

Transparency International EU

European Elections Manifesto

Key priorities

- The EU institutions must strengthen their [ethics and integrity frameworks](#), including by ensuring effective monitoring, oversight and enforcement.
- The EU must step up the fight against [illicit financial flows and promote greater financial and business integrity](#).
- The EU must defend the [rule of law against internal and external threats](#). Civic space must be protected.

Specific measures

[Improve the transparency and integrity of EU institutions](#)

Only proper transparency and integrity can ensure that European citizens can meaningfully engage in the decision-making process, and that EU institutions are accountable, ethical, and efficient. The Qatargate scandal has shown that the strengthening of institutional ethical frameworks and regaining citizen trust is paramount for all European institutions, particularly the Parliament.

The lack of EU institution transparency has been a long-standing issue, especially in relation to the Council, which is often considered a “black box”. Institutions should therefore proactively introduce citizen-friendly websites with all legislative documents, as well as integrate open data formats. Institutions should ensure more transparency during the legislative process, including that of Member States’ positions, in line with recent rulings from the Court of Justice of the EU. Without that requisite transparency it is both impossible to engage in the decision-making process and hold national governments accountable for decisions that take in Brussels behind closed doors.

Transparency alone cannot solve the integrity loopholes of the European institutions. This is why, in the next legislative term, the institutions must make [the necessary reforms](#) to improve their anti-corruption and integrity frameworks and introduce stronger rules on conflicts of interest, whistleblowing protections, financial management of MEP allowances, revolving doors, and lobbying activities. These rules should be

independently monitored to detect possible breaches and to carry out proper investigations. The newly-established [Ethics Body](#) should be given a proper mandate to investigate and sanction ethical violations by members of the institutions. Any breaches of the rules should be complemented by a stronger sanctions regime that would serve as a deterrent for non-compliance.

Introduce an EU Interest Representatives Regulation

Lobbying is a part of any healthy democracy. It allows a wide range of stakeholders to be consulted when public officials take decisions, leading to more informed and better policy outcomes. But with fewer than half of the EU Member States having some form of rules governing lobbying activities, there are rife opportunities for undue influence, from both foreign and domestic actors. This means that not everyone is conducting their lobbying activities in a transparent and ethical manner across the single market. It is vital to create a transparent level playing field, where all actors involved in influencing public policy face the same ruleset. This would require the EU to be more ambitious: we must move away from a haphazard approach to regulating lobbying, to a framework based on common standards. Legislation that would harmonise existing lobby registers, and create new registries in Member States, as well as allow for more transparency from interest representatives, would be a significant step forward. An EU Representatives Regulation will allow citizens to know who is influencing policies they are affected by.

Create a European Asset Registry

Criminals, kleptocrats and members of organised crime groups often channel their ill-gotten wealth into high value assets, such as yachts, art works, jewellery, or real estate. However, more often than not, a significant share of their wealth finds its way into financial assets, providing a convenient avenue to obscure the true owners of these holdings. The Commission, together with the national authorities, must therefore develop a digital system in which information about asset ownership is collected and available via a single digital access point. These registries should cover luxury physical assets, financial holdings, and real estate, ensuring seamless and prompt access for competent authorities across interconnected databases. Such registers are essential to curbing the influx of illicit flows and cracking down on tax evasion effectively.

A comprehensive strategy to tackle corruption in the EU

The EU must adopt a new and comprehensive strategy to tackle corruption, protect its financial interests, and strengthen and utilise their arsenal of legislative and administrative instruments. The Council and Parliament should adopt a robust Anti-

Corruption Directive that has strong preventive measures, includes the crime of grand corruption and protects victims of corruption. The mandate of the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) must be extended to cover all EU Member States, and institutional autonomy must be ensured. The public procurement directives and funding instruments must be revised to close current loopholes, and to include common rules on open governance, data standards and proactive transparency of public spending. The EU must further leverage its debarment system to ensure economic operators that are found of fraudulent and corrupt practices are excluded from EU funding. The EU's anti-fraud agency, OLAF, should be given greater powers to investigate EU members and officials and must be granted access to MEP offices. All of the EU investigative and enforcement bodies and agencies must be given the requisite resources, budget, and institutional autonomy to carry out their respective mandates. The EU, led by the Commission, must continue to meaningfully engage in the self-review processes on the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). The EU institutions must lead by example when it comes to the transparency and financial management of public resources. Finally, the EU must also future-proof its anti-corruption policies, as artificial intelligence is poised to become the next enabler for power holders seeking illicit gains. The possibility of corrupt design, application or manipulation of AI must be taken be considered in future reviews of the European AI act.

Support Ukraine with a transparent, accountable, and inclusive reconstruction process

The EU must redouble its efforts to support Ukraine in the face of Russia's war of aggression. In particular, the EU's sanctions response has been far from enough. It must support Ukraine by imposing a credible and robust sanctions regime, greatly expanding its scope of those sanctioned. It should also place greater focus on targeting those that facilitate sanctions circumvention. Sanctions must be enforced effectively, and national authorities currently do not possess neither the financial resources nor political will to enforce adopted sanctions. The EU must therefore grant national authorities the significant resources they need to carry out their mandates.

