



## **MEPs Project: Journalists oppose European Parliament in Court, reiterate their request for MEPs' expenses to be made public**

*Journalists call EU Parliament's reasons for refusing to disclose documentation about MEPs' expenses disappointing*

Ljubljana, 12 Sept – Journalists covering all EU Member States have asked the European Court of Justice (ECJ) to deny the European Parliament's refusal to disclose how the 751 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) spend more than 71 million euros in allowances they receive on top of their salaries every year.

*"We find it very concerning that the European Parliament has no control over how 38,7 million euros of European taxpayers' money is spent each year, and even more concerning that the Parliament itself finds this justified",* said Nataša Pirc Musar, the journalists' lawyer, about lack of control over MEPs' General Allowance Spending.

The court case started in November 2015 when the consortium filed 29 complaints (one on behalf of each journalist) with the ECJ, calling for the release of all documentation detailing how the MEPs spend their allowances – which include a general allowance, travel allowance, daily subsistence and funds for staffing. This was the first time that journalists took a European institution to court for refusing to grant them access to information on these kinds of expenses.

Earlier in July 2015, each journalist had contacted the European Parliament (EP) to request documentation related to the MEPs coming from his/her country. All requests were denied on the grounds of personal data protection, as well as an alleged excessive workload that granting access to these documents would cause. The EP also said it did not hold any documents related to how MEPs spent their general allowances.

After the journalists filed their complaints with the Court, the European Parliament put forward the same arguments in its defense. The journalists are not backing down and are reiterating their demand for the documents to be made public.

*"It is time for the European Parliament, an institution that is meant to be accountable to European citizens, to face up to the task and release the information",* said The MEPs Project's

leader, Slovenian journalist Anuška Delić. *"We hope that the MEPs themselves will come forward and put pressure on the Parliament to do the right thing."*

After replying to the EP's arguments, the law firm Pirc Musar issued a statement on behalf of the 29 journalists that counteracts some of the points the EP made in its defence.

"We are quite disappointed with the EP's defense, because it is rather bland," Nataša Pirc Musar said. "Their core arguments hide behind three legal cases in which the facts were distinctively different from our case. First, in the *Bavarian Lager*<sup>1</sup> case the requested data concerned lobbyists, people with no public functions. In our case, the data we want disclosed concern MEPs, their assistants, and advisers – decision-makers who spend public funds in order to perform public functions. Second, in the two *Dennekamp*<sup>2</sup> cases the requested data concerned the MEPs' pension schemes, which are of a more personal nature. In contrast, we want to shed light on how public funds allocated to MEPs are spent. Is it truly for the purpose of their work in the Parliament as elected representatives of European citizens?"

"Worryingly, the EP claims it does not hold any documentation on how the MEPs spend their General Expenditure Allowance because it is paid in the form of a lump sum, of some 4.300 Euros per month to each one of the 751 MEPs. While we know that we won't succeed with this part of our Application with the court, as we cannot receive documents that do not exist, we have already revealed a significant flaw in the EP's oversight of public spending. We expect decision-makers to make the appropriate changes to the system."

"Finally, we also emphasise that the personal data of European officials and employees is by 'letter of law' far more protected than for ordinary citizens. We call on the European Parliament to stop hiding behind an outdated interpretation of whose personal data should be better protected. Rather, we want the EP to enable a fairer balance between European officials' and employees' right to data protection and citizens' right to freedom of information. If the EP deems it impossible to interpret the relevant EU legislation this way, then it's up to the institution to change the status quo by pushing for appropriate legislative changes, instead of shrugging its shoulders."

## About the MEPs Project

The MEPs Project was created in November 2015 when journalists covering all EU member states filed complaints with the European Court of Justice due to infringement of their

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<sup>1</sup> Commission v Bavarian Lager; C-28/08.

<sup>2</sup> Dennekamp v European Parliament, T-82/09.



rights of access to information. Journalists requested from the European Parliament documents revealing how MEPs spend the allowances they receive on top of their salaries that are meant to be spent exclusively for the exercise of their public functions, a request which the EP has so far denied.

A timeline of The MEPs Project, articles and documents can be found here: <http://www.ird.dk/the-meps-project/>

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