



TEXTS ADOPTED

P9_TA(2023)0054

Following up on measures requested by Parliament to strengthen the integrity of European institutions

European Parliament resolution of 16 February 2023 on following up on measures requested by Parliament to strengthen the integrity of the European institutions (2023/2571(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the measures for strengthening integrity, independence and accountability adopted by its Conference of Presidents on 8 February 2023,
- having regard to its resolution of 15 December 2022 on suspicions of corruption from Qatar and the broader need for transparency and accountability in the European institutions¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 16 September 2021 on strengthening transparency and integrity in the EU institutions by setting up an independent EU ethics body²,
- having regard to the Commission President's 2022 State of the Union address of 14 September 2022 and to the 2023 Commission Work Programme,
- having regard to its decision of 27 April 2021 on the conclusion of an interinstitutional agreement between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, and the European Commission on a mandatory transparency register³,
- having regard to the Interinstitutional Agreement of 20 May 2021 between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on a mandatory transparency register⁴,
- having regard to the Decision of the European Parliament of 28 September 2005 adopting the Statute for Members of the European Parliament (2005/684/EC, Euratom)⁵,

¹ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2022)0448.

² OJ C 117, 11.3.2022, p. 159.

³ OJ C 506, 15.12.2021, p. 127.

⁴ OJ L 207, 11.6.2021, p. 1.

⁵ OJ L 262, 7.10.2005, p. 1.

- having regard to Rules 10 and 11 of its Rules of Procedure and to the Code of Conduct for Members of the European Parliament,
 - having regard to the Treaty on European Union, and in particular Article 29 thereof,
 - having regard to Rule 132(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas ongoing investigations led by the Belgian authorities have uncovered substantiated suspicions of corruption, money laundering and participation in a criminal organisation involving three sitting Members of the European Parliament and one former Member, as well as other staff, in particular by Morocco and Qatar, as well as other states;
- B. whereas on 15 December 2022, the European Parliament adopted by a large majority its resolution on suspicions of corruption from Qatar and the broader need for transparency and accountability in the European institutions; whereas the resolution called for a number of urgent measures to be adopted to strengthen the integrity, transparency and accountability of EU institutions;
- C. whereas the President of the European Parliament presented draft proposals on reforming Parliament’s ethics rules which were endorsed at a meeting of the Conference of Presidents in early January 2023;
- D. whereas transparency and accountability are a precondition for citizens’ trust in EU institutions and whereas, therefore, corruption constitutes a serious attack on European democracy; whereas the recent revelations have led to greater public interest in the measures in place to guarantee the transparency, independence and accountability of Members of the European Parliament and in the other institutions’ measures in this area; whereas public trust in the European Parliament has been shaken by allegations of corruption by foreign interests;
- E. whereas it is key to ensure that democratic processes are not captured by private and external interests and that citizens’ rights are fully respected; whereas the EU institutions and their officials must protect the integrity of the EU’s democratic principles and values;
- F. whereas the internal monitoring and alert mechanisms of the EU institutions have dramatically failed to detect the ongoing corruption and foreign interference; whereas the existing safeguards and sanction mechanisms have proven ineffective in deterring the aforementioned criminal behaviour;
1. Reiterates its deep shock and condemnation of the recent allegations of corruption against current and former Members of the European Parliament and reaffirms its zero-tolerance policy on corruption in any shape and at any level; insists that the magnitude of the ongoing investigations requires Parliament and the EU institutions to react with unequivocal unity and unwavering resolve, in an inter-institutional and non-partisan manner and by taking strong and immediate measures;
 2. Notes that not a single financial penalty has ever been imposed for a breach of the Code of Conduct of Members despite at least 26 breaches having been documented in the annual reports of the Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members; considers it of the utmost importance to ensure that the current transparency and accountability rules

are fully implemented, including financial sanctions for breaches of the Code of Conduct for Members of the European Parliament; calls for a review of the list of sanctionable activities for Members in order to help improve compliance with their obligations and responsibilities, including a revision of Rule 176 of the EP Rules of Procedure, to establish a strong and visible framework which is enforceable and dissuasive;

3. Notes that laws are essential to fight against corruption and criminal behaviours but cannot alone prevent criminal behaviour by individual Members, former Members, staff or officials of the European Parliament or the other European institutions; insists that potential loopholes in the institutions' rules and procedures that facilitate unlawful behaviour need to be detected and closed;
4. Notes that all EU institutions have mechanisms in place to address transparency and accountability; highlights that these existing mechanisms and tools need to be reviewed and revised where appropriate, including with a view to detecting vulnerability to foreign interference;
5. Notes that in the case of the Members and former Members under investigation, NGOs were allegedly used as vectors of foreign interference in European parliamentarism; urges a review of existing regulations with the aim of increasing transparency and accountability of NGOs, in particular related to governance, budget, foreign influence and persons of significant control; underlines that NGOs receiving money from third parties whose registration in the Transparency Register is not required need to disclose the sources of their funding by specifying the same information as all regular registrants; requests that if this information is not disclosed, any public EU funding to the NGO in question should be frozen immediately; calls for comprehensive financial pre-screening of NGOs before they are listed on the EU transparency register, the publishing of contractual agreements between the European Commission and NGOs and a clear definition of NGOs allowed to register under the transparency register and eligible to receive EU funding;
6. Reiterates its full support for the proposals it put forward to strengthen transparency, integrity and accountability, as set out in its resolution of 15 December 2022;
7. Notes that the initial proposals aimed at strengthening integrity, independence and accountability put forward by the President of the European Parliament on 8 February 2023 are a necessary first step towards acting on the urgent need for the institution to ensure the accountability, transparency and integrity of EU institutions; notes that the plan adopted by the Conference of Presidents covers some measures voted by Parliament in December 2022 and does not exclude the consideration of other measures as part of a wider reform process; commits to follow through with all measures adopted in the December resolution and restates its ambition to take all necessary measures to guarantee the accountability, transparency and integrity of the EU institutions; commits, henceforth, to an open and transparent process in order to demonstrate to the public a strong commitment to reform and gain back citizens' trust;
8. Calls for the full implementation of all measures and demands adopted in the December resolution without delay; calls for additional, more extensive measures to be taken, in particular on whistleblower protection, monitoring, reporting and oversight; calls for decisions and deliberations in regard to transparency, accountability and integrity to be

taken as part of public meetings, thus ensuring accountability and oversight as a matter of principle, unless a legitimate and pressing concern requires confidentiality;

