorised occupations](#), Decisions of the European Commission and related opinions of the Independent Ethical Committee on occupation of former European Commissioners, nd.

## 5 Transparency of outside activities, roles and paid work of MPs

The transparency of MP's outside activities, roles and paid work is an important aspect of ensuring accountability and integrity in the political system. By requiring members to disclose these activities, the public can be made aware of any potential conflicts of interest, hold MPs accountable for their actions and have more confidence that they are acting in the public interest rather than for personal gain. However, the level of disclosure of information varies widely across countries.

In Croatia, the central web portal of the Commission for the Prevention of Conflict of Interest enables the public to have an insight into data on the financial interests of MPs, including outside activities and their life partners<sup>48</sup>, such as board memberships, educational or other activities and amounts received for each outside activity. In line with the law preventing any conflict of interest<sup>49</sup>, information is updated annually through declarations on financial interests/assets MPs need to submit to the Commission in a standard template. Furthermore, MPs' paid activities are monitored for a year after they leave office, with certain cases where the Commission opens investigations and issues opinions or sanctions for MPs who are breaching rules regarding the disclosure of financial interests. Some researchers argue that the Commission's lack of human resources and inter-operability of various relevant State registers are, *inter alia*, significant obstacles which prevent more effective oversight of submitted data on MPs' financial interests<sup>50</sup>.

In France, under the National Assembly's Rules of Procedure (Article 75)<sup>51</sup>, MPs are required to disclose any outside activities or professional interests that could create conflicts of interest with their parliamentary duties. They must declare any paid employment, consultancy work, or other activities that generate income or benefits. The National Assembly's rules require that Members refrain from using their parliamentary position for personal gain or to advance outside interests. This means that they cannot use these positions to promote their own businesses or advocate for the interests of their clients or employers. Moreover, Chapter IV of the French Electoral Code<sup>52</sup> lists a series of potential incompatibilities between MPs' mandates and outside activities, including the prohibition of any function or activity paid for by a foreign state. These rules are enforced by the Assembly's Committee on Ethics and Standards, which is responsible for investigating allegations of misconduct and making recommendations for sanctions when necessary. If these rules are breached, MPs may face sanctions or disciplinary action, including possible censure or expulsion from the National Assembly. Transparency International report indicates that 72 % of French MPs have side activities in addition to their public function, while the descriptors of side activities are found to be vague and inconsistent<sup>53</sup>.

A recent change in the UK Code of Conduct for MPs provides an interesting example which is very relevant to current discussions in the context of ongoing EP rules' reform. The new Code, which came into effect on 1 March 2023<sup>54</sup>, introduces a new outright ban on paid parliamentary advice and tightens loopholes while

<sup>48</sup> The names of life partners are not publicly disclosed in the financial declarations of MPs, which according to some authors can limit the public oversight of their assets. See V. Bratić, M. Pezer, B. Stanić, '[Imovinske kartice – efikasan instrument sprječavanja korupcije u jugoistočnoj Europi ili tigar od papira?](#)', *Osvrti Instituta za javne financije*, Vol 16, No 130, 2023.

<sup>49</sup> Croatian Parliament, '[Odluku O Proglašenju Zakona O Sprječavanju Sukoba Interesa](#)', 71-10-01/1-21-2, 21 December 2021.

<sup>50</sup> V. Bratić, M. Pezer, B. Stanić, '[Imovinske kartice – efikasan instrument sprječavanja korupcije u jugoistočnoj Europi ili tigar od papira?](#)', *Osvrti Instituta za javne financije*, Vol 16, No 130, 2023.

<sup>51</sup> French Parliament, '[The French Assembly Rules of procedures](#)', June 2022.

<sup>52</sup> French Republic, '[French Electoral Code](#)', last modified on 26 March 2023.

<sup>53</sup> R. Kergueno and J. Vrushi, '[Debugging Democracy – Open data for political integrity in Europe](#)', *Transparency International*, 2020.

<sup>54</sup> UK Parliament, '[New Code of Conduct for MPs to launch on 1 March](#)', 27 February 2023.

at the same time improving transparency. This Code sets out standards of behaviour expected from all Members of the House of Commons, including rules concerning additional income, gifts and personal activities that must be declared and published in the Register of Members' Interests. Following the October 2021 investigations by the Committee on Standards regarding the breach of rules on paid advocacy by an MP<sup>55</sup>, the Code was updated through the first significant review in more than eight years, which involved widespread consultation, four interlocking reports and an extensive inquiry. The resulting new Code has tightened provisions against lobbying and undue influence in the UK Parliament, including a ban on paid parliamentary advice, which aims to prevent MPs from using their positions to derive profit. Other new provisions include prohibiting MPs from initiating or participating in proceedings of the House or communicating with officeholders on behalf of an organisation from which they have received financial benefits in the last twelve months. MPs must also obtain a written contract from employers that explicitly states that they will not undertake any lobbying activities. Some CSOs criticised the Code because it failed to introduce parity between the reporting of ministers' and MPs' interests, as ministers' disclosures are now less stringent and less frequent than the former<sup>56</sup>. Overall, the Code reduces opportunities for paid lobbying while allowing MPs to raise legitimate concerns as they hold related outside employment.

In addition to these 'innovations' in the Code of Conduct, the UK provides an example of good practice regarding the Register of Members' Financial Interests<sup>57</sup>. This Register, updated twice a month, is a transparent portal and single-access point to all information on MPs' financial interests, meetings, visits and paid work.

Canada is another example of a country, which has banned or restricted paid advocacy by MPs and has stricter rules regarding outside paid work. MPs in Canada need to disclose their outside income along with assets and are prohibited from engaging in paid advocacy that would require them to communicate with public office holders on behalf of a client. In 2018, the Canadian Ethics and Conflict of Interest Commissioner launched an investigation into an MP who had allegedly accepted a paid trip to China from a businessman and then advocated on behalf of the businessman's company in parliament. This case encouraged a wider discussion on the effectiveness of preventing conflicts of interest in the Canadian Parliament<sup>58</sup>.

MPs in Australia must disclose their financial interests, which include details of any outside employment or consulting work, as well as any gifts or benefits they receive. MPs are also prohibited from engaging in paid advocacy on behalf of a third party. In 2017, a senator in the Australian Parliament faced criticism and calls to resign over his close connections to Chinese businessmen and officials. He was accused of accepting payments from Chinese companies for travel expenses and legal bills, which raised concerns about his loyalties and potential conflicts of interest. The senator's conduct came under scrutiny after he was recorded at a public event in 2016 contradicting the Labour Party's policy on the South China Sea dispute, instead expressing support for China's position. This raised concerns about his political views being influenced by his financial ties to China. He resigned after further revelations about his having warned a Chinese businessman that his phone was probably being tapped by Australian intelligence agencies as well as increasing concerns about his loyalties and suitability to hold public office. Details were stipulated in the findings of the Australian Senate's powerful privileges committee<sup>59</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> The investigation report available [here](#).

<sup>56</sup> R. Whiffen, 'A New Parliamentary Code of Conduct Marks the First Day of Spring', *Transparency International UK*, 1 March 2023.

<sup>57</sup> House of Commons, [Register of Members' Financial Interests - 2019 Parliament](#).

<sup>58</sup> For a summary of media discussion on the topic, see B. Hill and R. Browne, 'Ethics commissioner investigating Liberal MP whose law firm was linked to alleged Chinese gangster', *Global News*, 7 August 2019.

<sup>59</sup> For more information about the case, see A. Remeikis, 'Sam Dastyari quits as Labour senator over China connections', *The Guardian*, 11 December 2017.

## 5.1 Lessons learned

Overall, regulating MP's outside activities and financial interests is a critical aspect of ensuring accountability and integrity in political systems. The level of transparency varies widely across countries, with some providing more rigorous and frequent disclosure requirements than others. As pointed out by some CSOs, it is important to ensure the consistency of descriptors used for the outside activities of MPs, as a pre-condition for effective monitoring and verification by independent bodies as well as the general public. The UK provides a particularly strong example of good practice with its Register of Members' Financial Interests, which is a transparent portal and single-access point to all information on MPs' financial interests, meetings, visits and paid work. Furthermore, recent changes in the UK Code of Conduct for MPs provide an example of good practice in preventing the exercise of undue influence in the UK Parliament, with a new outright ban on paid parliamentary advice as an effort to close loopholes<sup>60</sup>.

