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EICC-2022

Brussels, 16 December 2022

Ms. Roberta Metsola
President
European Parliament
Brussels

Dear President, Ms. Metsola,

Re: **Bribery Scandal at the European Parliament**

Events of last week in the heart of EU institutions involving some Members of European Parliament in a bribery scandal has rattled European Union and those who believe in European democracy. They have also, unfortunately, strengthened the hand of many detractors of the idea of EU, both within the Union and outside, who have long alleged that EU is an opaque institution with little accountability that controls the lives of the over 400 million people who call EU home.

As a longstanding well-wisher of the EU, its institutions, its principles, and values, I write to express our deep concern on the abuse and misuse of power by the law makers. This we think will go down in history of European Parliament as one of the most shocking, damaging, and unfortunate, and also one the largest scandals in European politics. The scandal also speaks of the dark sides of corrupt operation in the European Parliament.

Madame President, you will certainly agree that incidents of corruption in high places like the current scandal in the European Parliament severely corrode the remaining public trust in EU institutions. They also hobble effective governance and provide undemocratic governments and enemies of the EU means to undermine European democracies. Corruption is the cancer at the heart of so many of problems we are facing in the EU today. Therefore, it is our belief that the time is nigh to modernise mechanism and improve the ability of key agencies of the European Parliament to prevent and combat corruption, including, by proposing relevant legislation to the European Parliament Constitution. It is also time to hold accountable those corrupt individual lawmakers and their facilitators and associates, through increased vigilance.

Madame President, it is in the interest of European Parliament to support and strengthen the capacity of trade bodies like ours, civil society, media, and other oversight and accountability actors to share their views and analysis on how illegal funds enter the European Parliament under the guide of "lobbying". Only by establishing best practices and enforcing mechanisms and built-in corruption prevention measures, such scandals can be avoided.

It should not surprise anyone that some lawmakers are actively participating in corruption directly or indirectly through their nominees and proxies. For long the European Parliament has been a ripe target for people seeking funds or favours or to influence policy. Sadly, it has become a hornet's nest of suspicion, and mistrust, while the heads of the main European institutions try to defend the "integrity" of the European project in times of growing citizen mistrust by promising zero tolerance against corruption and greater transparency.

In view of the frustrating events, we call upon you that the European Parliament should now take immediate steps to strengthen the law relating to the bribery of, or receipt of a bribe by, a Member of European Parliament. The Parliament should urgently set up a Judicial Commission of Enquiry to undertake an immediate review of the current statute law relating to bribery, with specific reference to those lawmakers who have been involved in this scandal.

You will agree that accountability through transparency is key to lobbying reform. It is therefore important to set up and empower an independent monitoring body to aggressively tackle corruption, through all the tools and mechanism legally possessed by the Parliament. We believe that enabling a mechanism for disclosure of acts of corruption and the bribery of law makers will assist in promoting a culture of accountability and integrity in public life in the European Union.

Without doubt, the events of the last few days will make many Europeans feel that the European Union is in dire straits. Some may even feel that it is facing an existential crisis that could result in the disintegration of the Union. After Brexit this is probably the most damning event for the EU. However, we are of the view that still the turmoil of the last few days does not necessarily indicate a super full-blown crisis for the European democracy as there is still time to recover from this crisis. European Union reeling under energy crisis now faces the crisis of credibility of an institution that has long been seen as the people's voice of the member states. This scandal has also undermined the Parliament's claim to the moral high ground in its own investigations, such as into allegations of corruption in some member countries of EU.

We cannot imagine that MEPs who enjoy a glamorous lifestyle, can make such damage to the Institution that feeds them honour, gives them status of "superhuman" being and offers them platform to exercise their power. In the case of MEP Maria Arena, her resignation from the Chair of the Sub-Committee on Human Rights is not enough. She has damaged the prestige and mission of the Sub-Committee and she cannot be allowed to remain a MEP. We have long believed that MEP Maria Arena has used her privileges for her personal interest. If investigating agencies go deeper, it should not surprise any that she has been on payroll of some foreign countries who are keen that their human rights violations issues are not discussed by the European Parliament and would prefer burying the issue under bags full of money.

Today, it is "Qatargate" and make no mistake tomorrow it could be "Chinagate". Is the European Parliament prepared to confront the magnitude and persistence of China's influence and operations to undermine EU's democracy? Beijing's aim is to use unprepared governments as the weak links through which to infiltrate the EU's political system. It's high time that European Parliament takes a stand against Chinese infiltration in the EU because China is a consequential threat facing the European Union today.

Madame, FIFA 2022 will be over in two days, but the "golden ball" will continue to rattle European political scene for a long time. I hope the issues we have raised above will receive your attention, and will be treated in priority to save the integrity of the European Parliament.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'L. Borrell', written in a cursive style.

Secretary General

Cc. Mr. Josep Borrell, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission