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in the European Parliament

Green Briefing: What happened with ethics and integrity? The vote in the Constitutional Affairs Committee

On 8 November 2016 members of the European Parliament's constitutional affairs committee voted on proposals to change the internal rules of procedure of the Parliament, which contain the ethics rules - or code of conduct - that applies to elected EU Parliament representatives and which seeks to prevent conflicts of interest.

This briefing gives an overview of the positive and negative parts of the vote.

The next steps in the process are to have the new rules voted on by the full Parliament in plenary in December 2016. The changes to the rules need to be adopted by absolute majority and the new rules are expected to come into force on 1st January 2017.

For this reason, neither the gains nor the losses in this briefing should be taken for granted. Those interested in campaigning to improve transparency, ethics and integrity in the EU institutions should read this briefing and contact our [Transparency and Democracy campaigner](#).

ACHIEVEMENTS in the Committee vote

Candidates for the post as Commissioner can proceed in their hearings only when cleared by the Legal Affairs Committee (JURI) of any conflict of interest.

Allegations of conflicts of interest of MEPs have to be sent by the Parliament's President to the Advisory Committee if they are not manifestly vexatious. The President therefore has no room to block such investigations anymore.

The ban on lobby side jobs of MEPs is toughened by explicitly ruling out paid lobby work for MEPs.

Big groups can no longer veto inquiry committees or specific aims when such a request passes through the Conference of Group Presidents before its voted in plenary. The inquiry committee on the Luxembourg Leaks were blocked by the Conference of Presidents.

More transparency about who finances EU Parliament's intergroups, formalised lobby meetings between MEPs and organised interest representatives.

Lobbyists who refuse to accept hearings before the European Parliament lose their entrance badges. And lobbyists will not be able to get EP entrance badges that disguise them as the entourage of an MEP.

The results of triologue meetings have to be made public in writing, not just in a minimalist and oral version in Committee.

LOSSES in the Committee vote

On lobby transparency no progress was possible. If MEPs compile a legislative footprint to show who lobbied them on their reports and if they meet exclusively lobbyists who are in the Transparency Register remains unregulated. Better rules will depend on the negotiations of the new inter-institutional agreement on the Transparency Register between Parliament, Commission and Council.

Shadow rapporteurs will not be checked for conflicts of interest.

Cooling off: MEPs can still take lobby jobs directly after their mandate. A minimalist obligation to notify the Parliament will remain without effect because no one is called to check notifications on conflicts of interest.

If the Advisory Committee finds that MEPs violated the code of conduct with a conflict of interest and recommend sanctions, the Parliament's President can still block the application as he did with all sanctions recommended to him so far. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee remains composed only of MEPs, no external experts will balance the de facto conflict of interest of MEPs who investigate into the conduct of colleagues.

The Advisory Committee is not called to better define conflicts of interests in general.

No clarification that payments for speeches, articles or extra functions of MEPs should be included by the ban on MEPs taking money for their political decisions.

MEPs still only have to declare income but not property and debts as Parliamentarians have to do in France, Croatia and other countries.

Despite some progress on reporting about trilogue results, most documents in trilogues will still be treated differently from other legislative documents in the negotiations should not be treated differently from the usual transparency in legislative processes.

How Commission and others follow up on Parliament's recommendations will not be listed by Parliament. There will be no new pressure to take Parliament serious.