Independent Ethics Body: improving transparency and integrity in EU institutions

- Investigations complementary to other EU institutions and bodies
- Proactive guidance and recommendations on ethical matters, conflicts of interest
- Investigation of conflicts of interest of Commissioners-designate

The new EU Ethics Body would be able to initiate investigations on possible conflicts of interest or “revolving door” cases for Commissioners, MEPs and staff.

In a report endorsed by the Constitutional Affairs Committee on Wednesday with 18 votes in favour, 8 against, and 1 abstention, MEPs set out their views on the establishment of an independent EU Ethics Body.

The new EU Ethics Body would propose and advise on ethics rules for Commissioners, MEPs and staff of the participating institutions, before, during and in some cases after their term of office or employment. This new Body would also raise awareness and provide guidance on ethical matters, as well as have a compliance and advisory role with the ability to issue recommendations, including on conflicts of interest. It would work in collaboration with national authorities and other competent EU bodies and agencies, such as OLAF and the EPPO.

It would apply a uniform definition of ‘conflict of interest’, to be defined as a conflict between the public duty (i.e. professional and official accountability) and private interests, in which the public official or decision-maker has private interests that could improperly influence the performance of the activities and decisions in their responsibility.

MEPs propose an interinstitutional agreement (IIA) to set up the new body for the Parliament and the Commission, which would be open to all EU institutions, agencies and bodies.

Investigations

The EU Ethics Body should have the right to start an investigation based on information received from third parties, such as journalists, NGOs, whistle-blowers or the European Ombudsman - using anonymity where appropriate. While the duty of deciding on conflicts of interest...
The interest of Commissioners-designate prior to hearings remains a competence of the Committee on Legal Affairs, the proposed ethics Body should be able to access administrative documents, to help the Committee decide. The Body’s work would also be complementary to Parliament’s right of inquiry.

Composition

The Body should comprise nine members, three each for the Commission and Parliament, and three from among former judges of the CJEU, former members of the Court of Auditors, and former EU Ombudsmen. Former MEPs and Commissioners should not make up more than a third of the membership, which would be renewed by a third every two years.

Quote

Rapporteur Daniel Freund (Greens/EFA, DE) said: "This is an important step towards eliminating conflicts of interest from the EU institutions, as self-regulation has failed to prevent scandals. Independent oversight can finally help enforce the rules in a credible way, close the revolving doors between the institutions and lobbying, and help regain citizens’ trust. By establishing an EU Ethics Body, the EU can learn from the examples of France and Canada and set the new standard for Europe."

Background

Before the 2019 European elections, all lead candidates for the position of European Commission President signed a pledge in favour of the establishment of an Independent Ethics Body common to all EU institutions. The Commission President Ursula von der Leyen made the same promise before her election and entrusted Vice-President Věra Jourová with the task.
Further information
Committee on Constitutional Affairs
Procedure file

Independent Ethics Body: presentations and debate on transparency and integrity in the EU

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Free photos, videos and audio material

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