

GUE/NGL urges establishment of ethics-probing body to oversee EU institutions

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News

The Left group in the European Parliament has requested a special body to be set up to probe ethics and possible conflicts of interest in EU institutions, including the assembly itself.



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The request comes on the heels of recent confirmation hearings for the EU commissioners-designate that, according to some left-leaning MEPs, exposed a “flawed” process that “overlooked” alleged corruption, financial impropriety and conflicts of interest.

A number of the commissioners-designate had to be replaced by their Member States because they failed to win approval from MEPs.

Of the 26 commissioners in Ursula von der Leyen’s team, two were rejected outright by the Parliament due to conflicts of interest (the Romanian and Hungarian nominees) and two were called back for additional questioning (Poland and France).

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However, French MEP Manon Aubry, joint leader of the Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left, said there were "irregularities and doubts" over the declarations of many of several nominees.

She said, "How can you expect European citizens to trust their institutions if nothing is done to end conflicts of interest among the most powerful EU leaders?"

"An independent ethics body is the only way to solve the problem. With clear rules, transparent procedures and sufficient means. If most Member States have a system in place, why would the EU be the exception?"

She added, "French Commissioner-designate Sylvie Goulard is the subject of an investigation for fictitious jobs in France. As an MEP, she was paid more than €10,000 per month by the Berggruen Institute, a think tank of the American billionaire Nicolas Berggruen."

"The paid activities of MEPs outside their mandate must be limited and an independent ethics authority for the Commission and Parliament must be established. It must have the time and means for serious work" **Manon Aubry, GUE/NGL co-leader**

"Questions about Goulard's links with Berggruen have long been raised: has she passed on confidential information from the European Parliament? Does she advise on European industrial and technological policy?"

"The review procedure by the Legal Affairs Committee is superficial and biased. MEPs have neither the time nor the means to assess the candidates. A proof of this is that they did not even ask questions to Mrs Goulard about her links with Berggruen."

"The paid activities of MEPs outside their mandate must be limited and an independent ethics authority for the Commission and Parliament must be established. It must have the time and means for serious work," she said.

Meanwhile, the Council has criticised the UK for failing to nominate a commissioner despite the date of its EU exit being pushed back to 31 January.

Earlier in November, Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen asked the UK to suggest one or more persons who "by their general competence, independence and European commitment" would be suitable to become a member of the next Commission.

The UK did not respond to the letter and, on 12 November, von der Leyen sent a second letter with

the same invitation, noting the UK's "obligations" under the EU treaties.

A Council statement said, "On 13 November, the UK replied to both letters and indicated that it was not in a position to suggest a candidate in view of the upcoming general election."

The following day, the Commission launched infringement proceedings against Britain following its failure to suggest a candidate.

The Council, representing Member States, noted that a Member State "may not invoke provisions prevailing in its domestic legal system to justify failure to observe obligations arising under Union law."

About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

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[European Commission](#) [6]

[Justice and Rights](#) [7]

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[Public order, justice and rights](#) [8]



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