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Uber lobbying scandal shows European Commission ethics rules are not up to scratch

Lucinda Pearson · Monday, July 11th, 2022

Transparency International EU expresses its deep concern over reports that former Commissioner Neelie Kroes secretly lobbied on behalf of Uber during her mandatory 18-month cooling off period after leaving the European Commission and calls for an independent investigation into the case as well as for an overhaul of the way ethics breaches are policed and sanctioned.

The Guardian [reported](#), based on leaked Uber files, that Kroes helped to organise a series of meetings between the Silicon-Valley giant and senior politicians, including As she had been responsible for the digital portfolio as a Commissioner, her apparent decision to ignore the Commission’s decision would appear to constitute a clear breach of the Commissioner [Code of Conduct](#).

The clandestine lobbying may have also put her in breach of [article 245](#) of the Treaty, which imposes a duty of good behaviour on current and former Commissioners (“When entering upon their duties they shall give a solemn undertaking that, both during and after their term of office, they will respect the obligations arising therefrom”).

What the Kroes scandal makes clear once again is that the current self-policing system of ethics for present and former-Commissioners isn’t fit for purpose, as we pointed out in our [integrity study](#) of the institution last year.

Transparency International EU therefore calls for an immediate and independent investigation into these allegations, as well as for the urgent establishment of an independent EU Ethics Body, as proposed by President von der Leyen at the start of her mandate. Such a body would be able to investigate and sanction EU policy-makers suspected of flouting ethics and integrity rules without political interference. The proposal for an ethics body is currently stalled.

Vitor Teixeira, Senior Policy Officer at Transparency International EU, said: “It’s essential that there is an immediate and independent investigation into these serious alleged ethics breaches by former Commissioner Kroes, and that any breaches of her duties as a former Commissioner are sanctioned. At the same time the institutions have to get their act together and make sure there is an independent ethics body in place before the next European Parliament elections, or they will risk losing the trust of citizens.”

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