## 5.2 Recommendations and possible measures for the EP

As the analyses of CSOs<sup>61</sup> pointed out, the current system of monitoring MEP's outside roles and paid undertakings is inadequate with limited public access to data on the scope and nature of these different activities. Based on the abovementioned experience of different parliaments, possible policy options together with medium and long-term measures for the EP could include:

- **tightening the rules on disclosure of financial interests** with more detailed written evidence to be provided and regularly updated, at least annually.
- **setting up a single web portal with updated information on MEPs'** financial interests and outside activities.
- **introducing a compulsory publication of meetings of MEPs** with interest groups and lobbyists (also from third countries) and full compliance with the Transparency Register, namely 'no-registration-no meeting' rules, regardless of whether the meeting concerns a resolution or a report with which an MEP is involved.

<sup>60</sup> Loopholes, however, continue to exist, but the intention is to reduce a number of them. One loophole in the current UK system is that an MP who received a gift or payment for representation of interest from an entity can after six months again engage in interest representation for the same entity providing they are not paid the second time. See S. Stowers, '[MP's second jobs and outside interests](#)', *UK in a Changing Europe*, 12 January 2023,

<sup>61</sup> L. Pearson, '[Burning the candle at both ends: one quarter of MEPs top up their EU salary with side jobs](#)', *Transparency International*, 12 October 2021.

## 6 Post-employment prohibition of lobbying of MPs – ‘cooling-off’ periods and ‘revolving door’ rules

Lobbyists increasingly play a structural role in policy-making, which creates a public demand that governments adapt for implementing measures to define and limit lobbying<sup>62</sup>. Post-employment prohibition of lobbying, also known as ‘cooling-off’ periods and ‘revolving door’ rules, refers to the period during which former government officials are prohibited from engaging in lobbying activities. Revolving door practice can be viewed positively in terms of ‘human capital development’ but ‘the risk of misuse of government experience and private interests is also present’<sup>63</sup>. These rules aim to prevent the potential for conflicts of interest and ensure integrity within the political process.

At the level of EU institutions, the most advanced regulation of post-office activities can be found in the Code of Conduct for Members of the European Commission, which since 2018 extended the ‘cooling-off’ period from 18 to 24 months for former Commissioners and to 3 years (36 months) for the President of the Commission. During this cooling-off period, former Members not only need to inform the Commission before taking up new jobs, but are also subject to restrictions regarding certain activities, such as lobbying members or staff of the Commission<sup>64</sup>. Compliance with the Code of Conduct cooling-off period rules is monitored by an Independent Ethics Committee. Taking into account any advice from the Independent Ethical Committee, the European Commission has to approve all intended new occupations of former Commission Members. Decisions on approved ‘post-office activities’ are published on one of the Commission’s dedicated web sites<sup>65</sup> and are also monitored in the annual reports on the implementation of the European Commission Code of Conduct. Below is a brief overview of different countries’ approaches to the post-employment prohibition of lobbying.

In Canada, rules and restrictions for lobbyists as well as public office holders are set out under the Lobbying Act’s terms, within which one of the key provisions is the ‘cooling-off’ period that restricts former designated public office holders (including MPs) from lobbying the government for a period of five years following the last day of their employment<sup>66</sup>. During this period, former MPs are prohibited from: lobbying the government on behalf of a corporation or organisation; engaging in any activities that would require them to register as a consultant lobbyist; and communicating with a public office holder in efforts to influence government decisions.

The ‘cooling-off’ period is enforced by the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying, an independent agency that administers and enforces the Lobbying Act. The Commissioner is authorised to investigate alleged violations of the ‘cooling-off’ period and can impose penalties as well as sanctions for non-compliance. In addition to this five-years period, Canada also has strict rules around the so-called ‘revolving door’, which refers to the movement of individuals between the public and private sectors. The Lobbying Act prohibits former MPs from using their knowledge and influence gained from their public position to benefit their

<sup>62</sup> M. Boucher, [Public Ethics and the Regulation of Corporate Political Activities in North America and Europe](#), Working Paper, Centre for Governance, University of Ottawa, June 2021; E. Bauer and M. Thiel, [Transparency of lobbying in Member States. Comparative analysis](#), European Parliament Directorate-General for the Presidency, PE 649.411, November 2019.

<sup>63</sup> L. Akiashvili et al., [Lobbying After Federal Service: The Revolving Door, Shadow Lobbying, and Cooling Off Periods for Former Government Officials](#), Capstone Project, The Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University, April 2018.

<sup>64</sup> European Commission, [Decision on a Code of Conduct for the Members of the European Commission](#), 2018/C 65/06, 31 January 2018.

<sup>65</sup> European Commission, [Former European Commissioners’ authorised occupations](#), Decisions of the European Commission and related opinions of the Independent Ethical Committee on occupation of former European Commissioners, nd.

<sup>66</sup> Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada, [‘5-year post-employment prohibition on lobbying’](#), 2022.

private sector employer. Overall, in a comparative perspective, Canada's experience with regulating 'cooling off' and 'revolving door' rules for MPs and other public officials has been generally seen as advanced. The data available in annual assessments indicate that the enforcement of these rules by the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying has helped generally to maintain the integrity and transparency of the lobbying industry in Canada<sup>67</sup>. Conversely, some researchers argue that political elites' electoral calculations in regulatory reform and regulatory opportunism have not only undermined the Lobbying Act's effectiveness, but also the Commissioner of Lobbying's credibility in its mission toward a balanced and transparent lobbying system<sup>68</sup>. Such dilemmas have been further emphasised with the recently proposed changes in the cooling-off period rules for lobbyists<sup>69</sup>.

In France, under the Law on Transparency in Public Life, which was enacted in 2013, the HATVP is responsible for overseeing and enforcing rules related to the incompatibility of MPs' professional transitions in the private sector<sup>70</sup>. Specifically, the HATVP is tasked with monitoring and ensuring compliance with the three-year 'cooling-off' period that applies to MPs who leave office and move into the private sector. This is designed to prevent conflicts of interest and to ensure that former MPs do not use their insider knowledge and connections to benefit private sector pursuits. During these three years, former MPs are prohibited from engaging in activities that could create a conflict of interest or give the appearance of impropriety, such as lobbying their former colleagues or using information obtained during their time in office for personal gain. The HATVP has broad powers to investigate and enforce the 'cooling-off' period, including the authority to conduct audits, impose penalties for non-compliance and refer cases to the public prosecutor for further action. The agency also maintains a public register of former MPs and other public officials who are subject to the 'cooling-off' period, regularly publishing reports on its activities and findings. Overall, the HATVP's role in enforcing this three-years period has been seen as an important step in promoting transparency and integrity in French politics<sup>71</sup>. By preventing former MPs from using their insider knowledge and connections to benefit private sector interests, the 'cooling-off' period helps to ensure that public officials act in the public interest and maintain the trust of the citizens they serve.

In the UK, under the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014<sup>72</sup>, former MPs are subject to a two-year 'cooling-off' period during which they are prohibited from engaging in lobbying activities. This period begins on the day they cease to be MPs and applies to all lobbying activities, including those on behalf of clients or organisations. This is intended to prevent former MPs from using their connections and insider knowledge to influence government decisions unduly. It also ensures that former MPs do not have an unfair advantage in lobbying the government and thus the public interest is protected. Rules are enforced by the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists, an independent body established under the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014. The Registrar is not only responsible for maintaining a public register of consultant lobbyists, but also has the power to investigate and sanction violations of the 'cooling-off' period. The Registrar can

<sup>67</sup> More information on the level of compliance with established rules and use of investigative and enforcement powers is available in the annual reports, see Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada, [Annual report 2021-22](#), Annual Report, 2022

<sup>68</sup> N. Fry, '[Lopsided lobbying? Regulatory opportunism and the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying](#)', *Canadian Public Administration*, Vol 65, 2022, pp. 73-98.

<sup>69</sup> Democracy Watch, [41 lawyers and professors call on House Ethics Committee to reverse its position and reject Commissioner's gutting of key ethical lobbying rules](#), 6 April 2023.

<sup>70</sup> For more information on the HATVP competences in this area, see High Authority for Transparency in Public Life, '[Public-Private Mobility](#)', webpage, nd.

<sup>71</sup> The recent survey shows large majority of experts agree that the HATVP has a positive impact on the integrity and honesty of elected officials. For more information see B. Monnery and A. Chirat, '[Trust in the fight against political corruption: A survey experiment among citizens and experts](#)', Working Paper, *EconomiX*, University of Paris Nanterre, 2023.

<sup>72</sup> UK Public General Acts, [Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014](#).

impose fines or imprisonment for non-compliance. In addition to this 'cooling-off' period, the UK has also implemented other measures to regulate lobbying activities. Overall, the UK's approach to regulating lobbying activities and enforcing 'cooling-off' periods for former MPs is designed to promote transparency, accountability and integrity in the political process.

