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International Anti-Corruption Day

Greens/EFA call for urgent improvements in the EU and Member States' integrity systems

On the occasion of International Anti-Corruption Day, the Greens/EFA group is highlighting the most urgent measures that need to be taken to ensure integrity in the EU institutions and Member States. The figures are well-known: 70% of EU citizens believe that there is corruption in the EU institutions, and 80% think that there is corruption in their own countries. What's worse is that only 5% of citizens actually think that corruption is decreasing.

What is corruption?

In summary, corruption is the **abuse of power for private gain**. Most people tend to equate corruption with bribery (receiving money in return for influence). But scandals such as the few cases of a handful of MEPs accepting cash for amendments are in fact rare. What we should be concerned about is more political corruption including more subtle conflicts of interest that can still impede public representatives from fully defending the common interest. Corruption is a problem both within the EU institutions and at the national level in the Member States. The European Commission estimates that every year €120bn is lost due to corruption. While 80% of EU funds are actually spent by the Member States, the EU can and should do more to control the spending of these funds, and the institutions themselves suffer from deficiencies in the way risks of conflicts of interest are prevented, managed and held to account. **What are (some of) the different types of corruption risks in the EU? Opacity in EU law-making and lobbying** The lack of transparency in the way EU officials and lobbyists interact in Brussels means that there is scope for conflicts of interest to arise undetected, and for risks of corruption to appear. The current system for lobby transparency in the EU is voluntary and the information that we have about the impact of lobbyists is both inaccurate and incomplete. **Poorly managed conflicts of interest** Conflicts of interest can arise when public officials have family or business interests in the topics they are dealing with, as this may affect their decision-making. Conflicts of interest can also arise via the revolving door, especially if job offers are made while public officials are still in office. The EU institutions have adopted rules on conflicts of interest but there is a lack of enforcement of these rules. An Advisory Committee of five MEPs gives recommendations to the President of the Parliament for sanctions. So MEPs are supposed to judge colleagues, often from the same party. This means there are conflicts of interest when judging conflicts of interest. **Lack of protection for whistle-blowers** Whistle-blowers are people that uncover corrupt or immoral behaviour in their workplaces. Currently there is a lack of protection for whistle-blowers at both EU and Member State level, meaning that most whistle-blowers so far have lost their jobs and careers as a result. There is no comprehensive system for protecting EU whistle-blowers, and there are only a few Member States that have whistle-blower laws. **Cash-for-influence** The two most widely

reported cases of corruption in the EU occurred in the previous European Parliament and European Commission. In one case, three MEPs were caught on tape accepting €100,000 in exchange for tabling amendments presented by lobbyists. One of these people is now in jail. In another case, the European Commissioner for Health, John Dalli, was forced to resign amid accusations that a friend of his was requesting €60m from tobacco companies in exchange for the access to the Commissioner, who was dealing with tobacco legislation. The case is still shrouded in controversy with some people suggesting that the Commissioner was set up and others accusing the European Anti-Fraud Office of not properly conducting the inquiry. **Misuse of EU funds** There are many irregularities in the spending of EU funds, with some well-known cases of money being spent on airports with no airplanes or other unnecessary infrastructure projects.

How are the Greens/EFA MEPs working to fight corruption in the EU and its Member States?

The Greens/EFA group is committed to improving transparency and fighting against corruption in the EU and its Member States. We have made transparency and democracy one of our six priority areas and are working on the following issues: **European Parliament own-initiative report on Transparency, Integrity and Accountability** The European Parliament has appointed German Green MEP Sven Giegold as rapporteur for an own-initiative report on transparency, accountability and integrity in the EU institutions. In this report, we seek to put forward 48 proposals for defending integrity against all sorts of political corruption and increasing the transparency and accessibility of the decision-making process for the ordinary citizen.

- See the draft report

Transparency in EU law-making and lobbying



- The Greens/EFA is the first group in the European Parliament to automatically publish information about our meetings with lobbyists using a new open-source tool.
- Click here to find out more
- We are also pushing for improvements to be made to the official EU lobby register so that transparency becomes an obligation for lobbyists and so the Council of the EU is also included.

