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Enforcement set up by MEPs, for MEPs: inside the European Parliament's toothless Advisory Committee

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With [scandal](#) after [scandal](#) engulfing the European Parliament, how can the public be assured their elected representatives are acting in their interest? On paper, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are bound by a Code of Conduct regarding integrity and transparency. This sets out guiding principles for MEPs, underlining that their work must be in the public interest. It also defines conflicts of interest and rules on the declaration of private interests, publication of lobbying meetings and gifts.

But what happens if an MEP refuses to respect the Code of Conduct? What if an MEP holds a key role in EU legislation affecting the car industry, while having a second job as an [automotive consultant](#)? What if an MEP declares a third-party-funded trip [1,254 days late](#)?

This is where the Parliament's Advisory Committee could—in theory—step in. This committee is responsible for assessing all alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct, as well as its interpretation. Where's the catch? The Advisory Committee is composed entirely of MEPs themselves. External oversight is non-existent.

What could go wrong?

With a self-policing model, the advisory committee is primed for inaction from the get-go. On paper, its role is meant to be proactive—but in practice, it has no real investigative capacity to deal with breaches to the Code.

This has left it up to outsiders to monitor and call out unethical activity. Exactly one year ago, we submitted a [complaint](#) to the advisory committee on a potential MEP conflict of interest—the EPP MEP Stefan Köhler, who works on agricultural legislation in the Parliament, while working as the regional president of the Bavarian Farmers' association. And in December 2025, we submitted a second [complaint](#) on EPP MEP [Jörgen Warborn](#). He works on the EU's Omnibus package, while

simultaneously presiding over SME Europe, an EPP-affiliated organisation advocating for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Yet despite both the severity of these risks, and the huge amount of time elapsed, we've had radio silence from the committee. What are we to expect from a secretive governing body that is set up by MEPs, composed of MEPs, to monitor MEPs? Is it any wonder misconduct goes essentially unpunished?

The slap-on-the-wrist committee

Even if the Advisory Committee were to establish a breach of the Code of Conduct, it has no sanctioning powers, which rest solely with the President of the Parliament. The potential penalties are severely limited, consisting solely of minimal measures such as reprimands, limited suspensions from Parliamentary activities, and some docked allowances. None of these are adequate deterrents of unethical behaviour in anyone mandated to represent citizens.

It would be preferable for MEPs to be fined, with financial penalties proportionate to the severity of the misconduct. But the very Code of Conduct it has been set up to enforce does not allow for those kinds of penalties. And who adopted the Code of Conduct in the first place? MEPs themselves, naturally.

MEP-led non-reforms

It would take a scandal the size of Qatargate to lead MEPs to set out to change their internal rules, including those on the Advisory Committee. Technically, it now has a more proactive role in monitoring MEPs' compliance with the Code. More importantly, according to the Code, alleged breaches "may be signalled directly" to the Advisory Committee, and "the Bureau may adopt rules on the procedure for the signalling of alleged breaches".

The European Ombudsman itself has also criticised the Advisory Committee, remarking that [there is no guidance](#) available to the public on how to direct "signals" to the Advisory Committee, and that the European Parliament should keep citizens informed on the status of their complaint. Given that we have no updates on the outcome of our complaints, it doesn't seem to be taking these seriously, either.

Either way, these new cosmetic rules would do nothing to change the Advisory Committee's

fundamental flaw: it is not independent and does not have a strong mandate.

Creating effective oversight

Self-policing simply does not work, and past scandals are the evidence to prove it: Parliament's Advisory Committee is not fit for purpose. If it is to fulfil its mission, it needs wholesale reform: it must proactively monitor MEPs' conduct, and instate truly deterrent rules in the Code of Conduct, with independent expertise and enforcement. And until this occurs, it must finally follow and implement the Ombudsman's recommendations. Otherwise, it will remain a vehicle for MEPs to rubber-stamp their own indiscretions. Business as usual, then.

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