In Croatia, under the Law aimed at preventing conflicts of interest, former MPs need to comply with a one-year 'cooling off' period and 'revolving door' rules. Compliance is overseen by an independent Commission for the Prevention of conflict of interests, which under its initiative has powers of investigation in reacting to complaints of individuals and media coverage. Details of all investigations and arguments on decisions taken are published on the Commission's website, thus providing the public with a clear understanding of the reasons behind certain decisions, thereby holding MPs and Commission accountable.

## 6.1 Lessons learned

Overall, the examples provided suggest that 'cooling-off' periods are considered by many countries to be an effective tool for preventing conflicts of interest, thereby ensuring political process integrity and making sure that decisions are made in the public interest. Furthermore, clear 'revolving door' rules aim at prohibiting former MPs from using their knowledge and influence gained from their public positions to benefit their private sector employers<sup>73</sup>. However, effective enforcement, along with clear and comprehensive rules are crucial for the success of any 'cooling off'/'revolving door' regulatory framework. This requires an independent agency with the authority to investigate and sanction rule violations. Probably the most effective regulatory and institutional framework can be found in Canada where an independent agency not only enforces the 'cooling-off' period and 'revolving door' rules, but also has the power to investigate and impose penalties for non-compliance, while at the same time ensuring a high level of transparency and public access to relevant information on investigations and their outcomes. Furthermore, already established European Commission approaches, especially the publication of all decisions on post-mandate occupations, can be regarded as examples of good practice at an EU institutional level.

## 6.2 Recommendations and possible measures for the EP

The current situation with no clear rules on MEPs' 'cooling off' period and 'revolving door' cases is not sustainable, as already pointed out in an earlier analysis by Transparency International<sup>74</sup>. Based on a detailed assessment of the experience of different parliaments, possible policy options together with medium and long-term measures for the EP could include:

- **introducing a 'cooling-off' period rules for MEPs** with at least the same duration as European Commission Members (2 years), but at least equal to the time during which MEPs continue to receive transitional allowances from the taxpayer (up to 24 months, depending on the length of service).
- **providing clear competencies to the future EU independent ethics body**, not only to oversee compliance with rules of MEPs' 'cooling off' period and 'revolving door' but also to demonstrate transparency by conducting investigations and sharing findings with the public.

<sup>73</sup> M. Martini, [Cooling-off periods: Regulating the revolving door](#), *Transparency International*, 2015.

<sup>74</sup> Transparency International, [Initial Assessment by Transparency International EU of the leaked European Parliament internal reform proposals \(overall assessment and detailed commentary of text\)](#), 11 January 2023.

## 7 Regulations governing foreign entities' lobbying in parliaments

The regulation of lobbying activities in parliaments varies across the world, with different approaches regarding the scope and criteria for registration and disclosure for lobbyists, their clients or MPs. Various countries also regulate the lobbying of foreign entities in parliaments, the rationale for which generally breaks into four key headings:

- (i) *National security concerns* – risks of interference from foreign governments or corporations in the democratic process by influencing parliamentary decision-making in ways that are considered contrary to the national interest of a country, for instance gaining access to sensitive information by foreign governments or corporations;
- (ii) *Fairness and transparency* – lobbying can give an unfair advantage to those with the most resources, especially powerful foreign corporations or governments, as they may be able to use their financial power to sway decision-making in their favour;
- (iii) *Public trust* – lobbying can erode public trust in the democratic parliamentary process if it is perceived as being too closely tied to powerful foreign corporate or government interests;
- (iv) *Prevention of corruption* – unregulated, undisclosed foreign lobbying can provide opportunities for corruption, such as bribes or other incentives to law-makers in exchange for favourable treatment in parliamentary decision-making.

In general, there are two dominant approaches in regulating foreign entities' lobbying within parliaments – one through the general lobbying laws or rules on the registration of lobbyists and the other through a separate foreign agents' registration act, which also covers political influence activities on behalf of foreign entities.

The most systematic approach to regulating the lobbying of foreign entities can be found in the USA. On the one hand, the Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) requires that all lobbying activities are public<sup>75</sup>. All lobbyists, including those lobbying on behalf of foreign entities, need to register with the Clerk of the House of Representatives as well as the Secretary of the Senate, providing regular reports on their lobbying activities and expenditures. According to this law, the definition of lobbying includes attempts to influence not only members of Congress but also congressional staff.

On the other hand, FARA requires individuals and organisations to register with the Department of Justice (DoJ) if they engage in certain activities on behalf of foreign governments, political parties, or other foreign entities. Lobbyists who represent foreign interests in the US Congress must register under FARA and disclose their activities as well as financial arrangements with their foreign clients. The DoJ is responsible for enforcing FARA and has the authority not only to investigate potential violations of the law, but also bring civil and criminal actions against violators. The enforcement of FARA has recently been stepped up, particularly regarding lobbying by foreign governments and their agents. In response to concerns about Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election, the DoJ announced a new FARA unit in 2018 to enhance law enforcement and increase public awareness of requirements for foreign agents. The DoJ's enforcement of FARA with respect to the lobbying of US Congress involves investigating and prosecuting individuals and organisations that fail to register under FARA or provide false or misleading information in their FARA filings. In recent years, various high-profile cases have been brought against individuals and organisations for violating FARA in connection with lobbying activities directed at the US Congress. Overall,

<sup>75</sup> United States Senate, '[Public Searchable database of lobbying report, including lobbying of foreign entities](#)', webpage, nd.



FARA is a key tool for regulating lobbying of foreign entities in the US and the DoJ's enforcement of the law plays a critical role in ensuring transparency and accountability in the lobbying process.

Unlike the LDA, which covers only paid lobbying, the FARA does not distinguish between paid and unpaid activities. Individuals and organisations are instead required to register with the US DoJ if they are acting as agents for a foreign principal by engaging in certain political or public relations activities in the US on behalf of that foreign principal, regardless of whether they are receiving compensation for their activities. The types of activities covered by FARA include lobbying, public relations and political consulting, as well as other activities that promote the interests of a foreign government or entity in the USA. These can include efforts to influence US policy or public opinion, as well as endeavours that seek to promote cultural or commercial interests. FARA registration requires detailed disclosure of the activities being undertaken on behalf of the foreign principal, as well as financial information about the compensation received. Failure to register under FARA or disclose accurate and complete information can result in civil and criminal penalties. Anyone already registered under the American LDA does not need to register again under FARA<sup>76</sup>.

In Australia, the main legal Act regulating lobbying activities is the Commonwealth Register of Lobbyists which was established in 2008 under the Lobbying Code of Conduct<sup>77</sup>. This code applies to third-party lobbyists who engage in lobbying activities on behalf of clients intending to influence government or parliament decision-making. The Code requires those engaged in lobbying to register with the Register of Lobbyists, disclose their clients as well as the issues they are lobbying on and provide regular reports of their lobbying activities. Furthermore, in 2018 the Australian government introduced the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act (FITSA)<sup>78</sup>, which regulates foreign interference, including lobbying on behalf of foreign entities. FITSA requires individuals and organisations to register with the Attorney General's Department if they engage in certain activities on behalf of foreign principals, including foreign governments, foreign political organisations, foreign government-related entities or individuals. These activities include: lobbying of the Australian Parliament; general political lobbying; communications activities; and disbursement activities. The Act requires registrants to disclose certain information, including their relationship with the foreign principal, the nature of their activities together with the financial arrangements between them and their foreign principal.

In the UK, a Register of Consultant Lobbyists also includes lobbying of foreign entities. Additionally, in May 2022 the National Security Bill was introduced in parliament and is currently being taken through its adoption procedure. Part three of the Bill establishes a new Foreign Activities and Foreign Influence Registration Scheme<sup>79</sup>, which requires all foreign organisations, including companies, businesses, charities or otherwise, to register publicly each of their interactions with UK policy and decision-makers and other political influence activities in the UK under the influence of a foreign power. Political influence activities include communications with senior decision-makers such as UK ministers, election candidates, MPs and senior civil servants. It also includes certain communications to the public where the source of influence is not already clear and disbursement of money, goods or services to individuals in the UK for a political purpose. In order to register such political influence activity, it must have the purpose of influencing UK public life, for example, elections, decisions of the government or members of either the House of Parliament or devolved legislatures. It is expected that this new regulatory framework for foreign political influence in the UK will enter into force during September 2024.

<sup>76</sup> US Department of Justice, '[Foreign Agents Registration Act](#)', webpage, nd.

<sup>77</sup> Australian Government, [The Australian Lobbying Code of Conduct](#), 2019.

<sup>78</sup> Australian Government, [Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme \(FITSA\)](#), 2018.

