

Thursday 15 December 2022

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**Suspicious of corruption from Qatar and the broader need for transparency and accountability in the European institutions****European Parliament resolution of 15 December 2022 on suspicions of corruption from Qatar and the broader need for transparency and accountability in the European institutions (2022/3012(RSP))**

(2023/C 177/13)

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its decision of 27 April 2021 on the conclusion of an interinstitutional agreement between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, and the European Commission on a mandatory transparency register <sup>(1)</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 16 September 2021 on strengthening transparency and integrity in the EU institutions by setting up an independent EU ethics body <sup>(2)</sup>,
  - having regard to the legal principle of the presumption of innocence,
  - having regard to its resolution of 9 March 2022 on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation <sup>(3)</sup>,
  - having regard to Rules 10 and 11 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to Rule 132(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the Belgian federal prosecutor's office has opened an ongoing investigation into allegations of money-laundering, corruption and participation in a criminal organisation; whereas several arrests and searches have taken place since 9 December 2022, affecting both current and former Members of the European Parliament, as well as staff;
- B. whereas several suspects have already been charged with money-laundering, corruption and participation in a criminal organisation; whereas police forces have seized considerable amounts of money from the possession of suspects following searches of their homes;
- C. whereas trust in Parliament's integrity and the rule of law is paramount for the functioning of European democracy; whereas it is key to ensure that democratic processes are not captured by private and external interests and that citizens' rights are fully respected;
- D. whereas the ability of interest group representatives to influence decision-making in Parliament by way of arguments is a vital part of European democracy; whereas on the other hand, inappropriate means of influencing, bribery and other criminal offences are unacceptable;
- E. whereas Parliament outlined its position calling for an ambitious ethics body in its resolution of 16 September 2021;
- F. whereas Directive (EU) 2019/1937 <sup>(4)</sup> protects whistleblowers when, under specific circumstances, they directly and publicly disclose wrongdoing;
- G. whereas the transparency register is a central piece of the ethical framework for and the transparency of the EU institutions;
- H. whereas the non-governmental organisation Fight Impunity has not to date been registered in the transparency register;

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<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 506, 15.12.2021, p. 127.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ C 117, 11.3.2022, p. 159.

<sup>(3)</sup> OJ C 347, 9.9.2022, p. 61.

<sup>(4)</sup> Directive (EU) 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2019 on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law (OJ L 305, 26.11.2019, p. 17).

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1. Is appalled by and expresses serious concern about the alleged acts of corruption, money-laundering and participation in a criminal organisation by Members, former Members and staff of the European Parliament in exchange for influence over Parliament's decisions; supports Parliament's full cooperation with the ongoing criminal investigation; notes with concern that internal monitoring and alert mechanisms of the EU institutions have dramatically failed to detect ongoing corruption;
2. Denounces, in the strongest terms, Qatar's alleged attempts to influence Members, former Members and staff of the European Parliament through acts of corruption, which constitute serious foreign interference in the EU's democratic processes;
3. Underlines that the gravity and magnitude of the current investigations require Parliament and the EU institutions to react with unequivocal unity and unwavering resolve;
4. Strongly deplors that decisions adopted by committees and the plenary assembly with regard to Qatar are likely to have been altered by corruption and undue influence, including the resolution on the situation of human rights in the context of the FIFA World Cup in Qatar, adopted on 24 November 2022; deplors that this has led to a lack of ambition in defending the human rights of thousands of migrant workers who have died on construction sites and of hundreds of thousands whose fundamental rights are being trampled in Qatar;
5. Calls for a special committee tasked with identifying potential flaws in the European Parliament's rules on transparency, integrity and corruption and making proposals for reforms, building on the work of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs and best practices in other parliaments;
6. Commits to setting up a committee of inquiry, under Article 226 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, following the outcome of the criminal investigations and possible court proceedings, in order to investigate cases of corruption and improper actions by non-EU countries seeking to buy influence in the European Parliament;
7. Is concerned about potential conflicts of interest caused by side jobs of Members, especially where they serve as managers, on the board of directors or on advisory boards of, or as consultants to banks, multinational companies or publicly traded companies;
8. Welcomes the termination of Member Eva Kaili from her position as Vice-President, as provided for by Rule 21 of the Rules of Procedure;
9. Demands that a dedicated vice-president be put in charge of integrity and fighting corruption and foreign interference in Parliament;
10. Urges the Commission to put forward a proposal to set up the ethics body as soon as possible, in line with Parliament's resolution of 16 September 2021;
11. Proposes to introduce a cooling-off period for former MEPs to avoid the negative effects of the so-called phenomenon of revolving doors;
12. Calls for a thorough evaluation of and improvements to the readability of Members' legislative activities, in particular by disclosing legislative footprints for proposed texts and amendments;
13. Commits to ensuring full transparency of MEPs' side income by exact amount and prohibiting any external financing of MEPs' and groups' staff; commits to establishing a ban at EU level on donations from third countries to Members and political parties, in order to close loopholes in Member States; requests that the Commission urgently put forward a proposal on this matter;
14. Urgently calls for the access badges of representatives of Qatari interests to be suspended, in line with Rule 123 of its Rules of Procedure, until the judicial investigations provide relevant information and clarification;
15. Believes that the EU transparency register should be strengthened by increasing the budget and the number of staff, so that it is able to verify the information provided by applicants and registrants more thoroughly; believes furthermore that its scope should be expanded to include representatives of non-EU countries;

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16. Emphasises that proper regulation and monitoring of friendship groups is a prerequisite for their continued existence in Parliament; instructs the Questors to implement the existing rules and to develop and maintain an accessible and up-to-date register of friendship groups and declarations;
  17. Calls for the transparency register to be made mandatory;
  18. Calls for the transparency register to cover former Members;
  19. Calls for the EU institutions to urgently adopt measures to introduce the practice of minimum 'cooling-off periods' for senior EU officials and former Members, in order to avoid the phenomenon of 'revolving doors';
  20. Recommends a revision of the Staff Regulations, especially Article 22c thereof, in order to align it with the standards of the Whistleblower Directive; calls on the Bureau, in the interim, to immediately revise 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;
  21. Emphasises the role of the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), the EU Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust), Europol and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) in the fight against corruption; calls for the capacities of and cooperation between the EPPO and OLAF to be strengthened further; calls for common anti-corruption rules applicable to Members and staff of EU bodies;
  22. Believes that a declaration of assets by Members at the beginning and end of each mandate would offer additional safeguards against corruption, following the example of many Member States; believes that the asset declaration could be accessible only to relevant authorities to allow them to check whether declared assets fit with declared incomes when faced with instances of substantiated allegations, which would make spending illegal proceeds substantially more difficult;
  23. Suspends all work on legislative files relating to Qatar, particularly as regards visa liberalisation and the EU aviation agreement with Qatar, and planned visits, until the allegations have either been confirmed or dismissed;
  24. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Government and Consultative Assembly of Qatar.
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