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The European Union, the Sermon of Transparency, and the Side Door of Private Interests

Publicado em 2026-07-03 10:17:00



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Transparency, and the Side Door of Private Interests

The EU lectures the world on the rule of law, transparency and democratic values. Then one looks inside its own highest court and finds private interests quietly sitting in the front row.

By **Aletheia Veritas** · For **Fragmentos do Caos**

The European Union likes to present itself as the modern temple of the rule of law, transparency, fundamental rights and democratic moral superiority. It is a beautiful image: blue flag, golden stars, carefully drafted speeches, simultaneous translation and a nearly priestly talent for lecturing others. Then comes an investigation into the Court of Justice of the European Union, and suddenly even the altar of European law appears to have private interests seated in the front pew.

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companies and sectors over which the Court may one day rule.

This does not, by itself, prove corruption. Let us say that clearly, before some guardian of institutional solemnity faints into a procedural memorandum. But in a supreme judicial institution, the question is not only whether illegality has been proven. The question is whether there is visible independence, public trust, sufficient transparency and robust safeguards against actual or perceived conflicts of interest.

And that is where the problem begins.

A court does not live by law alone. It lives by trust.

And trust cannot be decreed in Brussels. It must be earned.

1. The Europe That Preaches to Others and Forgets the Mirror

The European Union demands transparency from Member States. It demands judicial independence. It demands anti-corruption reforms. It demands integrity, accountability,

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But when we look inside its own institutional architecture, we find grey areas, opaque procedures, incomplete public disclosures and a system of case allocation that raises legitimate questions.

It is always charming when the teacher is caught with crib notes in her own pocket.

The EU cannot demand from national governments what it does not practise impeccably in its own institutions. It cannot speak of the rule of law as if distributing democratic indulgences while accepting shadows around the very court that interprets European law for more than 400 million citizens.

European justice must not merely be independent. It must visibly be independent.

It must not merely be legal. It must be clean.

It must not merely be technically correct. It must be democratically credible.

Because when credibility cracks, everything else follows: trust, authority, legitimacy and public respect.

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Worlds Where One Has Interests

Nobody expects judges and advocates-general to live like medieval monks, barefoot and fed on lentils and jurisprudence. The problem is not the existence of assets. The problem is the nature of those assets, their proximity to companies, sectors and cases, and the way those interests are declared, assessed and managed.

If a member of a court that decides on competition, environment, pharmaceuticals, energy, technology, taxation or large corporations has financial interests in related sectors, then there is at least a serious transparency issue.

Even if the person is honest.

Even if no decision was ever influenced.

Even if everything is formally within the rules.

Appearance matters.

Justice is not a private experiment in inner purity. It is a public function. And in a public function of this magnitude, “trust us” is not enough. That phrase has already been used by too many governments, banks, regulators and executives before the bill landed in the taxpayer’s mailbox.

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3. Opacity is Suspicion's Elegant Cousin

The allocation of cases in a court of this importance cannot look like an internal ritual performed behind velvet curtains. If the Court of Justice of the European Union decides matters affecting states, corporations, citizens, markets and fundamental rights, then the distribution of cases must be transparent, auditable and understandable.

Opacity is comfortable for those inside.

It is poisonous for those outside.

Inside, everything can appear normal: internal rules, old practices, trust among peers, institutional tradition, technical language, specialised procedure. Outside, citizens see something else: legal elites deciding enormous matters through mechanisms they cannot scrutinise.

When a significant number of court members declare private financial interests, opacity is no longer merely an administrative weakness. It becomes fuel for democratic suspicion.



4. Then They Complain About the Autocrats

The European Union is right to criticise Vladimir Putin and other authoritarian regimes. Putin's Russia is marked by political repression, control of opposition, propaganda, war and contempt for fundamental freedoms. There is no moral equivalence between an imperfect democracy and an aggressive authoritarian regime.

But there is something European democracies too often forget: autocrats feed on our hypocrisy.

Every time Europe preaches transparency and practises opacity, it gives ammunition to its enemies. Every time it speaks of values while tolerating grey zones within its own machinery, it weakens its own authority. Every time it demands cleanliness from others while keeping dust under its institutional carpets, it opens the door to cynicism.