<sup>79</sup> UK Home Office, [Foreign Influence Registration Scheme factsheet](#), Policy paper, 28 March 2023.

It is important to note that the proposed UK Foreign Influence Registration Scheme has been criticised for failing to differentiate between hostile and friendly countries, using broad definitions that could have unintended consequences, thereby placing unnecessary bureaucracy on non-UK businesses and overseas charities by not addressing domestic lobbyists and lacking clarity on the information required for registration. Amendments have been proposed by the House of Lords to exempt foreign businesses, charities as well as other bodies acting in their own interests from registration and address other concerns<sup>80</sup>.

In Canada, the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying aims to ensure transparent and ethical lobbying by administering the Lobbying Act and the Lobbyists' Code of Conduct. The Commissioner of Lobbying is an independent Agent of Parliament responsible for regulating lobbying at federal level<sup>81</sup>. Its responsibilities include: maintaining a searchable registry of the information reported by lobbyists; providing education to stakeholders; as well as verifying that lobbyists comply with requirements. The Lobbying Act also requires consultant lobbying on behalf of foreign entities to register. The scope of regulation covers both MPs and their staff. In March 2023, the Government opened discussions on setting up a new Foreign Influence Transparency Registry in Canada<sup>82</sup> prompted by reports that allegedly reveal plans by China to interfere in Canada's elections<sup>83</sup>. As with the US FARA and Australian FITSA, the Canadian Foreign Influence Transparency Registry is expected to foster transparency regarding foreign state lobbying and all individuals or entities acting on behalf of a foreign state to advance its goals would have to disclose their ties to the government employing them.

Existing rules on the EU Transparency Register<sup>84</sup> do not adequately cover the lobbying of foreign entities in the EP. The lobbying of public authorities of third countries, including their diplomatic missions and embassies, is not covered by the Inter-Institutional Agreement on the transparency register, except where such authorities are represented by legal entities, offices or networks without diplomatic status or are represented by an intermediary. Moreover, the measures to be taken in case of non-compliance with the rules do not have sufficient deterrent effect.

## 7.1 Lessons learned

The above-mentioned examples show that regulation of foreign lobbying in parliaments is of growing concern due to national security worries, a desire for fairness and transparency, as well as the need for public trust and fighting corruption. There are two main approaches to regulating foreign lobbying, one through general lobbying laws and the other through a separate foreign agents' registration act. The USA has the longest tradition and the most systematic approach to regulating foreign lobbying, with both the LDA and the FARA requiring lobbyists to register and provide regular reports on their activities and expenditures. Similarly, comprehensive, cross-cutting regulation of foreign lobbying is undertaken by Australia and more recently the UK and Canada, requiring all foreign organisations, including companies, businesses, charities or otherwise, to register publicly each of their interactions with policy and decision-makers and other political influence activities under the influence of a foreign power. As seen from recent discussion on the UK Foreign Influence Registration Scheme, it may be challenging to reconcile the

<sup>80</sup> For more information on the criticism of proposed FIRS see C. Gallardo, '[UK narrows scope of political influence register following criticism](#)', *Politico*, 23 February 2023.

<sup>81</sup> For more information on the competencies of the Commissioner, see the Government of Canada, '[Office the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada](#)', webpage, 2023.

<sup>82</sup> Government of Canada, '[Consulting Canadians on the merits of a Foreign Influence Transparency Registry](#)', webpage, nd.

<sup>83</sup> S. Scherer, '[Canada starts setting up foreign agent registry amid reports of Chinese election meddling](#)', *Reuters*, 10 March 2023.

<sup>84</sup> [Interinstitutional Agreement between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on a mandatory transparency register](#), OJ 21/04/2023, 20 May 2021.

legitimate aims of preventing foreign state interference, while at the same time avoiding unproportionate additional bureaucratic burden on foreign businesses, charities and other bodies acting in their own interests and not engaging in lobbying public officials.

## 7.2 Recommendations and possible measures for the EP

The current rules on the functioning of the Transparency Register do not adequately cover the lobbying of foreign entities. Based on the experience of different parliaments detailed above, possible policy options together with medium and long-term measures for the EP could include:

- **revising the inter-institutional agreement on the Transparency Register** to cover the lobbying of various foreign entities with strict reporting and oversight rules, together with stricter measures carrying sufficiently deterrent effect.

## 8 Regulation of friendship groups

The establishment of friendship groups or parliamentary friendship associations is a common practice in many countries' parliaments. These groups are formed by MPs to discuss and promote a particular issue or interest and often involve meetings with foreign officials, representatives of foreign governments, or individuals with interests related to the group's focus. However, there have been concerns about their potential influence on foreign policy and the need for transparency in their operations. As such, various countries have established friendship group regulations.

In Australia, the rules governing friendship groups were introduced in 2002 by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade<sup>85</sup>. These rules state that friendship groups must not undertake any activity that could create a perception of influence on government policy or involve the use of parliamentary resources for political purposes. The rules are designed to ensure that friendship groups do not undermine the Australian government's foreign policy or engage in activities that could create conflicts of interest. The rules also aim to promote transparency and accountability in the activities of friendship groups. For example, in 2018 concerns were raised about the activities of the Australia-China Parliamentary Friendship Group, which was accused of being too close to the Chinese government, thereby potentially compromising Australia's national security interests. The Group's co-chair publicly criticised China's human rights record, which resulted in the Group being suspended by the Chinese government. In response, the Australian government announced a review of the rules governing friendship groups to ensure that they are in line with Australia's national interests.

In summary, the rules governing friendship groups in Australia are designed to ensure that they do not interfere with the Australian government's foreign policy or engage in activities that could create conflicts of interest. The rules also aim to promote transparency and accountability in the activities of friendship groups.

In the USA and Canada, members of friendship groups are required to disclose any gifts or donations received from foreign governments or entities, with rules that are aimed at ensuring transparency and preventing potential conflicts of interest. In the USA, these rules fall under the FARA, which requires individuals and organisations acting as agents of foreign principals to register with the DoJ and disclose certain information about their pursuits and financial relationships. Friendship groups can fall under the scope of FARA if they engage in activities on behalf of a foreign government or entity, such as lobbying Congress or advocating for policy changes. In such cases, the group and its members would be required to disclose any gifts or donations they receive from the foreign principal.

In Canada, the rules governing the disclosure of gifts and donations received by friendship groups fall under the Lobbying Act. This Act requires individuals and organisations that engage in lobbying activities to register with the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying and disclose certain information about their activities and financial relationships. This includes any gifts or benefits received from a person or organisation that is part of a lobbying endeavours.

In the UK, friendship groups are required to register with the parliamentary authorities and disclose their sources of funding. The rules governing friendship groups are set out in the Guide to the Rules for All-Party Groups<sup>86</sup>, which is published by the UK Parliament. This guide provides guidance on the establishment and operation of friendship groups, as well as rules governing their funding and activities. Under UK parliamentary rules, friendship groups must register with the parliamentary authorities and disclose their

<sup>85</sup> Australian Parliament, '[Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade](#)', webpage, nd.

<sup>86</sup> UK Parliament, '[Guide to the rules on All-Party Parliamentary Groups](#)', revised May 2017.

sources of funding – including any donations, gifts or other forms of support. In addition, the rules state that friendship groups must not engage in any undertakings that could create a perception of influence on government policy or involve the use of parliamentary resources for political purposes. These rules aim to ensure that friendship groups operate transparently and do not have undue influence on government policy. By also requiring disclosure of funding sources and gifts, the rules are designed to prevent potential conflicts of interest and maintain the integrity of the parliamentary process. The rules also ensure that friendship groups do not use parliamentary resources for political purposes, which could be seen as an abuse of public funds.

In the EP context, it is important to mention the activities of formal intergroups and informal friendship groups. Intergroups act not only as a forum for informal exchanges of views on specific issues across different political groups, but also as a means of contact between Members and civil society. Although intergroups are not considered as official parliament bodies, they are recognised by the EP and regulated by Rule 35 of the Rules of Procedure as well as other internal rules. They are established by agreement between the chairs of political groups at the beginning of each legislative term. Only interest representatives registered on the Transparency Register may participate in intergroup activities organised at the EP – such as attending, supporting or co-hosting meetings or events. In addition, each intergroup must publish an annual declaration of financial interests, covering all support received in cash or in-kind (financial, staffing and material support). Furthermore, they are forbidden from carrying out activities which might result in confusion with the official activities of the EP or its bodies<sup>87</sup>. Friendship and other unofficial groups are also occasionally set up by MEPs to discuss relations with non-EU countries, in addition to official EP delegations which are regulated by the EP Rules of Procedure. These friendship groups are sometimes sponsored by lobbyists or foreign governments, but they are not official parliamentary organisations. As pointed out by the EP, these groups have no official status, cannot speak on behalf of the EP and the local EU offices do not provide them with any assistance, which would normally be offered for standing delegations with third countries<sup>88</sup>. In general, there is a lack of transparency around the work of intergroups and especially friendship groups, with limited information on their activities available on the EP website.

