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Transparency International calls on the European Parliament to open the books on member expenses

Alex Johnson · Friday, November 20th, 2015

Transparency International calls on the European Parliament to release documents detailing how its members (MEPs) spend monthly expense allowances funded by the European taxpayer.

Journalists from every EU country have brought a case against the European Parliament to the European Court of Justice today for their refusal to release documents relating to MEPs' expenses. Transparency International EU supports this initiative and has submitted its own access to documents request for information on MEP allowances.

MEPs can earn more than 30,000 EUR a month of allowances to pay for staff and expenses. The journalists claim the Parliament has repeatedly refused to grant requests for information on how MEPs spend their allowances. These allowances, which include office and staff expenses, have been the subject of a number of formal investigations over the years, from the MEP jailed for using office expenses to buy a car and cases of wine to alleged fraud over paying domestic political party staff.

"The European Parliament lags far behind other parliamentary bodies, such as Sweden and the UK, when it comes to the transparency of parliamentary expenses," said Carl Dolan, Director of Transparency International EU. "There are clear risks of fraud involving taxpayer money that even the Parliament's own internal watchdog has highlighted. The Parliament should be routinely providing information on how these public funds are spent rather than putting obstacles in the way of journalists."

As early as 2008 the European Parliament's own internal audit report identified high risks in certain allowances, citing the example of a MEP contracting his own company as a service provider. However, the Parliament still refuses to increase transparency and allow for proper public scrutiny of these allowances.

NOTES:
Details on MEPs allowances can be found on the European Parliament website.

MEPs can claim 21,379 EUR per MEP, per month in staff allowance. They receive a daily allowance when attending the Parliament in Brussels or Strasbourg of 306 EUR. MEPs receive a lump sum of 4,320 EUR for General Expenditure Allowance.

The access to documents request Transparency International EU has just submitted is for information on General Expenditure Allowance [1], Travel Expenses [2], Assistance from Personal Staff [3] and Subsistence Allowance [4].

[1] General Expenditure Allowance, as laid out in Articles 25-28 of the Decision of The Bureau of 2008 (2009/C 159/01), including a list of MEPs who have reimbursed the Parliament unused portions of this allowance.

[2] Travel Expenses, as laid out in Articles 10–23 of the Decision of The Bureau of 2008 (2009/C 159/01).

[3] Assistance from Personal Staff, as laid out in Articles 33–42 of the Decision of The Bureau of 2008 (2009/C 159/01), including a detailed list of the names of all current and past service providers employed by Members.

[4] Subsistence Allowance, as laid out in Article 24 of the Decision of The Bureau of 2008 (2009/C 159/01).

This entry was posted on Friday, November 20th, 2015 at 10:31 am