Resolution on the establishment of the EU ethics body

2023/2741(RSP) - 12/07/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 365 votes to 270, with 20 abstentions, the resolution on the establishment of the EU ethics body.

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

The recent corruption revelations have rightly increased public and political scrutiny of the current standards and practices within Parliament and other institutions. The current ethics framework is fragmented across the EU institutions, agencies and bodies, which have different rules, processes and levels of enforcement, creating a complex system that is difficult to enforce and is undermining the trust of EU citizens.

Parliament noted that the Commission's proposal for the establishment of an interinstitutional ethics body is unsatisfactory and not ambitious enough, falling short of a genuine, independent ethics body as envisaged in Parliament's resolution of 16 September 2021 and reiterated in its resolution of 16 February 2023. Furthermore, it regretted the Commission's long delay in presenting the proposal despite the commitment made by the President of the Commission in her political guidelines when she was first elected.

As regards the composition of the body, the resolution regretted that the Commission proposed that five independent experts be involved only as observers rather than as full members. Parliament's proposal of 2021 envisaged a nine-person body composed of independent ethics experts, instead of one member from each participating institution.

Parliament recalled that the ethics body should be:

- able to investigate on its own initiative alleged breaches of ethical rules by current or former Members and staff 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 and should have the power to request administrative documents, while respecting the immunity of Members, their freedom of mandate and safeguarding the applicable procedural guarantees;

- empowered to deal with individual cases upon request from a participating institution or upon the proposal of one or more members of the body, including its independent experts;

- able to issue recommendations for sanctions to the responsible authorities of the respective participating institutions; proposes that its recommendations be made public together with the decision taken by the respective institution or after a deadline;

- able to receive and assess declarations of interest and assets from participating institutions when applicable;

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

Parliament regretted that the Commission's proposal covers members of the participating institutions but does not concern staff, who are subject to common obligations in the Staff Regulations. It called for staff of the participating institutions to be included within the scope of the ethics body's work.

Lastly, Parliament emphasised that in recent corruption allegations, NGOs appear to have been used as vectors of foreign interference. In this regard, it called for an urgent review of existing regulations with the aim of making NGOs more transparent and accountable. It also stressed the need for comprehensive financial pre-screening of these entities before they are listed in the Transparency Register.