## 8.1 Lessons learned

Overall, the establishment of friendship groups is a common practice in many parliaments worldwide. However, to ensure that these groups operate transparently and do not have undue influence on government policy, rules and guidelines must be put in place. From the abovementioned three cases described, certain key lessons can be learned. Firstly, transparency and disclosure are essential, with all three cases highlighting their importance regarding funding sources, gifts and donations received by friendship groups. It is crucial to ensure that these groups are not compromised by external influences and that their activities do not create conflicts of interest. Secondly, rules and guidelines are necessary to ensure that friendship groups operate transparently and do not have undue influence on government policy. These rules should cover the establishment, operation, funding and activities of friendship groups. This can help to prevent foreign interference. Finally, monitoring and accountability are essential. Cases stemming from Australia and the UK highlight the need for monitoring and accountability of friendship groups' activities.

<sup>87</sup> European Parliament, '[The intergroups of the European Parliament](#)', webpage, 2023.

<sup>88</sup> For basic information on EP friendship groups, see European Parliament, '[Understanding the European Parliament's delegations](#)', webpage, 2023.

## 8.2 Recommendations and possible measures for the EP

Based on the experiences of the USA, the UK and Australia, but also considering the specific EP context, it is possible to recommend various policy options for the EP to consider:

- **establishing a set of rules and guidelines that friendship groups must follow** - including the obligation to register and disclose their sources of funding and any gifts or donations received.
- **requiring that friendship groups engage in activities that are aligned only with the EU's foreign and security policy** objectives.
- **establishing a monitoring system to ensure that friendship groups comply** with the rules and guidelines set out by the EP. Furthermore, the EP could require that friendship groups report on their activities regularly.
- **or banning friendship groups from EP and require that all third countries interact with the EP through** its Committee for Foreign Affairs, existing official parliament delegations or other committees.
- **considering the introduction of stricter rules for the EP intergroups.**

## 9 Advice, training and awareness-raising for MPs

Mandatory compliance training on codes of conduct, individual counselling mechanisms and whistleblowing awareness raising for MPs can be an effective way to build an integrity culture in parliaments. Training programmes can provide MPs with the knowledge and tools they need to navigate ethical dilemmas and maintain high standards of conduct.

In Finland, newly elected MPs are required to attend a training programme on parliamentary procedures and the Code of Conduct. At the beginning of each parliamentary term, the Parliamentary Office arranges an orientation session for all new MPs, during which the existing rules and practices regarding declaring conflicts of interest and notification of assets and interests are explained<sup>89</sup>. Calls for mandatory education of MPs and other public officials on ethics and integrity rules, as a way of strengthening accountability, have also recently been raised in other countries as well<sup>90</sup>.

In Ireland, all MPs may seek advice from the Committee on Members' Interests and Standards Commission according to section 12 of the Ethics Act. This is used by MPs as a pre-emptive procedure in case of any doubts about compliance with the Ethics Act. The advice is provided to MPs on a confidential basis<sup>91</sup>.

In the UK, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Whistleblowers was set up in 2018 to provide stronger protection for whistleblowers. The APPG is an informal group of cross-party parliamentarians established by backbench MPs to help other MPs from all parties become better informed about whistleblowing<sup>92</sup>. It has no statutory or formal role but seeks to exert influence on improving the legislative framework about whistleblowing. In cooperation with a not-for-profit organisation called WhistleblowersUK, the APPG organises the annual event Whistleblowing Awareness Week which also includes a multi-stakeholder debate in the Parliament on strengthening the whistleblowing legislation.

### 9.1 Lessons learned

These three cases illustrate the importance of combining various preventive mechanisms such as the training on compliance with codes of conduct, individual confidential counselling on ethics rules and whistleblowing awareness raising for MPs, as a way of promoting the culture of integrity and accountability in parliaments. This training aims to equip MPs with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate various ethical dilemmas and maintain high standards of conduct. The opportunity to access individual confidential counselling on compliance with ethics rules can encourage reflection and self-assessment among MPs regarding dilemmas they could encounter on the application of codes of conduct. Finally, highly visible awareness-raising events on whistleblowers' protection rules can encourage the harmonised implementation of EU standards in this area among MPs and EP staff.

### 9.2 Recommendations and possible measures for the EP

Based on the abovementioned practices of parliaments and considering the specific EP context, recommendations for the EP in terms of medium and long-term measures could include:

- **implementing mandatory compliance and whistleblowing training programmes for all MEPs.**  
The training could cover issues such as conflicts of interest, transparency, accountability and the

<sup>89</sup> GRECO, [Fourth Evaluation Round, Corruption Prevention In respect of Members of Parliament – Fourth Evaluation Round – Evaluation Report for Finland](#), Council of Europe, 27 March 2013.

<sup>90</sup> See for example M. Lopez-Martinez, '[Accountability loop' in ethics breaches causing distrust from public: Dion](#)', *CTV News*, 17 February 2023.

<sup>91</sup> GRECO, [Fourth Evaluation Round, Corruption Prevention In respect of Members of Parliament – Fourth Evaluation Round – Evaluation Report for Ireland](#), Council of Europe, 21 November 2014.

<sup>92</sup> For more information, see APPG Whistleblowing, '[Home](#)', webpage, nd.

proper use of parliamentary resources. Said programme could also include case studies and discussions on whistleblowing, as well as provide information on the procedure for reporting any concerns about unethical or illegal behaviour.

- **establishing a harmonised approach and protocol for implementing EU whistle-blower protection rules by the EP** to encourage reporting of unethical or illegal behaviour. Along with mandatory training and awareness-raising activities, this can help improve compliance with codes of conduct and strengthen the integrity culture among MEPs.



## 10 Strengthening MP's accountability through more advanced public engagement in the work of the parliament

Strengthening MP's accountability through more advanced public engagement in the parliament's work is a crucial step towards building a culture of integrity in parliamentary systems. It involves providing citizens, CSOs and other stakeholders with more opportunities to participate in parliamentary activities, increasing transparency and improving access to information.

The EP has been criticised for the lack of transparency of the legislative process, especially in regard to the so-called 'trilogues', informal (but procedurally established) meetings for negotiations between representatives of the EP, the Council of the EU and the European Commission which are held behind closed doors with the aim of brokering a political compromise on a legislative act between the three institutions. Although the EP requires its trilogue negotiators to report back to its committees after each trilogue, the previous research shows that the majority of trilogues is not reported back on at all or not in time and with poor quality of feedback<sup>93</sup>. Since the public access to these legislative documents is a pre-condition for citizens to participate in legislative processes affecting their lives, the EP thus does not deliver on its promises to citizens set in the Lisbon Treaty: 'Every citizen shall have the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union. Decisions shall be taken as openly and closely as possible to the citizen'<sup>94</sup>.

Despite a certain progress made in opening the work of the Parliament to the wider public (web streaming of sessions, handling citizen petitions, etc.), there is still a lack of public engagement in the legislative process of the EP and more structured mechanisms for holding the EP accountable by citizens, CSOs and other representatives are still missing, especially by using new digital tools.

There are different approaches to strengthening public engagement in the parliament's work across the world, which differ mainly regarding the scope and level of public engagement: from using digital tools to improving the overall information and communication of parliaments with citizens, using web platforms for consulting the public during Parliament's legislative work, but also developing cross-sector bodies for joint, partnership monitoring of the implementation of anti-corruption policies.

One of the most prominent examples of the use of digital tools to engage citizens in the parliamentary work can be found in the Parliament of Brazil where both houses (House of Representatives and Senate) are consistently praised as one of the best practice examples of the parliamentary digital maturity<sup>95</sup>.

The Brazil Parliament House of Representatives has set up *LABHacker*, as a citizen innovation laboratory that works to improve transparency, participation, and citizenship through collaborative and experimental projects and increase the exchange of innovative ideas between civil society and parliament. One of its flagship digital tools is the *e-Democracia* online portal, first developed in 2009, which was created to engage with constituents and representatives through surveys, forums and collaborative wiki tools. The platform aims to collect opinions and encourage citizens to engage more in the law-making process. The platform includes 'virtual communities' for debates on specific topics and '*Wikilegis*'<sup>96</sup>, which allows users

<sup>93</sup> G. J. Brandsma, '[Transparency of EU informal trilogues through public feedback in the European Parliament: promise unfulfilled](#)', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol 26, No 10, 2019, pp. 1464-1483.

