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Three years since Qatargate: has the European Parliament learned its lesson?

Pia Engelbrecht-Bogdanov · Tuesday, December 9th, 2025

Three years ago, on Anti-Corruption Day no less, the so-called Qatargate scandal broke. Belgian, Greek, and Italian authorities uncovered 1.5 million euros in cash, stashed across many properties—and even hidden in [suitcases](#)—exposing the biggest scandal ever to hit the Parliament. This would reveal a cash-for-influence scheme that linked MEPs and ex-MEPs to third countries, namely Morocco and Qatar, giving the scandal its now-notorious name.

The scandal shocked the European Parliament to its core and further weakened trust in the EU institutions. In her initial reaction to the scandal, the European Parliament's President Roberta Metsola declared Qatargate a “[test of our values and of our systems](#)” and that Parliament would “[meet this test head on](#)”. Tough words are about as tough as the European Parliament's reaction ever became: the European Parliament has simply [failed](#) to introduce the reforms needed to prevent similar scandals. The system remains largely unchanged in the places it matters most: oversight, monitoring, and sanctioning. The Parliament remains susceptible to corruption as a result.

A striking example is the Parliament's Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members, which is meant to oversee MEPs' compliance with ethics standards. But this Committee is composed entirely of MEPs themselves: it is simply a vehicle for MEPs to supervise their own conduct, without *any* external oversight. Although its mandate has been expanded on paper, allowing citizens to submit complaints and giving it a more proactive role, the Committee still lacks real investigative powers and—critically—is still composed solely of MEPs. As a result, it remains structurally incapable of enforcing ethics rules. Transparency International EU has already used its new complaint mechanism several times, including in a clear [conflict-of-interest case involving an MEP](#). Yet, to date, no meaningful follow-up has taken place. As has so often been the case, what looks like reform has, in practice, delivered very little.

Given these persistent weaknesses, it has not come as a surprise that new allegations have continued to emerge. Take, for example, [the allegations of Russian influence](#) in the European Parliament, or the allegations of [bribery involving the Chinese tech giant Huawei](#). And this might only be the tip of the iceberg, given how Parliament still [fails to meaningfully protect whistleblowers](#).

Other troubling developments since the Qatargate affair include the allegations that the Identity and Democracy (ID) Group systematically [misappropriated millions of euros in EU funds](#). Similar practices [may exist in the Patriots for Europe \(PfE\) Group](#), underlining how urgently the Parliament's internal integrity system needs reform. This is particularly striking given that those responsible for overseeing the ID Group funds appear to hold the same positions within the PfE Group.

Nevertheless, MEPs continue to block meaningful reform. In May last year, the European Parliament—at long last—signed the agreement between EU institutions to establish a European Ethics Body. Ideally, this body would have served as an independent watchdog, monitoring and sanctioning MEP behaviour. But the Ethics Body's mandate is [severely limited](#), with it mainly tasked with developing common minimum standards across the institutions, essentially serving as a forum of exchange on ethics issues. However, even this tepid agreement has still not been implemented, and the Body remains non-operational due to internal boycotts within Parliament, [led by the European People's Party](#) and far-right groups.

Over the past year, rather than strengthening their own ethics rules and enabling the Ethics Body to function, these groups have turned their attention towards [scrutinising NGOs](#). This is a diversion tactic: shifting focus toward civil society created a chilling environment for those actually holding the European Parliament to account, while leaving Parliament's own integrity challenges largely untouched.

At the three-year anniversary of the biggest European Parliament corruption scandal in history, it is clear that far too little has changed. Instead of taking meaningful steps to bolster integrity and ethics, Parliament continues to block reforms, leaving loopholes open to foreign influence and internal mismanagement. Establishing a genuine culture of integrity at the heart of European democracy is essential, and requires robust ethics standards, effective oversight and sanctions that deter misconduct. That will only change if MEPs finally take matters into their own hands, and change the system that enables them.

This entry was posted on Tuesday, December 9th, 2025 at 5:20 pm