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MEPs miss opportunity to improve ethics regime in Parliament

Pia Engelbrecht-Bogdanov · Wednesday, September 13th, 2023

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At today's plenary vote, Members of the European Parliament have failed to make necessary changes to the ethics system and put an end to the culture of impunity among MEPs that has been exposed by one of the largest corruption scandals to hit Parliament. Although there will now be much needed and stronger measures on lobby transparency as well as a new obligation to submit asset declarations, the new rules fail to tackle known structural problems in the Parliament's ethics regime. Important overhaul, such as the need for sanctions that serve as deterrents, and real independent oversight of Members' conduct, were not addressed. Lucrative side jobs by MEPs with organisations on the EU's lobby register will continue to be allowed, enhancing perceived and real risks of conflicts of interest. Most incredibly, some of the changes voted today water down existing disclosure rules on MEPs' declarations of financial interests.

Shari Hinds, Policy Officer for EU Political Integrity, said:

“It is disappointing that MEPs, in light of the largest corruption scandal in the Parliament's history, have missed a crucial opportunity to bring about meaningful ethical reforms. Although there are some positive improvements to the current rules, they have equally succeeded in weakening current provisions on the transparency of declarations, and they did not support much needed reforms on MEP side jobs. Taken as a whole, these adopted measures demonstrate MEPs are not prepared to make real reforms and prove they are committed to ensuring a scandal like Qatargate will not happen again.”

Given that these reforms were based on President Metsola's initial 14-objective plan, there is still time to tackle the bigger issues ahead of the European Parliament elections in 2024. MEPs should not let this opportunity go to waste.

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