<sup>94</sup> European Union, '[Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union - TITLE II: PROVISIONS ON DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES - Article 10](#)', Official Journal 115, 9 May 2008.

<sup>95</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, '[Global Parliamentary Report 2022: Public engagement in the work of parliament](#)', Report, *Inter-Parliamentary Union*, nd. For more information on Brazil case, see also Inter-Parliamentary Union, '[Brazil: A digitally mature parliament](#)', webpage, 2022.

<sup>96</sup> Câmara dos Deputados, '[Wikilegis](#)', nd.

to directly comment on or contribute to specific articles or sections of a draft bill<sup>97</sup>. Independent research on the effectiveness of the e-democracia tool has demonstrated that citizens' inputs are well reflected in Congress reports and that Members refer to citizens' online contributions during their discussions in public hearings<sup>98</sup>. Other studies point out that the e-democracia tool 'survives much more because of a bureaucratic determination than because of support and political use, even though those happen at some level'<sup>99</sup>, thus indicating the importance of strong administrative support for the success of digital tools.

The House of Representatives was also known for its innovative use of artificial intelligence (AI) to improve its responsiveness to citizens' inputs to parliament's legislative process. It developed the Ulysses smart analysis platform<sup>100</sup>, an AI-based tool that uses machine learning to analyse the large volumes of documents and data produced. Citizens have been able to vote and comment (anonymously) on a particular bill since 2018, and the Ulysses platform helps MPs make sense of all the comments received (sometimes up to 30 000 comments for a single bill), by applying a machine-learning algorithm to the comments based on natural-language processing. The system conducts a 'smart' analysis of all comments on the positive and negative aspects of a piece of legislation, thus making the citizen's inputs into the Parliament legislative work more valued and meaningful.

In 2012, the Senate of Brazil launched *e-Cidadania*, an online portal designed to enable more civic participation in its legislative, budget, oversight and representation activities. The portal is divided into three sections: *Ideia Legislativa* (Legislative Idea), *Consulta Pública* (Public Consultation) and *Evento Interativo* (Interactive Event)<sup>101</sup>. The *e-Cidadania* portal had over 40 million users accessed the portal between 2015 and 2020 (20 % of the total population and 30 % of Brazilian internet users) which illustrates its visibility and societal impact. While the *e-Cidadania* portal was designed to engage more citizens, civil society and other representatives of interested public in the work of the Senate, it also serves senators as important tool for effective communication with their constituencies.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the House of Representatives of Brazil Parliament adapted its existing *Infoleg* app<sup>102</sup>, which provides information on the current parliamentary session to both Members and the public, and contributes to strengthening a more transparent, open and inclusive legislative work of the parliament.

New Zealand has also been recognised as one of the leading examples in using digital tools to engage citizens in the legislative process. The single parliamentary web platform 'Have your Say'<sup>103</sup> is a central hub where citizens can access information about New Zealand Parliament and its activities, as well as provide input and feedback on legislative issues. The platform offers a range of tools to facilitate citizen engagement, including online submission forms for public consultations on legislative acts in the Parliament, and other easy-to-understand resources that help citizens navigate the legislative process and understand how they can engage with their elected representatives.

<sup>97</sup> For more information see '[LABHacker Social Innovation Lab, Brazil](#)', webpage, nd; Câmara Dos Deputados, '[Enquetes](#)', webpage, nd.

<sup>98</sup> P.C. da Conceição Rossini and V. Veiga de Oliveira, '[E-Democracy and Collaborative Lawmaking: The Discussion of the Political Reform in Brazil](#)', *International Journal of Communication*, Vol 10, 2016.

<sup>99</sup> C. Faria and M. Rehbein, '[Open parliament policy applied to the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies](#)', *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, Vol 22, No 4, 2016, pp. 559-578.

<sup>100</sup> See Câmara dos Deputados, '[Câmara lança Ulysses, robô digital que articula dados legislativos](#)', webpage, 28 November 2018.

<sup>101</sup> See Senado Federal, '[Participe Dos Debates Com Perguntas E Comentários](#)', webpage, nd.

<sup>102</sup> More information on the Infoleg application of the Brazil Parliament is available at Câmara dos Deputados, '[Infoleg](#)', webpage, nd.

<sup>103</sup> New Zealand Parliament, '[Have your say](#)', webpage, nd.

The Croatian Parliament Committee for Monitoring the National Anti-Corruption Strategy<sup>104</sup> was established in 2013, as part of a series of efforts to combat corruption in the country. The parliamentary committee comprises representatives from various sectors, including CSOs, trade unions, employers, businesses, academia and media. It provides a good example of a cross-sector platform for building a partnership approach between the Parliament and key stakeholders in joint monitoring implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy adopted by the parliament. The committee is responsible for scrutinising the quality of strategy implementation, identifying weaknesses and making recommendations to improve its effectiveness. The committee is chaired by a representative from opposition parties, which ensures the transparency and impartiality of its work. The members of the committee are appointed by the parliament and they serve a four-year term. The committee regularly publishes reports on its activities and the progress made in implementing the anti-corruption strategy.

## 10.1 Lessons learned

Despite the progress in past years in improving access to information about its work, the EP has been criticised for the lack of transparency in its legislative process, particularly regarding trilogue negotiations. In view of the current context, it should prioritise opening up these negotiations to public scrutiny, ensuring that citizens have access to relevant documents and information to actively participate in the decision-making process. The use of digital tools can significantly enhance public engagement in the legislative process. Examples from Brazil, such as the e-Democracia online portal and the Ulysses smart analysis platform, showcase the effectiveness of platforms that enable citizens to provide opinions, comments, and contributions to draft bills. The EP could develop similar tools to gather public input, encourage participation and make citizen inputs more valued and meaningful. To make those tools more effective, a strong administrative support should be ensured within the EP.

## 10.2 Recommendations and possible measures for the EP

Given general concerns about the EP legislative process' lack of transparency and especially the opacity of trilogues, recommendations for the EP's medium and long-term measures could include:

- **establishing a consultation portal with citizens**, similar to the one run by the European Commission, where citizens could express their concerns about the legislative files that are currently in the EP's procedure.
- **develop an app which allows citizens to follow EP legislative process and provide their comments in an easy, user-friendly way**, also considering the use of AI tool to process and structure citizens' inputs more effectively.
- **ending the secrecy surrounding trilogues by holding regular public briefings on progress in achieving compromises** with the European Commission and Council, especially in cases of non-controversial legislative files.
- **establishing a regular practice of citizen assemblies** to strengthen a genuine face-to-face engagement with representative samples of citizens and build public trust in the EP's work.
- **set up a forum for structured dialogue between the EP and CSOs** dealing with transparency and anti-corruption issues, as an additional mechanism for strengthening the accountability of the EP, but also serving as a useful forum for safeguarding civic space and recognising the important role of CSOs in mobilising citizen engagement in the EU democratic life.

<sup>104</sup> For more details about the work and sessions of the Committee, see Croatian Parliament, '[The National Council for Monitoring the Implementation of the Anti-Corruption Strategy](#)', webpage, nd.

## 11 Structures for oversight and enforcement of rules on transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption

The quality of institutional structures serving as oversight and enforcement mechanisms of parliamentary rules on transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption is crucial for ensuring that MPs comply with ethical standards. As already seen from previous chapters, in recent years, many countries have implemented various oversight and enforcement mechanisms to prevent unethical behaviour by MPs and to hold them accountable for any violations of ethical rules. The effectiveness of these mechanisms is essential as it directly impacts the level of compliance with ethical rules by MPs. Weak oversight and enforcement mechanisms can lead to a perception of impunity among MPs and thereby undermine public trust in the parliament and democratic institutions. Conversely, robust oversight and enforcement mechanisms can promote transparency and accountability, enhance public trust in the parliament and ensure that MPs are held accountable for their actions<sup>105</sup>.

This chapter analyses examples of oversight mechanisms in different countries, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. The brief analysis of these mechanisms will highlight the factors that contribute to their effectiveness and identify best practices that can be adapted and implemented in the EP context. The purpose of this overview is to demonstrate how the quality of oversight and enforcement mechanisms is directly linked to the compliance of MPs with ethical rules. The strengthening of these mechanisms can contribute to promoting a culture of integrity and transparency in the parliament and ensure that MPs are held accountable for their actions.

In general, the oversight and enforcement mechanisms for ethical rules vary across different countries. Below is a short overview of three groups of cases:

- (i) Independent oversight and enforcement bodies (France, Croatia and Canada);
- (ii) Joint work of independent investigation bodies and political bodies imposing sanctions (USA and UK); and
- (iii) Independent investigation bodies without enforcement powers (the Netherlands and Norway).