Tentative discussions are taking place around the globe on a future reconstruction process that would funnel hundreds of billions of euros into infrastructure projects to Ukraine over a short time span. Reconstruction should be inherently tied to progress on enlargement. The already adopted Ukraine facility and the reform programme of the

so-called "Ukraine plan" must be treated as a part of larger efforts that see funding from multiple sources. This would include the return of confiscated Russian state assets to victim populations. The EU must seek to maximise the transparency and accountability of post-war reconstruction by including civil society in the decision-making process. It must further dedicate funding for cross-border projects that can help Ukraine as well as other accession countries to build long-lasting partnerships across the continent. In doing so, it must build the capacities of national, regional and local authorities, as well as other stakeholders, to ensure these reforms are maintained.

A credible enlargement process with a focus on rule of law and grand corruption

Enlargement is a strategic geopolitical and democratic imperative. It is essential that the current political impetus to reignite the enlargement process remain within the EU institutions and Member States. At the same time, accession countries must address serious shortcomings in the areas of rule of law, the fight against corruption and the independence of public institutions and the judiciary. It is not simply the EU itself that demands this, but also the citizens and civil society of the countries in question, who see the conditions attached to EU membership as leverage for achieving meaningful domestic reform. Transposition of the EU's body of legislation and jurisprudence (the "acquis") is not enough. Candidate countries must also tackle state capture and grand corruption. The Commission should expand the scope of their annual rule of law reports past four candidate countries, to include all candidate countries. The EU needs to leverage the enlargement processes and to work with local civil society to help the countries of the Western Balkans and the Eastern Neighbourhood to succeed in their processes of democratic and societal transformation.

Safeguard the rule of law in the Union

In recent years, the EU has experienced an escalating rule of law crisis wherein the values of democracy and political integrity have been seriously undermined in several Member States. Attacks to the rule of law have emerged in the form of high-level corruption and the abuse of power, including worrying attempts to weaken plural and independent media. In response, the EU has created additional instruments, both preventive and punitive. The conditionality regulation, first used against Hungary, suspends EU funds until systemic rule of law deficiencies are addressed. The Commission's annual rule of law assessments of the 27 Member States are accompanied by country-specific recommendations. Despite these tools, rule of law problems continue to exist in the Member States. It is therefore up to the EU to use its instruments to stop the serious

breaches of EU values that continue to be observed in some member states: these existing tools should be used concretely. The rule of law reports must have more robust and detailed recommendations that should be concretely followed up the Commission. The EU does not need to wait years for the rule of law situation to deteriorate to dire state-captured conditions, as it did with Hungary. The Commission and Council should trigger the conditionality regulation in proportional responses to other Member States that have identifiable rule of law deficiencies. Finally, when measures are taken, the negotiations and decision-making processes of the fulfilment of these rule of law conditions must be transparent, objective, and free from politicisation.

EU-wide protection of civic space

Civil society organisations, journalists and rights defenders play a key role in identifying and exposing corruption and other societal problems, making them effective checks on abuse of power and injustice. In recent times, civil society has experience increasing pressure and even threats, trends which are more pronounced in countries facing democratic decline. For European democracies to thrive, the strengthening of civic space is paramount. To achieve this, the EU must introduce an EU civic package of legislative and non-legislative measures to protect civil society, activists and human rights defenders, as well as ensure adequate and consistent public funding for civil society. Amidst challenges such as democratic backsliding and rule of law issues, nurturing a robust civic space is imperative for fostering healthy democracies, facilitating widespread civic participation, and upholding fundamental rights. The EU's commitment to protecting and empowering civil society should be instrumental in preserving the integrity of democratic values and principles.

The EU as a champion of climate integrity

Political corruption plays a significant role in watering down or blocking climate policies across the world. Lobbyists operating in the shadows, unmanaged conflicts of interest and the revolving door all favour those that eschew transparency and accountability. This is not only true at EU level, but even more so in international forums. The latest United Nations Climate Change Conference saw a record number of representatives from fossil fuel industry, putting ever more pressure on delaying a binding timeline for a complete phase-out. As the EU itself comes under pressure from politicians across the spectrum to halt its transition towards a sustainable economy, the EU should protect its landmark climate policy, the European Green Deal, to advocate consistently for more transparency, integrity and accountability both at home and abroad. First, EU institutions must

introduce higher transparency and integrity standards in its own policymaking on climate, to prevent undue influence and policy capture. As the single largest trade bloc in the world, the EU must also leverage its geopolitical power in multilateral forums to become a champion of climate integrity, setting the course for transparent and accountable climate policies in the coming years.

The Commission must be become a true Guardian of the Treaties

As the guardian of the treaties, it is the European Commission's responsibility to ensure Member States adhere to the values and laws of the Union and properly transpose and implement Union legislation. Yet there are countless examples of laws not being implemented and values being disregarded with little or no consequences from the Commission. The next mandate should witness greater monitoring of Member State adherence to Union law and, when necessary, swifter and more robust consequences for non-compliance. Infringement procedures and existing instruments should be utilised more, and additional tools for the Commission should be adopted to address this widespread problem.