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Letter | 13.01.2023

Greens/EFA Group propose transparency and integrity measures

Greens/EFA letter to EP President Metsola

Dear President,

The recent events and revelations exposing the weaknesses of our Institution to corruption, bribery and foreign interference need to be addressed through specific and ambitious measures. We welcome your initiative on this and we would like to suggest additional measures aimed at reinforcing transparency, integrity and monitoring and oversight, including through enhanced protection for whistleblowers.

Transparency and public oversight are imperative for a functioning democracy strongly anchored in the rule of law and we need to act now.

With this in mind, the Greens/EFA welcome your proposal as a necessary first step for the work that lies ahead of us. However, our actions should not lack ambition. This is why we are proposing the below 8-point action plan of additional measures aimed at further strengthening transparency and oversight of our institution.

The Greens/EFA call for:

1. Ensuring that the revision of the European Parliament's ethics rules is carried out under full **public scrutiny and democratic oversight**. This is why the Greens/EFA were calling for the establishment of a Special Committee with a strong mandate on transparency and anti-corruption: we take note of the decision of the Conference of Presidents to directly lead the work on the reforms, but call for specific measures to ensure full public scrutiny and democratic oversight around the work of our Institution on this matter, as we cannot allow this important work to be carried out in camera;

2. Significantly **enhancing whistleblower protection** for staff members and APAs, by immediately revising Parliament’s Internal Rules Implementing Article 22c of the Staff Regulations to bring them in line with the protections provided for in the Whistleblower Directive and by amending the Staff Regulations, especially Article 22c thereof, in order to align them with the standards of the Whistleblower Directive; objective 10 of the proposal submitted to the Conference of Presidents lacks ambition and remains extremely insufficient to ensure protection for those denouncing wrongdoings;

3. Reforming the **transparency register** to make it mandatory for all organisations **and third countries representatives** lobbying the EU institutions and introducing more stringent transparency rules, mapping foreign funding for EU-related lobbying, and ensuring an entry which allows for the identification of funding from foreign governments and entities acting on their behalf; meetings of Members, APAs and staff with third parties related to a report or resolution of the European Parliament should be duly published, while exceptions should be envisaged for whistleblowers and human rights and environmental defenders at risk; objectives 3 and 6 of the proposal submitted to the Conference of Presidents fail to add third country representatives to the transparency register, which would be a crucial step to ensure more stringent transparency rules for all those lobbying the EP;

4. The establishment of an **ethics body** with the power to investigate all EU institutions, bodies and agencies, with the necessary financial means and staff to carry out its tasks fully; while it is mentioned in objective 11 of the proposal submitted to the Conference of President that Parliament has already requested the setting up of an ethics body, we need to appoint EP lead negotiators and ensure that the negotiations for an interinstitutional agreement on setting up an independent EU ethics body can urgently start;

5. A strong and **independent oversight mechanism**, established through a full **reform of the Advisory Committee on the Code of Conduct of Members**, to ensure the enforcement and monitoring of obligations, including **with the participation of external experts**, and coupled with the establishment of a **complaint mechanism** for anyone to report potential violations; the proposal submitted to the Conference of Presidents lacks ambition in this respect and its objective 11 merely refers to the need to strengthen the Advisory Committee, without directly linking this to the imperative need for a reinforcement of monitoring and oversight, including by external and independent experts; ultimately, the newly stablished Ethics Body should take over the role of the Advisory Committee;

6. **Sanctions for MEPs not complying with ethics, rules and regulations**: a clear and enhanced sanctions regime needs to be in place and transparently enforced and not applied only by the President discretionally; revising the list of sanctionable activities, as proposed in objective 14 of the document submitted to the Conference of Presidents will not be sufficient, if the President can continue to apply discretion on whether sanctions would be applied in specific cases; in particular, specific sanctions, including financial sanctions should result from violations of the Code of Conduct and full transparency on sanctions that are applied should be ensured for the public;

7. Specific **obligations for Members to declare their assets** at the beginning and end of each mandate, to offer additional safeguards against corruption; **side jobs, gifts and travels** not paid for by the European Parliament must be duly declared by MEPs, publicly accessible and monitored in order to avoid conflict of interest; in any case, paid work for organisations in the scope of the transparency register should not be allowed; objectives 2, 8 and 9 of the proposal submitted to the Conference of President should significantly be strengthened in this regard;

8. The introduction of a **cooling off period** for former MEPs to ensure that they cannot use their position to influence policy; we welcome that this is included as part of objective 1 of the proposal submitted to the Conference of Presidents;

Finally, we would like to highlight the importance for our institution to continue **acting in support of civil society, journalists, academics and human rights and environmental defenders**, who risk their lives globally in defence of democracy rule of law and human rights. In this respect we would like to stress that urgency resolutions are a precious if not the main human rights tool the European

Parliament has at its disposal, a tool which needs to be preserved and even strengthened, not undermined, as we fear objective 12 of the proposal presented to the Conference of President would ultimately do.

Terry REINTKE

Philippe LAMBERTS

Co-Presidents of the Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament

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Attached documents

GreensEFA letter on transparency and integrity measures

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