Recommendations for reform of European Parliament’s rules on transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption

2023/2034(INI) - 13/07/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 441 votes to 70, with 71 abstentions, a resolution on recommendations for reform of European Parliament’s rules on transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption.

General observations

Members denounced the alleged attempts by Qatar and Morocco to influence Members, former Members and Parliament staff through acts of corruption, which constitute **serious foreign interference** in the EU’s democratic processes. They condemned the alleged acts of corruption, money laundering and participation in a criminal organisation by three Members of the European Parliament, one former Member and one accredited parliamentary assistant in exchange for influence over Parliament’s decisions. They are committed to working at all levels to **strengthen the rules and culture on integrity, transparency and accountability** in Parliament and called for stronger measures to address all potential conflicts of interest. The need for solidarity between the Member States and the EU institutions is needed to be able to fight effectively against this type of activity.

The resolution insisted that potential loopholes in the institutions’ rules and procedures that allow unlawful behaviour need to be systematically identified and thoroughly closed by effective reforms and control capacities; highlights that some current mechanisms need to be reviewed with the aim of preventing conflicts of interest, enhancing transparency, and preventing, deterring and detecting foreign interference and corruption.

Code of conduct

Parliament has called for a **rapid review** of the Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament, including the effectiveness of sanctions. The Code should protect **whistleblowers** more effectively. It should introduce additional disclosure requirements in Members' declarations of financial interests and ensure a more effective and transparent system for Members and former Members of the European Parliament working for outside interests.

Members gave their support to the **14 points** approved by Parliament's Conference of Presidents following a proposal by President Metsola to reform its Rules of Procedure and procedures and called for these points to be translated into concrete action as soon as possible.

Reinforcing the security culture within Parliament

Members called for **mandatory, proper and regular training** on security, interference, ethical standards, compliance and integrity for all Members and their offices and for all Parliament staff, making them aware that they are potential targets of foreign state and non-state actors.

As regards private contractors, particular attention should be paid to companies owned by non-EU companies or states, such as Russia and China.

Access to Parliament buildings by visitors, including representatives of non-EU countries, lobbyists and NGOs, should be controlled more strictly. Foreign interference and other illegitimate influence has at times taken the form of offering well-paid positions to former Members of the European Parliament. The EU institutions should treat potential cases of 'revolving doors' more stringently in order to prevent conflicts of interest.

Relations with non-EU countries and entities: official missions, trips and friendship groups

Parliament called for special monitoring by the EU Transparency Register of registered interest representatives from countries considered to be at risk on the basis of **objective criteria** such as: (a) the existence of a programme of intellectual property theft directed at the Union and its Member States, (b) the existence of legislation compelling national non-state actors to engage in intelligence activities, (c) the systematic violation of human rights, (d) the existence of a revisionist policy on the current international legal order, (e) the extraterritorial application of an authoritarian ideology, and (f) the detection of interference activities or conflicts of interest in the European institutions.

Missions to non-EU countries can be used as an opportunity to exert undue influence on Members. Members proposed tightening up the rules on official missions on behalf of Parliament. In addition, Members should only take part in election observation missions that have been decided and approved by the Conference of Presidents.

Stricter rules should be put in place for trips by officials which are paid for by foreign countries and entities. Members suggested **limiting the threshold for gifts to Members to EUR 100**.

Integrity of parliamentary work

Parliament pointed out that countries such as Qatar, Morocco, but also China, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, Serbia and Turkey have invested heavily in lobbying efforts in Brussels. It stressed that foreign interference must not go unchallenged, and called for the suspension of all legislative and non-legislative proposals on cooperation with the authorities of states that attempt to interfere, as well as the **suspension** of all funding for EU programmes in favour of the national authorities of such countries.

Members recommended that the resolutions voted on by Parliament be accompanied by an **annex containing a list of persons or institutions** met by rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs. It should be made compulsory for all Members to **publish all scheduled meetings with third parties** (interest representatives).

Members called for much stricter implementation, application and monitoring of compliance with the current provisions of the Interinstitutional Agreement on a **transparency register** within Parliament. They insisted on the need for transparency, by means of registration in the EU Transparency Register, regarding the funding received by interest representatives, such as NGOs, think tanks and consultancy services, that wish to be involved with Parliament, in particular when they request support or sponsorship from Members for organising meetings on Parliament's premises, when they are invited to hearings, exchanges of views or any other scheduled appearances, or when they participate in a study or research on behalf of Parliament.

Members called for a **full financial review** of all interest groups, NGOs and consultancies prior to their inclusion on the transparency register, and a review of all interest representatives currently on the register. In addition, Members should be more transparent about any paid work they may be doing, with revised rules on the disclosure of amounts of side income earned, the position in which it is earned and the clients on whose behalf Members work for payment.

Cooperation with other EU and national institutions

Members reiterated the call for the swift establishment of an **independent EU ethics body** and committed to concluding interinstitutional negotiations by the end of 2023. The body's mandate should include scrutiny, on a case-by-case basis, of Members' and former Members' intentions to work for any non-EU government or any entity controlled by a non-EU government during their term of office or after the end of their term. Members are called on to uphold Parliament's values and standards and not accept employment by authoritarian, non-democratic governments or related state-owned entities after the end of their term.

The rules applying to former Members engaging in **lobbying activities** falling under the Transparency Register should be clarified. It is recommended that the ethics body be given appropriate investigative powers, including the ability to act on its own initiative, and the power to request administrative documents, while respecting the immunity of Members.

Lastly, Members insisted that the list of sanctionable activities for Members should be revised on the basis of this report.