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Parliament squanders chance to reform MEP allowance

Nicholas Aiossa · Tuesday, July 3rd, 2018

Last night the European Parliament's [Bureau](#) voted down proposals to introduce basic financial accountability mechanisms to MEPs' General Expenditure Allowance (GEA).

The GEA is meant for office and representation expenses related to their work as a MEP, such as rental costs for constituency office space, phone bills, or office supplies. Every month each MEPs has €4416 directly deposited into their personal bank accounts by default. Currently there is absolutely no transparency nor financial controls required of MEPs' spending of the GEA. Not one receipt is required and not even the Parliament knows if MEPs are spending this public money within the [rules](#) and [guidelines](#) in place. The spending under this budget line amounts to just under €40 million annually, cumulatively for all MEPs.

There have been repeated calls for increased transparency and accountability of how MEPs are spending the GEA, from both [citizens](#) and [civil society](#). An investigation from journalists from the [MEPs project](#) exposed a host of questionable arrangements from MEPs renting office space from family members, political parties or having offices located in their own houses. Many did not have any premise at all. In response, the Parliament constituted a Bureau working group to reform the GEA. Despite a year of [secret meetings](#), the Bureau voted last night, with a majority formed between EPP and S&D members, to essentially keep the status quo. They have voted down mandatory requirements to return unused GEA amounts at the end of the mandate, keep receipts, have their expenditures audited, or publish this information. The only mandatory provision would require MEPs to keep a separate bank account.

“It is absolutely scandalous that Parliament has rejected even basic measures on transparency and accountability of how MEPs are spending millions in taxpayers' money. The Parliament's Bureau has just squandered its only chance to bring about any meaningful reform to the General Expenditure Allowance before the 2019 elections.” – Nick Aiossa, Transparency International EU

The Parliament has clarified that MEPs who wish to externally audit this allowance and to publish this spending information, will have public resources at their disposal to do so.

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