

CITIZENS ALIENATED FROM EU INSTITUTIONS: THE CASE FOR A COMMITTEE ON ETHICS



The confirmation hearings for the incoming Commissioners-designate showed how many of the nominees are beholden to external interests. While the EU recognises that citizens are losing trust in EU institutions and its decision-making, these obvious conflicts of interest, and their acceptance and side-lining during the hearings, show that the system currently in place is inadequate. Conflicts of interest undermine democracy. They should not be normalised or tolerated, they must be rooted out. The Left in the European Parliament shows what changes are needed for a credible and robust conflicts of interest assessment system.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST ASSESSMENTS, THREE MAIN PROBLEMS:

- 1. Narrow scope of analysis:** the European Parliament's Committee on Legal Affairs (JURI) cannot address cases of corruption, cannot scrutinise income or banking information.
- 2. No investigative capacity:** MEPs have no means to verify declarations from Commissioners and have little time to conduct a thorough assessment with serious debate.
- 3. Politicised process:** MEPs shield Commissioners from their respective groups and attack Commissioners from opposing groups. This shows that those in charge of assessing conflicts of interest have conflicts of interest themselves.





DOUBLE STANDARDS

Result: unacceptable differences in treatment

- No questions asked about Sylvie Goulard's earnings of €10 000 a month from the Berggruen Institute when she was an MEP
- Josep Borrell was not asked to relinquish half a million euros worth in financial interests including in Bayer (big pharma), BBVA (finance) and Iberdrola (fossil fuels)
- Paolo Gentiloni, with €111 000 invested in Amazon and €20 000 in LVMH, and Johannes Hahn, with €37 000 invested in Reiffeisen (finance) and €113 000 in Verbund, were not asked to provide proof that they would sell these shares



HOW TO FIX IT

The creation of an independent ethics committee is paramount

- with the means, mandate and time to carry out a serious work
- composed of independent members, chosen from independent institutions (European Ombudsman, Court of Justice, Court of Auditors, etc.) or qualified persons elected by two thirds of MEPs to overcome partisan instrumentalisation

To assess conflicts of interest...

- thanks to enhanced investigative capacity: a clear and exhaustive analysis framework of the criteria, requesting additional documents if needed (bank statements, tax returns) and cross-checking information (national declarations of financial interests, balance sheets)
- at all levels and in good time: conduct checks before, during and after taking office

With a mandate beyond ethical issues:

- developing rules for the regulation of external remuneration of MEPs during their mandate
- supervision of "revolving doors" of European leaders after the end of their mandate (cooling off period)
- issuing recommendations to the bodies responsible for ethics in the various EU institutions