A separate case of the European Commission Independent Ethics Body overseeing compliance with the European Commission Members' Code of Conduct will also be briefly explored.

### 11.1 Independent oversight and enforcement bodies

In France, the HATVP<sup>106</sup> acts as an independent administrative authority with financial and administrative autonomy. Its executive board comprises a collegial body of 13 members responsible for making key decisions. The HATVP has investigative powers and can issue sanctions, including financial penalties (up to a maximum value of EUR 30 000), refer cases to the public prosecutor for criminal proceedings or to the national assembly for possible stripping of an MP's mandate and their suspension from parliament.

In Croatia, the Commission for Prevention of Conflict of Interest<sup>107</sup> is an independent body set up in 2004 that has investigative powers and can impose financial sanctions on MPs and other public officials at all

<sup>105</sup> J. Murphy and F. De Vrieze, [Guide for Parliaments: Independent Oversight Institutions](#), Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2020.

<sup>106</sup> High Authority for Transparency in Public Life, ['Ethic of Public Officials. Regulation of Lobbying'](#), webpage, 2023.

<sup>107</sup> Croatian's Commission on the Prevention of Conflict of Interest, ['Competencies'](#), webpage, 2023.

levels. The Commission President and four members are appointed by the parliament based on a public call<sup>108</sup> for a mandate of five years that could be renewed once. The Commission's decisions are binding and reported publicly, with detailed argumentation on the evidence collected.

In Canada, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner<sup>109</sup> is an independent officer within the House of Commons responsible for administering the Conflict of Interest Act for public office holders and the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons. The Commissioner provides independent direction and advice to MPs and federal public office holders, conducts investigations and, where necessary, makes use of appropriate sanctions to ensure full compliance with the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons and the Conflict of Interest Act.

## 11.2 Joint work of independent investigation bodies and political bodies imposing sanctions

The USA has two independent bodies to oversee ethical compliance, the OCE<sup>110</sup> and the Committee on Ethics (CE)<sup>111</sup>. The OCE consists of 8 private citizens, while the CE is a bipartisan oversight committee consisting of 10 members. The OCE conducts investigations and makes recommendations based on evidence, which is publicly available. The CE has key functions in ethics training and advice to House Members, officers as well as employees, investigating and adjudicating alleged violations along with reviewing financial disclosure statements. The CE can impose sanctions based on an OCE report.

The UK has the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards<sup>112</sup>, an independent officer of the House responsible for investigating complaints against MPs. The Committee of Standards is a cross-party committee that oversees the work of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and imposes sanctions (including a suspension or expulsion from the House of Commons).

## 11.3 Independent investigation bodies without enforcement powers

The Dutch Board on the Integrity of MPs investigates complaints regarding any breaches in the Code of Conduct by MPs<sup>113</sup>, but has no powers to impose sanctions, merely providing recommendations to relevant authorities for further action.

The Office of the Auditor General in Norway<sup>114</sup> has strong powers and acts as an external, independent body in investigating cases of breach of integrity, conflict of interest or corruption, forwarding its findings and recommendations to relevant authorities for further action.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the already established practice at the level of EU institutions – the Independent Ethical Committee set up in line with Article 12 of the Commission Decision of 31 January 2018 on a Code of Conduct for the Members of the European Commission<sup>115</sup>. This Committee advises the Commission on the proper application of the Code of Conduct, especially on whether

<sup>108</sup> Proven that they have expertise and experience, they are not members of political parties or running for executive or representative functions in past five years.

<sup>109</sup> Canadian's Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, '[What we do](#)', webpage, 2023.

<sup>110</sup> The Office of Congressional Ethics, '[About the OCE](#)', webpage, 2023.

<sup>111</sup> The Committee on Ethics, '[About CE](#)', webpage, 2023.

<sup>112</sup> UK's Parliament, '[Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards](#)', webpage, 2023.

<sup>113</sup> Dutch Parliament, '[Regulations on the Monitoring and Enforcement of the Code of Conduct for Members of the House of Representatives of the States-General](#)', House of Representatives of the States-General, 2023.

<sup>114</sup> Norway's Office of the Auditor General, '[About the OAG](#)', webpage, 2023.

<sup>115</sup> European Commission, '[Decision on a Code of Conduct for the Members of the European Commission \(2018/C 65/06\)](#)', C 65/7, 31 January 2018.

Commissioners' intended activities after leaving office are compatible with the treaties, but also on any other ethical question relating to the Code of Conduct for the Members of the European Commission, based on requests from the President of the Commission. The Committee consists of three members selected for their competence, experience, independence and professional qualities<sup>116</sup>. They are required to have an impeccable record of professional behaviour as well as experience in high-level functions in European, national or international institutions. Members are appointed by the Commission, on a proposal from the President. They need to sign a declaration on the absence of conflicts of interest. Their term is three years, renewable once. The secretarial support to the Committee is provided by the Commission. The deliberations of the Committee are confidential. The Commission Members or former Members concerned are expected to cooperate fully with the Committee, particularly by providing all the relevant additional information requested. They also have a possibility to be heard if the Committee considers issuing a negative opinion. According to Article 13 of the Code, the Commission publishes an annual report on the Code's application, including the Independent Ethical Committee's work. In general, while the existence of an independent ethics body advising the Commission can be considered as a positive step forward at the level of EU institutions, it nevertheless lacks its own investigative or enforcement powers and depends on the Commission President's willingness to ask for its advice and issue possible sanctions or reprimands. Furthermore, the Committee meets only twice a year and does not have its own staff or resources, but fully relies on the Commission's secretarial, administrative and financial support.

## 11.4 Lessons learned

Each country's oversight and enforcement mechanisms have their pros and cons. The examples from France, Croatia and Canada illustrate the importance of independence for an oversight authority and clear competencies to impose sanctions. The advantage of that option is potentially to create higher public trust in the work of these bodies and more effective links between the results of investigations and imposed sanctions. Conversely, as outside bodies, these may be in more difficult positions to promote the culture of integrity among members of the parliament and strengthen the ownership of MPs for reforms in the areas of transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption.

These examples, though, are not without faults and point to difficulties in not only establishing, but also sustaining bodies whose mission is to strengthen democratic integrity and accountability. For example, in February 2021, GONG a corruption watchdog in Croatia, warned GRECO that the Commission for Prevention of Conflict of Interest is under threat to be stripped of its powers and effectively marginalised. The High Administrative Court in Zagreb decided that the Commission had overstepped its authority in investigating officials for their conduct in performing official duties. GONG points to cases in which the Commission investigated Prime Minister Andrej Plenković and a former Zagreb mayor Milan Bandić<sup>117</sup>. Following Court rulings, a Law on the Prevention of Corruption was amended in a way that, from GONG's perspective, results in a weakening of the Commission and turns it into 'an administrative body which will mostly administer declarations of assets'<sup>118</sup>.

The US and UK examples combine independent oversight and investigative bodies as well as a bi-partisan, political body composed of MPs from major political parties which decides on sanctions. In the USA, the OCE's independence is ensured through its structure, staffing and transparency, but the CE is a bipartisan

<sup>116</sup> For more information on current and former members of the Committee, see European Commission, [The Independent Ethical Committee](#), webpage, nd.

<sup>117</sup> Gong, ['Pismo GRECO-u: Povjerenstvo ne smije biti uništeno'](#), webpage, 2 February 2021.

<sup>118</sup> Gong, ['Novim zakonom Povjerenstvo će postati beznačajno'](#), webpage, 11 October 2021.

committee that could potentially be influenced by politics. Similarly, the UK's Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards is an independent officer, but its Committee of Standards, which decides on sanctions is a cross-party committee that could also potentially be influenced by political agendas. Commissioner Kathryn Stone, whose term ended in January 2023, was exposed to criticism of conservative MPs when she published a highly critical report of cabinet minister Owen Paterson over lobbying. Stone recently revealed that she had to withstand not only personal attacks, but also attacks on the standards system itself<sup>119</sup>.

Concerns over breaches in conflict of interest rules has recently been raised regarding the appointment of Canadian interim commissioner for ethics and conflict of interests, indicating the importance of the integrity of the selection process for preserving the public trust in the work of this independent body<sup>120</sup>. Finally, the Netherlands' Board on the Integrity of MPs and Norway's Office of the Auditor General have mandates to provide recommendations but have no powers to impose sanctions. The lack of competence to impose any sanctions may be problematic for the EP context regarding public trust as well as the lack of a harmonised approach and cooperation with national enforcement authorities. Finally, the Independent Ethics Committee advising the European Commission is an example of an advisory body without proper investigative or enforcement powers, relying fully on the Commission for any follow-up sanctions in cases of non-compliance with the rules. In summary, while each country has its unique approach closely linked to its political context and tradition, the effectiveness of chosen oversight and enforcement mechanisms largely depends on their independence, transparency and the extent of their power to enforce ethical compliance.

