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Press release | 29.06.2011

EP transparency reform

Important step towards transparency but stricter monitoring system and sanctions must follow

In the wake of the recent MEP cash-for-amendments scandal the EP committed to strengthen its transparency and anti-corruption rules. The working group set up by EP president Buzek to draft a new code of conduct for MEPs finished its work today (1). The Greens have welcomed the outcome as an important step forward for transparency but underlined the need to back up the new code with legislation on sanctions. Commenting on the outcome, Greens/EFA representative on the working group **Claude Turmes** MEP said:

"This new code of conduct is an important step towards more transparency and addressing potential conflict of interests in the European Parliament, and, as such, reducing the possibilities for corruption. The Greens would naturally have preferred more far-reaching rules but believe that thanks to last minute changes the new code of conduct represents a major improvement on the status quo. In order to ensure the new code has teeth, it is now important that it is followed up with a well staffed monitoring system and a tighter sanction regime through new EU legislation.

"For the first time, MEPs will have to provide a detailed declaration of their financial interests, listing the source of the income and place it in four income ranges. The Greens insisted on this provision in spite of the strong opposition of other political groups. The new measures will provide much greater transparency than hitherto and enable better scrutiny of MEPs' second activities (2).

"Crucially, at the insistence of the Greens, MEPs will no longer be able to hold second jobs that involve lobbying on EU policies: this is an important measure, which directly addresses one of the key problems raised by the Sunday Times investigation on MEP corruption. MEPs with conflicts of interest will also be prevented from holding key positions in the European Parliament, such as being committee chairs or legislative/non-legislative draftspersons (rapporteurs).

"The strengthening of sanctions against MEPs who break the code of conduct and engage in unethical activities is a crucial next step. This was beyond the remit of the working group, as it will require a new legislative proposal, however the Greens will continue to work to ensure a legislation on sanctions is initiated as swiftly as possible (3).

"Another important outstanding issue is the question of the 'legislative footprint', detailing which lobbyists EP legislators have met in compiling legislative reports. While the new code of conduct includes provisions for a

voluntary 'legislative footprint', we will continue to work to ensure this becomes mandatory."

(1) The final meeting of the working group was yesterday evening (28 June); the final text of the code of conduct resulting from that meeting was circulated today.

(2) MEPs will have to provide details of all their secondary activities, outlining not just where/for whom the activities are carried out but also the level of financial income accrued. The incomes are to be listed in four categories, starting from €500 per month and rising to €10,000 - similar to the system in the German Bundestag.

(3) Discussions are already underway in the EP's constitutional and legal affairs committees with a view to initiating legislation on sanctions.

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Claude Turmes

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