Resolution on the establishment of an independent EU ethics body

2023/2555(RSP) - 16/02/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 388 votes to 72, with 76 abstentions, a resolution on the establishment of an independent EU ethics body.

The text adopted in plenary was tabled by the S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA and the Left groups.

The President of the Commission committed to establishing an ethics body in her political guidelines in July 2019. The recent corruption revelations have rightly increased public and political scrutiny of the current standards and practices within Parliament and other institutions. The independence, transparency and accountability of public institutions and their elected representatives, Commissioners and officials are of the utmost importance for fostering citizens' trust, which is necessary for democratic institutions to function legitimately.

Although ethics standards already exist within the EU institutions, they are very fragmented and rely solely on a self-regulatory approach. The creation of an independent ethics body could contribute to strengthening trust in the EU institutions and their democratic legitimacy.

In its resolution, Parliament reiterated its deep shock at and condemnation of the alleged acts of corruption in the European Parliament and states its zero-tolerance policy on corruption in any shape or form. It reiterated its support for the establishment of an independent ethics body to restore citizens' trust in the EU institutions.

The Commission is urged to submit, by the **end of March 2023**, its proposal to establish an independent ethics body for the European Parliament and the Commission that is open to the participation of all institutions and agencies of the EU, and to finalise the negotiations on the body's structure, governance, name, composition and powers, as well as on any other issues that might arise, before the summer recess.

According to Parliament, the new EU ethics body should:

- work on establishing a common definition of conflicts of interest for the EU institutions on the basis of the highest standards. A clear distinction between criminal acts, breaches of institutional rules, and unethical behaviour needs to be made;

- be delegated a list of agreed tasks to propose and advise on cases and rules for Commissioners, Members of the European Parliament and staff of the participating institutions before, during and in some instances after their term of office or service in line with the applicable rules;

- have the right to start investigations on its own and to conduct on-the-spot and records-based investigations using the information that it has collected or that it has received from third parties;

- have the possibility to check the veracity of declarations of financial interests and assets;

- protect whistleblowers, in particular European public officials, so that they can express their concerns about possible violations of rules without the fear of reprisals;

- have the possibility to engage in cooperation and information exchange with relevant EU bodies such as the European Anti-Fraud Office, the European Public Prosecutor's Office, the European Ombudsman and the European Court of Auditors, within their respective mandates.

Moreover, the resolution stressed that in the Qatargate case, NGOs were allegedly used as vectors of foreign interference in European democracy. In this regard, Parliament urged a review of existing regulations with the aim of increasing transparency and the accountability of interest representatives in their interactions with Members.

The resolution also calls on the Bureau, in the interim, to immediately revise Parliament's Internal Rules Implementing Article 22c of the Staff Regulations to bring them in line with the protections provided for in the Whistleblower Directive.

As regards the conflicts of interest, Parliament calls for a ban on Members of the European Parliament performing paid side jobs or activities on behalf of organisations or individuals covered by the scope of the Transparency Register.

Lastly, Parliament suggested reinforcing and making full use of the sanctions procedures within the European Parliament without delay, while working towards the establishment of an independent ethics body.