Overall, this analysis confirms the advantages of establishing an independent EU ethics body, as already pointed out by Andrew Schmulow, Jeff Hauser and Alberto Alemanno in a recently published white paper, which unequivocally calls for the establishment of an EU ethics body 'by pooling together existing monitoring, investigatory, sanctioning as well as advisory powers'<sup>121</sup>.

## 11.5 Recommendations and possible measures for the EP

To supervise and implement all the recommendations made in this analysis, the EP/EU could best undertake this by establishing an independent monitoring body. Possible policy options together with medium and long-term measures could include:

- **strengthening the role of the Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members with a more precise mandate** for conducting investigations based on own initiative powers or complaints of individuals or media coverage, ensuring strong support to its work through engaging professional staff and improving its transparency.
- **setting up an independent EU ethics body**, with a high level of independence and clear investigation and enforcement powers.

<sup>119</sup> D. McGrath, "[Watch your back': Ex-standards commissioner tells of warning from Tory MP](#)", *Independent*, 29 March 2023.

<sup>120</sup> R. Aiello, "[Conservatives concerned over interim ethics commissioner's connection to Liberal cabinet minister](#)", *CTV News*, 30 March 2023.

<sup>121</sup> A. Schmulow, J. Hauser and A. Alemanno, [Constructing an EU Ethics Oversight Authority, A White Paper](#), *University of Wollongong Australia, Revolving Door Project Washington and HEC Paris*, 15 November 2022.

## 12 Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, this analysis has highlighted a significant variety of practices, experiences and challenges for developing and implementing the rules in intertwined areas of transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption within parliaments. It has generally confirmed the importance of solid and consistent enforcement of rules in these areas to maintain public trust in the democratic process in parliamentary systems.

More particularly, the analysis started by highlighting the importance of ensuring transparency and public oversight of investigation and enforcement activities to maintain the integrity and ethics of parliamentary representatives. Full disclosure of collected information and public access to findings from investigations allows CSOs, media and other representatives of the interested public to re-use any data on MP's integrity which can contribute to the effectiveness of established standards.

The next chapter discussed regulation of MP's outside activities and financial interests as a critical aspect of ensuring accountability and integrity in the political system. The level of transparency varies widely across countries, with some providing more rigorous and frequent disclosure requirements, while others have looser rules. As pointed out by some CSOs, it is important to ensure the consistency of descriptors used for the outside activities of MPs, as a pre-condition for effective monitoring and verification by independent bodies and the wider public.

The following chapter on the effective enforcement of the 'cooling-off'/'revolving door' rules pointed out the importance of an independent agency with the authority to investigate and sanction rule violations, while at the same time ensuring a high level of transparency and public access to relevant information on investigations and their outcomes.

The regulation of foreign lobbying in parliaments was addressed next as an issue of growing national security concern in many countries. The examples analysed pointed out the trends of comprehensive, cross-cutting regulation of foreign lobbying, both through general lobbying laws and a separate foreign agents' registration act, while at the same time avoiding unproportionate additional bureaucratic burden on foreign businesses, charities and other bodies acting in their own interests and not engaging in lobbying public officials.

The analysis has also highlighted the importance of clear rules for friendship groups in parliaments, including the need for greater transparency and disclosure of funding sources, gifts and donations received by friendship groups. This should be regarded as a precondition for adequate monitoring and accountability of these groups, ensuring that they are not compromised by external influences and their activities do not create conflicts of interest.

In addition, research findings emphasised the need for combining various preventive mechanisms, such as training on compliance with codes of conduct, individual confidential counselling on ethics rules and whistleblowing awareness raising for MPs, as a way of promoting the culture of integrity and accountability in parliaments.

Finally, the analysis has provided examples which illustrate the importance of creating independent oversight authority with clear investigation powers and competencies to impose sanctions. The advantage of that option is potentially the creation of higher public trust in the work of these bodies and more effective links between the results of investigations and imposed sanctions.

Based on insights from case studies analysed and considering the specific EP context, an overview of key recommendations and measures now follows to be considered by the EP when conducting its internal reform and improving rules on transparency, integrity, accountability and the fight against corruption:



- **strengthening the role of the Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members with a more precise mandate** for conducting investigations based on its own powers of initiative or complaints registered by individuals and media coverage, ensuring strong support to its work through engaging professional staff and improving its transparency.
- **changing the Rules of Procedures of the Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members to ensure full transparency and disclosure** of information on MP requests for interpretation of the code of conduct and content of the Committee's opinions/advice provided. This is in line with good practice already established at EU level through the publication of decisions and opinions of the Independent Ethics Committee set up by the Commission.
- **setting up an independent EU ethics body**, with a high level of independence and clear investigation and enforcement powers.
- **ensuring that a potential future independent EU ethics body operates in a fully transparent manner**, with public access to the findings of the investigation reports.
- **tightening the rules on disclosure of financial interests** with more detailed written evidence to be provided and regularly updated, at least annually.
- **setting up a single web portal with updated information on MEPs'** financial interests and outside activities.
- **introducing a compulsory publication of meetings of MEPs** with interest groups and lobbyists (also from third countries) and full compliance with the Transparency Register, namely 'no-registration-no meeting' rules, regardless of whether the meeting concerns the resolution any reports MEPs are involved with.
- **introducing the 'cooling-off' period rules for MEPs** with at least the same duration as members of the European Commission (two years), but at least equal to the time during which MEPs receive transitional allowances from the taxpayer (up to 24 months, depending on the length of service).
- **providing clear competencies to the future EU independent ethics body**, not only to oversee compliance with rules of MEPs' 'cooling off' period and 'revolving door', but also to demonstrate transparency by conducting investigations and sharing all their findings with the public.
- **revising the inter-institutional agreement on the Transparency Register** to cover the lobbying of various foreign entities with strict reporting and oversight rules, together with stricter measures with sufficient deterrent effect.
- **establishing a set of rules and guidelines that friendship groups must follow** – including the obligation to register and disclose their sources of funding and any gifts or donations received.
- **requiring that friendship groups engage in activities that are aligned only with the EU's foreign and security policy** objectives.
- **establishing a monitoring system to ensure that friendship groups comply** with the rules and guidelines set out by the EP. Furthermore, the EP could require that friendship groups report on their activities regularly. If the above are considered insufficient, **consider banning friendship groups from EP and require that all third countries interact with the EP through** its Committee for Foreign Affairs, existing official parliament delegations or other committees.
- **considering the introduction of stricter rules for the EP intergroups.**
- **implementing mandatory compliance and whistleblowing training programmes for all MEPs.** The training could cover issues such as conflicts of interest, transparency, accountability and the

proper use of parliamentary resources. This programme could also include case studies and discussions on whistleblowing, as well as provide information on the procedure for reporting any concerns about unethical or illegal behaviour.

- **establishing a harmonised approach and protocol for implementing EU whistle-blower protection rules by the EP** to encourage reporting of unethical or illegal behaviour. Along with mandatory training and awareness-raising activities, this can help improve compliance with codes of conduct and strengthen the integrity culture among MPs.
- **establishing a consultation portal with citizens**, similar to the one run by the European Commission, where citizens could express their concerns about the legislative files that are currently in the EP's procedure.
- **develop an app which allows citizens to follow EP legislative process and provide their comments in an easy, user-friendly way**, also considering the use of AI tool to process and structure citizens' inputs more effectively.
- **ending the secrecy surrounding trilogues by holding regular public briefings on progress in achieving compromises** with the European Commission and Council, especially in cases of non-controversial legislative files.
- **establishing a regular practice of citizen assemblies** to strengthen a genuine face-to-face engagement with representative samples of citizens and build public trust in the EP's work.
- **set up a forum for structured dialogue between the EP and CSOs** dealing with transparency and anti-corruption issues, as an additional mechanism for strengthening the accountability of the EP, but also serving as a useful forum for safeguarding civic space and recognising the important role of CSOs in mobilising citizen engagement in the EU democratic life.

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PE 702.588  
EP/EXPO/ING2/FWC/2019-01/LOT6/1/C/28

Print ISBN 978-92-848-0635-5 | doi: 10.2861/907 | QA-04-23-540-EN-C  
PDF ISBN 978-92-848-0634-8 | doi: 10.2861/2153 | QA-04-23-540-EN-N