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## **OLAF uncovers financial irregularities by MEPs**

**Members of political parties from two different Member States broke European Parliament rules by transferring part of their salaries to the national party coffers, investigations by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) have found. Members of one political party also increased the salary of their assistants so that they could make additional contributions.**

The investigations, which were launched in 2017 and 2018, focused on allegations that certain Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and staff, including Parliamentary Assistants, were paying a part of their monthly salary and allowances to the national party. Such arrangements are contrary to the rules of the European Parliament.

In the first investigation, it was established that, between 2014 and 2019, MEPs and staff working for the party delegation at the European Parliament paid contributions of over €640,000 to the national headquarters. The OLAF investigative team also established that the payments were not made spontaneously: they were made in order to fulfil obligations set out in a financial charter that the party had specifically approved for the delegation at the European Parliament. OLAF also concluded that the European Parliament should have effective sanctions in place to address effectively the breach of its rules and to enable the recovery of due amounts established by the investigation.

In the second investigation, it was determined that between 2014 and 2019 certain MEPs each paid €3,000-4,000 per month to their party, totalling for more than €540,000 over the five-year period. Such payments are in breach of the European Parliament rules, but OLAF also confirmed that these same rules do not provide any possibility to sanction such irregularities, or to recover the money. The investigation also revealed that the party asked Parliamentary Assistants to contribute to the party. Although no evidence was found that the MEPs coerced their staff to do so, they were nonetheless aware that this was happening, and had in fact arranged for their Parliamentary Assistants to be classified at a high grade, and with a higher salary, in order to allow for contributions to be made to the national party.

The investigations were respectively closed in January and February 2020. For both cases, OLAF recommended that the European Parliament should introduce appropriate sanctions for MEPs disrespecting European Parliament rules.

In addition, for the first investigation OLAF issued recommendations to the European Parliament proposing disciplinary action. For the second investigation, OLAF issued also recommendations to the European Parliament to ensure that amounts transferred by the Parliamentary Assistants to the national party are recovered from the MEPs in question as they were aware and made an undue use of the parliamentary allowance to increase the Assistants' salaries so that the latter could contribute to the national party. OLAF also

recommended that the Parliamentary Assistants concerned should face disciplinary action for following the instructions of their party, even though these instructions put them in conflict with their statutory obligations to the European Parliament.

**OLAF mission, mandate and competences:**

OLAF's mission is to detect, investigate and stop fraud with EU funds.

OLAF fulfils its mission by:

- carrying out independent investigations into fraud and corruption involving EU funds, so as to ensure that all EU taxpayers' money reaches projects that can create jobs and growth in Europe;
- contributing to strengthening citizens' trust in the EU Institutions by **investigating serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU Institutions**;
- developing a sound EU anti-fraud policy.

In its independent investigative function, OLAF can investigate matters relating to fraud, corruption and other offences affecting the EU financial interests concerning:

- all EU expenditure: the main spending categories are Structural Funds, agricultural policy and rural development funds, direct expenditure and external aid;
- some areas of EU revenue, mainly customs duties;
- suspicions of serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU institutions.

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