9. Entrusts the Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the European Union, including Disinformation, and the Strengthening of Integrity, Transparency and Accountability in the European Parliament (INGE 2) with the task of identifying potential flaws in Parliament's rules and of making proposals for reforms, in line with the December resolution, building on the work of and cooperating with the Committee on Constitutional Affairs and the best practices of other parliaments;
10. Reiterates, in particular, its long-standing call for the Commission to put forward a proposal to set up an independent and effective ethics body as soon as possible, in line with Parliament's resolution of 16 September 2021; deplores the fact that the Commission has still not made such a proposal, despite its inclusion by the Commission President in the mission letter of Commissioner Věra Jourová in 2019, and regrets that the action plan of the President of the European Parliament does not include any measures to speed up the process; urges the Commission to come forward with its proposal to establish an independent ethics body by March 2023 at the latest, in line with Parliament's resolution of February 2022 on the establishment of an independent ethics body;
11. Regrets that the measures adopted do not include proposals for a credible reform of the Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members; commits to reforming the Advisory Committee in line with its proposal for an independent ethics body, until the independent EU ethics body is able to take over the Advisory Committee's current role, allowing it to scrutinise Members on its own initiative, allowing substantiated complaints to be raised by anyone, introducing proactive checks of Members' declarations of interests and ensuring a more effective, transparent system of stricter sanctions against Members and former Members;
12. Recommends additional vetting for parliamentary assistants and staff working on sensitive policy fields, particularly in foreign affairs, security and defence; is of the opinion that the staff working in such fields could be considered as politically exposed persons according to the definition in the Anti-Money Laundering Directive; is of the opinion that trips paid for by third countries should be subject to prior approval by a dedicated body of the European Parliament;
13. Considers essential the introduction of a 'cooling-off period' for Members for a period of six months immediately following the end of their respective mandates and believes that the period should be defined taking into account rules applicable for example to former Commissioners when taking up lobbying activities related to the European Parliament;
14. Commits to guaranteeing adequate resources for the secretariat of the Transparency Register to ensure that the entries on the lobbying activities of interest groups, lobbies and NGOs can be checked for accuracy and that lobbying becomes more transparent;
15. Calls for a ban on Members carrying out remunerated side activities that could create a conflict of interest with their mandate;
16. Welcomes the measures adopted to increase the transparency of financial declarations

by Members, which require more information on Members' side-jobs and outside activities, including the exact amount of side-income they earn and the clients on whose behalf they work for payment; reiterates its call for the consideration of additional safeguards against corruption, such as a declaration of assets by Members at the beginning and the end of each mandate;

17. Calls for the extension to accredited parliamentary assistants and staff of the obligation for Members working on specific reports or resolutions, or in situations in which Members have an active role and clear and immediate influence in the evolution of specific files, to declare all scheduled meetings with diplomatic representatives of third countries and third parties covered by the scope of the Transparency Register, except in specific cases such as when the naming of an individual or organisation would undermine the protection of the life or the integrity of any individual, when other compelling reasons of public interest require confidentiality, for meetings with natural persons acting in a strictly personal capacity and not in association with others,; or for spontaneous meetings or meetings of a purely private or social character;
18. Notes that in its December resolution, Parliament called for a revision of the Staff Regulations, in particular Article 22(c) thereof, in order to align it with the standards of the Whistleblower Directive; reiterates this call and calls, furthermore, for the revision of the whistleblower rules applicable to assistants;
19. Welcomes the measures adopted with regard to representatives of Qatar following the revelations; reiterates, however, its deep concern about the allegations of bribery by Moroccan authorities and calls for the implementation of the same measures for representatives of Morocco; reiterates its commitment to fully investigate and address cases of corruption involving countries seeking to buy influence in Parliament;
20. Reiterates with utmost determination that the European Parliament should continue to speak up against human rights violations;
21. Deplores the use of the corruption scandal to launch a misguided smearing campaign against NGOs and spread misinformation on the lack of transparency of their funding; reiterates its unwavering support for civil society organisations that speak up for human rights and the environment in full respect of transparency and integrity rules of the European institutions;
22. Believes that the existing ethical framework for Commissioners must be expanded in order to close existing legislative gaps, such as the absence of a Commissioners' statute; underlines that this process is closely linked with parliamentary scrutiny and oversight; is therefore of the opinion that any such Commissioners' statute must be drawn up in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure; calls on the Commission to present a proposal for a Commissioners' statute as part of the package on the defence of European democracy;
23. Calls on the Commission and the Council to cooperate with Parliament on working towards carrying out the reforms needed to ensure prevention and preparedness, to reinforce the transparency and accountability of EU institutions and to fight against corruption;
24. Supports urgent action to implement all measures already endorsed by Parliament; calls

on the INGE 2 Committee and Parliament's other responsible bodies to revise the rules on ethics as soon as possible, and at the latest before summer, and calls for a public assessment of progress made within six months;

25. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the Bureau of the European Parliament.