

Mr Martin Schulz
President of the European Parliament
PHS 9B11, Brussels



Brussels, Thursday 3 April 2014

Dear President Schulz,

In November 2013 we wrote to you with a complaint about MEP Louis Michel, after a Belgian TV programme had revealed that Mr. Michel had submitted 229 amendments to the EU's Data Protection Directive, amendments which had been drafted by two industry lobby groups (VBO and Agora). We suggested that Mr. Michel might have breached the Code of Conduct for MEPs, which states that "in exercising their duties, Members of the European Parliament: (a) are guided by and observe the following general principles of conduct: disinterest, integrity, openness, diligence, honesty, accountability and respect for Parliament's reputation".

In recent days, the Belgian media has reported extensively on the fact that the Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members, after its investigations into the case, concluded that MEP Michel had indeed violated the Code of Conduct for MEPs.¹ Belgian media also reported that you agreed that the Code had been violated but argued that sanctions were not needed because Michel admitted his mistake and had taken action to correct the situation. The media reports leave us with the impression that no further measures will be taken.

We believe this would be an inadequate response, for several reasons. When an MEP violates the Code of Conduct, as the Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members established was the case, this should have consequences; otherwise the impression is left that violations are not a major problem and the Code of Conduct loses its meaning. Moreover, it is debatable whether MEP Michel has taken appropriate action to correct the situation. Firstly, Louis Michel only withdrew 78 of the 229 amendments drafted by the two industry lobby groups. Secondly, on March 12th De Morgen reported that Michel's parliamentary assistant, who was said to have resigned, was still on the European Parliament's payroll (despite the fact that the three-month term of notice had passed).² If Michel considered his assistant fully responsible for submitting the 229 amendments, he should have made sure that the assistant resigned right away, which appears not to have happened.

Finally we would like to point out that Mr. Michel, in his reaction in Belgian media, boldly claims that he has been cleared of accusations, glossing over the fact that the Advisory Committee has concluded that he violated the Code of Conduct for MEPs.³

As the organisation that submitted the complaint against MEP Michel, we urge you to reconsider the decision not to introduce sanctions for this violation of the Code of Conduct. We also encourage you to inform members of the European Parliament, for instance through a statement in the Parliament's plenary session, that a violation of the Code of Conduct has occurred. This would be the minimal action needed to discourage future violations of the Code of Conduct.

I look forward to your response,

Yours sincerely,

Olivier Hoedeman
on behalf of Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO)

1 See for instance "Louis Michel overtrad gedragscode Europees Parlement" (De Standaard, 29/30 March 2014) and "Louis Michel n'a pas respecté le code de conduite du Parlement" (Belga, 28 March 2014).

2 "Ontslagen' medewerker werkt nog altijd voor Louis Michel" (De Morgen, 12 March 2014).

3 See for instance: "Je suis satisfait d'avoir été blanchi" (Belga 28 March 2014).