Improving the prevention and detection of conflicts of interest

- We are calling for the Code of Conduct for MEPs to be amended so that MEPs are banned from having second incomes that could lead to a conflict of interest. We also propose that MEPs that earn an outside income should have their remuneration by Parliament reduced by half of what they earn from external sources.
- We want the European Parliament's ethical Advisory Committee to be reformed to include independent experts and to have the power to take final decisions. Declarations of financial interest

should also be properly checked by European Parliament staff.

- We think that MEPs should be obliged to respect a "cooling-off period" of three years so that ex-MEPs are forbidden from lobbying their former colleagues in areas that they used to work in. European Commission staff should also have longer cooling-off periods, and revolving door rules should be extended to all Commission staff involved in law-making.

Legal protection for whistle-blowers We are calling on the European Commission to prepare a Directive to ensure minimum standards of protection for whistle-blowers across Europe. We are also including confidentiality waivers in some of our contracts with external suppliers so that they can blow the whistle if they identify irregularities. **Preventing corruption in the spending of EU funds**

- We believe that companies found guilty of corruption should be prevented from profiting from EU funds or receiving EU contracts for at least three years.

- We are investigating corruption in how cohesion funds are spent by the EU member states and believe improvements are necessary in the way this spending is monitored.

European Political Party finances and elections We want to ensure that the oversight of European Political Party financing is carried out even more independently, in order to minimise the conflicts of interest that can arise when political parties are in charge of controlling their own finances. We also want to ensure that those who are found guilty of corruption are banned from running for office in the European Parliament for 10 years. **European Parliament intergroup on Integrity, Transparency, Corruption and Organised crime** Green MEP Benedek Javor is one of the co-chairs of the internal Green Transparency and Democracy Working Group and he is also a member of the European Parliament intergroup (a cross-party group) on Integrity, Transparency, Corruption and Organised Crime. In these working groups we coordinate activities and initiatives that seek to increase transparency and decrease corruption risks in the EU. Benedek is also the rapporteur this year for the Annual Report on the Protection of the EU's Financial Interests, which will include many recommendations on how to improve integrity in the EU institutions. **What do you think?** We will continue to act in these and many more key areas, and hope to count on your support in the fight against corruption! Write to us on Twitter with your ideas for further improvements on https://twitter.com/GreensEP

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Press release

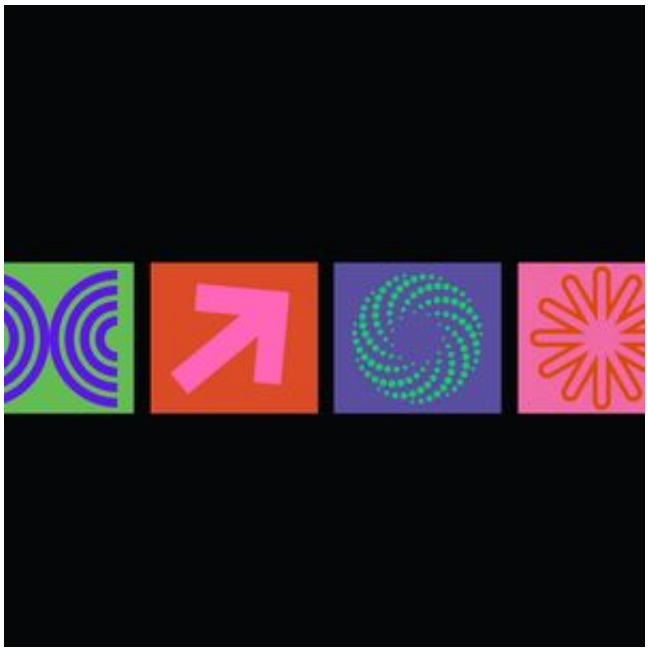
Jan van der Wolf



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