

EP Pushes for Increased Transparency and Integrity after Qatargate

Thomas Wahl

The European Parliament (EP) has pursued further steps in order to ensure better rules on transparency, accountability and integrity of the European institutions after allegations of corruption from Qatar had occurred in 2022 (→ [eucrim 4/2022, 242-243](#)).

On 8 February 2023, European Parliament group leaders [endorsed the reform plan](#), proposed by EP President *Roberta Metsola*, at the Conference of Presidents in Brussels. The reform plans address short-term measures and include, *inter alia*:

- A cooling off period for MEPs who wish to lobby Parliament when they are no longer in office;
- Mandatory registration in the Transparency Register for any event with participation of interest representatives in the EP;
- All Members, assistants and other staff, who have an active role on a report or resolution are required to declare scheduled meetings with diplomatic representatives of third countries, and with third parties covered by the scope of the transparency register (specific exemptions will be allowed);
- Revised declaration form on financial interests, that would include clearer information on Members' side jobs and outside activities;
- Reinforcement of cooperation with national authorities to boost the fight against corruption.

On 14 February 2023, the EP [extended the task of the special committee](#) on foreign interference (ING2), which is henceforth named "special committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation, and the strengthening of integrity, transparency and accountability in the European Parliament". It will be tasked, among other things, with identifying the shortcomings in Parliament's rules on transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption. ING2 will also have to propose measures for the medium- and longer-term and issue recommendations for reforms.

On 16 February 2023, the EP's [plenary adopted two resolutions](#) by which further improvements are called upon. The [first resolution](#) lists several follow-up measures on integrity, such as:

- Ensuring full implementation of the current rules on transparency and accountability in accordance of the Code of Conduct for MEPs, including financial sanctions for breaches of the Code of Conduct;
- Introducing more sanctionable activities into the Code of Conduct;
- Increasing transparency and accountability of NGOs by reviewing existing regulations in order to prevent NGOs from being used as vectors of foreign interference in European parliamentarism;

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- Establishing additional vetting for parliamentary assistants and staff working on sensitive policy fields, particularly in foreign affairs, security and defence;
- Introducing a ban on MEPs who carry out remunerated side activities that could create a conflict of interest with their mandate;
- Obliging MEPs, their staff and Parliament employees to declare work meetings with third country diplomats, where they would have “an active role and clear and immediate influence” in Parliament’s work, except where this could put those involved in danger or jeopardise public interest;
- Aligning internal rules with the Whistleblower Directive.

In its [second resolution](#), MEPs call for losing no more time to establish an independent EU ethics body as already proposed in September 2021. The Commission is urged to submit a legislative proposal in this regard by the end of March 2023. The resolution finally outlines some elements and the structure of the new EU ethics body. According to the MEPs, the body should, *inter alia*, have the right to start investigations on its own and to conduct on-the-spot and records-based investigations. In addition, it should also have the possibility to check the veracity of declarations of financial interests and assets.

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