Putin does not need to be right in order to exploit our failures.

He only needs those failures to exist.

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Democracy is not defended by sermons. It is defended by example.

5. The Court That Judges Europe Must Also Be Judged by Transparency

The Court of Justice of the European Union is one of the most powerful institutions on the continent. It interprets EU law, shapes national policies, influences markets, affects companies, protects rights and defines limits on the power of states.

The greater the power, the greater the transparency must be.

There is no democratic reason to accept vague declarations, opaque allocation of cases or insufficient recusal mechanisms when potential conflicts of interest may arise. It is not enough to say that ethics are provided for. It must be shown that ethics work.

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- transparent criteria for the allocation of cases;
- independent verification of declarations;
- strict limits on direct shareholdings in publicly traded companies;
- periodic external audits;
- clear sanctions for omissions, misleading declarations or undeclared conflicts.

This is not radicalism. It is institutional hygiene.

And frankly, if a small business owner must declare everything, if a worker is crushed by tax obligations, if a citizen must meet deadlines and prove administrative innocence before blind machines, then perhaps the highest guardians of European law can survive the civilisational trauma of real transparency.

6. European Democracy Cannot Be a Display Window

Europe likes to speak of democracy as if it were an inherited jewel. But democracy is not a museum piece. It is a daily practice. Either it is exercised, verified, corrected and renewed, or it slowly decays, politely and on letterhead paper.

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private influence. It comes from discreet networks that never appear in speeches but often appear in outcomes.

European democracy can die without tanks in the streets.

It can die through closed meetings, inaccessible documents, poorly explained conflicts of interest, technocratic decisions without scrutiny and citizens increasingly convinced that politics and justice belong to private clubs.

It is a less cinematic death.

But very efficient.

Brussels does like efficiency, after all.

7. The Problem With Europe Is Not a Lack of Values. It Is the Distance Between Values and Practice

The European Union has treaties, charters, regulations, directives, courts, ombudsmen, commissions, observatories

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separately from practice.

- When transparency is an obligation for others, but an inconvenience at home.
- When integrity is a slogan, but not an architecture.
- When trust is demanded from citizens, but not returned with clarity.
- When justice presents itself as supreme, but protects itself behind curtains.

Europe does not need more moral rhetoric.

It needs fewer curtains.

8. Rule of Law Cannot Be a Sermon Reserved for Others

The rule of law is not a slogan to be exported to disobedient Member States, inconvenient neighbours or authoritarian regimes. It is a discipline that must begin at home. If the European Union wants to defend the rule of law in Hungary, Poland, Russia or anywhere else, it must first ensure that its own institutions are beyond serious suspicion.

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capacity to expose, correct and reform itself.

The democratic answer to institutional embarrassment is not denial.

It is repair.

A court that interprets European law cannot behave as if transparency were an optional courtesy. It must behave as if transparency were part of justice itself.

Conclusion: Europe Has Authority Only If It Cleans Its Own House

The investigation into private interests at the Court of Justice of the European Union should not be treated as a footnote. It should be treated as a warning.

The EU wants to be a democratic lighthouse. Very well. Then it must accept the light being turned inward.

It is not enough to condemn corruption in Member States.

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It is not enough to lecture national governments.

It is not enough to wear the robe of virtue.

The European Union must practise what it preaches.

The Europe that wants to defend the rule of law must first prove that the rule of law also rules inside Europe itself.

Otherwise, its moral authority will crack. And when moral authority cracks, it is not only institutions that weaken. It is the European idea itself that begins to fracture.

The European Union will not be destroyed only by the Putins of this world.

It can also be corroded from within by private interests, bureaucratic opacity and elites convinced that democracy is a ceremony citizens are invited to watch in silence.

Everything else is just a sermon with an expenses receipt.

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<https://euobserver.com/224593/top-eu-judges-financial-holdings-raise-troubling-questions/>

3. **Court of Justice of the European Union** — “Ethical Standards for Members and Staff at the Court of Justice of the European Union”. Official page describing the Code of Conduct, declarations of interests, independence, impartiality and conflict-of-interest rules.

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https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-10-2024-0016_EN.html

Aletheia Veritas

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The rule of law cannot survive as a sermon. It survives only when power accepts scrutiny, including its own.



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