

EP Rules of Procedure, Rule 9: code of conduct for Members

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The committee adopted the report by Gérard ONESTA (Greens/EFA, FR) on amending Parliament's Rules of Procedure with regard to standards for the conduct of MEPs. The aim was to adapt existing provisions to recent cases of disturbance and to set clear rules for imposing sanctions on an MEP.

Two new rules set out the basic principles which should underpin these provisions: ensuring that Members' conduct was "characterised by mutual respect", that it respected the "dignity of Parliament" and did not "compromise the smooth conduct of parliamentary business or disturb the peace and quiet of any of Parliament's premises", while at the same time ensuring that the application of this rule did not "detract from the liveliness of parliamentary debates nor undermine Members' freedom of speech".

In a new Annex on guidelines for the interpretation of standards of conduct, a distinction was drawn between "visual actions" (which may be tolerated) and those which "actively disrupt any parliamentary activity whatsoever". It was also specified that "the President or his representatives" would exercise disciplinary powers over offending MEPs.

The report introduced a new chapter into the Rules of Procedure entitled "Measures to be taken in the event of non-compliance with the standards for the conduct of Members". In this way, it would be made clear that the measures covered are not restricted to the conduct of "sittings" but instead apply to all parliamentary business and all Parliament's premises. The rules applicable to the plenary would therefore apply to meetings of committees and delegations. Accordingly, the powers granted to the EP President would also be vested in the chairs of bodies, committees and delegations.

The amendments to the provisions on "Order in the Chamber" give slightly stronger powers to the President, in that they enable him to deny an offending Member the right to speak and also enable him to exclude that person from the Chamber immediately, without a second call to order, "in cases of exceptional seriousness".

The committee amended Rule 147 which was given a new title ("Penalties" instead of "Exclusion of Members") and now included a list of possible sanctions, including forfeiture of entitlement to the daily subsistence allowance for a period of between two and ten days and temporary suspension from parliamentary activities for a similar period (without prejudice, however, to the MEP's right to vote). The President could also submit to the Conference of Presidents a request for suspension or removal from one or more of the elected offices held by the Member in Parliament. Assessment of a Member's conduct with a view to deciding on appropriate penalties would take account of "its exceptional, recurrent or permanent nature and of its seriousness".

Finally, provision was made for an internal appeal procedure, suspending the application of the penalty imposed by the President.