

Robust Code of Conduct passed by European Parliament

- Impact depends on effective implementation, enforcement, and use of sanctions -

Brussels

1 December 2011

Transparency International (TI) welcomes the new Code of Conduct that has been passed by the European Parliament (EP) today, but warns that real change will only be achieved if the Code is implemented and enforced in a rigorous and transparent manner.

The vote in the EP today marks the end of the process to create a new Code of Conduct for Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), following the cash-for-amendments story that was published in March 2011. The Code represents a step forward in many important aspects. It has the potential to expose undue influence on the work of the EP and reduce the threat of corruption, bribery, and conflicts of interest. In particular, there is a ban on MEPs acting as lobbyists; a requirement to disclose a more detailed declaration of financial interest; the creation of an advisory committee on the implementation of the Code; and the call for the creation of a monitoring procedure to ensure that the Code is adequately enforced.

There are still some weaknesses. The Code does not include a “cooling off” provision to prevent MEPs from moving straight into lobbying jobs after the end of their term. Moreover, the Code does not outlaw all secondary employment that creates a conflict of interest, nor does it include an obligation for MEPs to keep a record of all significant meetings with interest representatives in connection with their work – a ‘Legislative Footprint’. Neither does it allow for stronger sanctions in the case of serious breaches of the Code.

“The real change happens after the adoption of the Code,” said Jana Mittermaier, Head of Transparency International EU Liaison Office. “Only if the current and future leadership of the European Parliament empowers the members of the new Advisory Committee, which will be administering the Code, will the current integrity gap in the European Parliament be closed. The Code needs to be accompanied by a strong monitoring procedure to verify financial declarations, clear operating procedures for investigations, and strong sanctions. Otherwise, it remains an empty shell. Moreover, a regular review of the Code will be important to ensure that its provisions are not abused or watered down.”

A well implemented and robust new Code will help the European Parliament and the vast majority of MEPs, who operate with great integrity, to restore public trust. As the Parliament’s power and influence grows, it is all the more important that its members abide by the highest ethical standards.

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Transparency International is the global civil society organisation leading the fight against corruption.

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