

Ethical Behaviour in Politics — A Responsibility for all Members of the EPP

Resolution adopted by the EPP Political Assembly, Brussels
4th-5th December 2017



Our democracies depend on our trust in politicians who are elected to serve the people and who have the common good in mind. Without this trust and acceptance, a representative democracy is unimaginable.

Political parties are institutions of central importance to our democracies. The actions of political parties, their leaders, elected representatives, candidates, constituency associations, volunteers and paid staff make a significant contribution to the vibrancy and integrity of democracy. In their daily work they cannot easily be replaced. Politicians are held to a higher standard than most, and rightly so. Rigorous criteria are therefore needed for political representatives, not only regarding the perception of their public service but also their general behaviour; they must accept full ethical responsibility for their decisions, actions and omissions and strive to serve the common good.

During the last decade, we have witnessed a growing decline in trust among the general public towards democratic institutions due to scandals involving corruption, bribery and conflicts of interest, which have damaged the reputation of politicians all over the world, including in Europe at various levels. All political forces have been affected by this. Foreign influence on parties and elections is also an increasing source for concern.

Such breaches of public trust by public office holders and politicians represent an ongoing challenge to the legitimacy of democratic institutions and processes. They negatively affect public accountability and political credibility, and they must be addressed at all levels of society.

To strengthen people's confidence in politics, the European People's Party (EPP) is committed to playing a key role in the fight against corruption and conflicts of interest, together with upholding the duty to preserve the highest standards of integrity.

The EPP is not willing to accept unethical behaviour within our political family, and we will maintain a clean and transparent culture of politics at the service of our citizens. The EPP, therefore, has decided — in addition to existing statutory regulations pertaining to the EPP's political representatives, member parties, applicant parties, groups and associations — to adopt a Code of Conduct.

As a guideline, a Code of Conduct not only affirms the central principles of our party, but also provides guidance in case questions arise vis-à-vis citizens, media, interest groups or businesses.

These core values shall guide the conduct of all our member parties, groups, member associations and their representatives.

Decency, honesty and responsibility are values that have a tradition in our party. Passion, too, and a sense of responsibility and of proportion are the most important characteristics of a politician. Personal integrity, credibility, fairness, transparent behaviour and accountability are also required.

The abuse of entrusted power for private gain, or the abuse of an office, is in contradiction not only with the principles of our democratic societies but with the values of the EPP, for which the common good is central.

Common principles and values which guide our actions

- Politicians must be independent and incorruptible;
- Those who exercise power must be bound by a higher moral standard;
- Politicians must respect the democratic principles of the rule of law;
- Politicians should be able to balance and weigh competing interests;
- Politicians need to be level-headed and not be consumed by extremism or populist simplicity;
- Politicians are there to serve the community; they should never forget that they are there at the service of the people and must have the common good in mind;
- Politicians need the courage to take unpopular decisions if these are in the interest of the people; they must be able to take long-term decisions if our democracies are to advance;
- Compromise and consensus are an integral part of politics; personal attacks on opponents are not, however, and should have no place in political discourse;

Avoidance of conflict of interest

- There should always be a clear separation between party and public responsibility;
- There should be no waste of public funds;
- Donations and political support from private individuals and institutions are legitimate as part of the democratic process, so long as they are in line with national legislation; but this support must be transparent and not tied to conditions or individual expectations;
- We take decisions based on our political convictions; they may not be influenced by a gift or favour; it is important to avoid conflicts of interest which could arise from financial or non-financial gifts or benefits;
- Those who hold public office should orient themselves in their actions solely towards the benefit of the common good; one's position as an elected official must never be used for private purposes;

Enforcement

1. The next EPP Congress, to be held in 2018, shall install an Ethics Committee; this Ethics Committee shall be composed of five members appointed by the Political Assembly, and its chairperson shall be chosen and elected from within the EPP Presidency for a period of three years; the Ethics Committee will draft the Code of Conduct, the Ethics Committee shall establish whether the Code of Conduct has been complied with or has been infringed and shall, if necessary, propose that the EPP Presidency adopt appropriate measures or possible sanctions, including exclusion and/or

suspension, as a recommendation for a final decision to be taken by the EPP Political Assembly;

2. Following the recommendation of the Ethics Committee, a member, member party or member association could face suspension from the EPP, pending an evidence-based inquiry;

3. The EPP will, upon the recommendation of the Ethics Committee and a vote in the Political Assembly, request that a member party take action against a member if it becomes evident that the respective individual has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct;

4. Every new applicant party, during the application process, will be carefully checked for its compliance with the EPP's Code of Conduct, following a procedure to be outlined by the Ethics Committee;

5. In the EPP Political Assembly, the EPP Presidency will update their members regarding the status of signatory parties and their commitment as pertains to the EPP Code of Conduct: by signing our Code of Conduct, these parties or persons accept the responsibility to act so as to maintain and enhance public confidence in the integrity of the political process.

**If you have any question
you would like to ask
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