

Rebuilding trust and reducing corruption potentials within the EU-institutions

Adopted at the YEPP Council Meeting in Paris, France (22/04/2023)

Recognizing that:

- Corruption hinders the European Union's capacity to achieve its objectives, such as promoting sustainable economic growth and innovation, reducing inequality, and protecting fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as strengthening cooperation beyond borders;
- The current legal basis for combating fraud and corruption is Article 325 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)¹. This defines the EU, and the EU member states as responsible for protecting the EU budget;
- The uncovered corruption scandal in the European Parliament at the end of 2022 has severely damaged the reputation of and trust in this European institution. Qatar and Morocco bribed MEPs and parliamentary staff to represent decisions in their specific favour;²
- European Commissioners have a "cooling off period" of two years and three years for the President of the Commission.³ Those were not always strictly controlled, which led to public attention and public discussions in the past.⁴

Acknowledging that:

- That the Article-7-procedure is insufficient to address rule of law challenges in EU member states, while the 2021 conditionality mechanism may be a promising tool.
- Corruption is a significant threat to the rule of law, democracy, social cohesion, and the economy of the EU;
- The exchange between MEPs and representatives of the civil society, business community, NGOs, or other interest groups is necessary to bring in the view of the different groups and sectors. Those exchanges will help MEPs to establish economically, socially and environmentally sustainable solutions to existing problems;
- The EU has a clear responsibility to combat corruption and to ensure that its citizens can trust their governments and public institutions;
- Corruption is not a trivial offense, and it is in the vital interest of democracy to do everything possible to prevent corruption;

¹ Art. 325 TFEU: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12016E325&from=EN>.

² Euronews: <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2023/01/16/who-is-who-in-the-european-parliament-corruption-scandal>.

³ European Commission: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_504.

⁴ Euronews: [Explained: What's the cooling-off period for EU Commissioners? | Euronews](#).

- The EU has established a legal framework and adopted measures to prevent and combat corruption, including the EU Anti-Corruption Report⁵ (which was discontinued in 2017) and the European Public Prosecutor's Office⁶;
- The European Parliament needs to regain the trust of EU citizens in the run-up to the EU elections in 2024, in order to avoid attacks from Eurosceptic parties and to be an easy target for foreign disinformation campaigns;
- The EU built up a voluntary transparency register for the European Commission to be able to track and control lobbying activities in 2008. 2011 the European Parliament joined. 2014, with the entry into office of the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, the obligation of registration for meetings with European Commissioners was introduced. This was followed in 2021 by introducing the lobby register in the Council of the EU. In 2023 around 12.000 lobby groups have been already registered; There are no rules covering other key lobbying targets, such as parliamentary assistants and the policy advisers of political groups.⁷
- There is still no obligation for third countries to register in the EU lobby register. Promising examples of successful implementations of such an endeavour are the American Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA)⁸ or the Australian Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act (FITSA);⁹
- The European Parliament's President, Roberta Metsola, announced on the 12th of January a first reform plan with 14 points to fight corruption¹⁰, followed by an endorsement of the European Parliament group leaders in February,¹¹ which brought up noteworthy discussion points for the future. However, there are still various open questions in some vital areas.

YEPP calls on:

- Strengthen the legal framework¹² to prevent and combat corruption by revising and implementing existing legislation and introducing new measures to protect whistle-blowers, enhance transparency, strengthen whistleblowing training and ensure accountability of public officials and European institutions;

⁵ Euractiv.com: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/commission-quietly-shelves-corruption-report/>.

⁶ European Public Prosecutor's Office: <https://www.eppo.europa.eu/en>.

⁷ Transparency Register: <https://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/consultation/reportControllerPager.do>.

⁸ Foreign Agents Registration Act: [Foreign Agents Registration Act | Foreign Agents Registration Act \(justice.gov\)](#).

⁹ Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act: <https://www.ag.gov.au/integrity/foreign-influence-transparency-scheme>.

¹⁰ Politico: <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-parliament-roberta-metsola-transparency-qatargate-corruption-scandal/>.

¹¹ European Parliament: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20230208IPR72802/group-leaders-endorse-first-steps-of-parliamentary-reform>.

¹² European Commission: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/corruption/eu-legislation-anti-corruption_en.

- Promote the exchange of best practices among Member States on anti-corruption measures and provide technical assistance and training to improve their capacity to prevent and combat corruption;
- The EPP to reaffirm the importance of media freedom and investigative journalism in exposing corruption and promoting transparency and accountability in the EU institutions.
- Establish a coordinated and comprehensive EU-wide approach to fighting corruption by strengthening cooperation between national authorities, EU institutions, and civil society organizations and creating a single EU anti-corruption agency;
- Increase public awareness and education on the negative impact of corruption and the benefits of preventing and combatting corruption and ensure that citizens will regain trust into the EU institutions;
- To increase significantly the penalties, sanctions and sentences related to corruption within the EU-institutions, to provide an additional deterrent effect for the future;
- The European Parliament to consider introducing measures for political assistants to prevent corruption.
- To control precisely the currently established” cooling off periods” (and consider the review of a potential expansion) for leading political personnel of the European Commission;
- To consider extending the “cooling off periods” for MEPs and (Vice)-Presidents of the European Parliament, up to at least the equal time in which MEPs receive a transitional allowance from the taxpayer (from 5 to 24 months, depending on length of service). Only a meaningful cooling-off period will help prevent former MEPs monetizing their privileged access to their former colleagues .
- The European Commission to re-establish a periodic EU Anti-Corruption Report and to consider combining the various EU-level monitoring mechanisms into a broader rule of law monitoring framework;
- Member States to remain vigilant and respect the rule of law; in particular, we strongly reject active reducing sentences of criminals involved in corruption cases, since this threatens trust in democracy;
- Establishing an obligation for third countries to register in the EU lobby register, along the lines of the American Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) or the Australian Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act (FITSA).
- All EU members to become full members of EPPO (European Public Prosecutor’s Office). ¹³

¹³ <https://www.eppo.europa.eu/en/legal-framework>