

Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs

DECLARATION¹

Allegations of corruption and fostering of interests made against some members or former members of the Parliamentary Assembly have recently come to light and been widely followed up in European media. Whether they prove to be founded or false, such allegations undermine the Assembly's image and credibility as an institution and, in turn, the reputation of each and every one of its members. A number of parliamentary delegations have voiced concern over the situation and called for a swift and resolute response.

The Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs reiterates that, for a number of years, it has shown firm commitment to promoting, within its terms of reference, the principles of integrity and transparency in the functioning of the parliamentary institution, including in the Parliamentary Assembly. The committee believes that it falls within its remit to consider to what extent the present situation makes it necessary to review the Assembly's procedures, as well as the principles and mechanisms established by the code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly.

In response to requests from several national delegations to the Parliamentary Assembly and a large number of members, and calls made by international non-governmental organisations working to protect human rights and combat corruption, the committee intends to send a clear message of zero tolerance towards all forms of corruption. It stands ready to tighten up the rules of conduct and mechanisms currently in force should it transpire that these rules have not been designed as effectively as they could be to prevent such alleged violations of the code of conduct for Assembly members.

The committee greatly appreciates the support and expertise provided to it by the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), thus contributing to the committee's efforts to give the Assembly a sound ethical framework and ensure effective compliance with it. The Assembly, as an institution, must continue to strive for respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, in a tranquil atmosphere free of allegations and suspicions of improper conduct.

The committee calls on the Bureau of the Assembly to set up an independent external investigation body to assess the functioning of the Assembly and shed light on hidden practices that favour corruption, the only measure which would end impunity for abuses and restore confidence in the Parliamentary Assembly, its actions and decisions.

The committee stands ready to provide expertise in the development of the terms of reference of this body.

The committee also urges the Bureau to act with utmost diligence in order to promptly put an end to speculations leading to criticism of the Assembly.

¹ Approved unanimously by the committee on 26 January 2017