



Brok announced on Monday that he would not run for re-election | European Parliament

MEP Brok seeks checks on allegations he netted surplus from visitors

POLITICO publishes documents at center of story as transparency advocates demand action.

By **MAXIME SCHLEE** | 1/24/19, 4:00 AM CET | Updated 1/24/19, 8:15 AM CET

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Veteran EU lawmaker Elmar Brok has asked a tax adviser to check allegations in a POLITICO story that he netted surpluses from charging constituents to cover the costs of visiting him at the European Parliament.

The comments by Brok, who announced on Monday he would not run for reelection, marks a change of stance from the Parliament's longest-serving lawmaker, who had previously dismissed the allegations out of hand.

According to copies of documents — which POLITICO has now published — from the German Christian Democrat's office, Brok charged visitors €150 per head to cover their costs while also claiming back many of the same costs from the Parliament.

The combination of Parliament subsidies and the visitors' charge yielded a total surplus of nearly €18,000 from four group visits in 2016 and 2017, according to the documents. Brok's office used surpluses generated by visits to pay for office materials, gifts and other items, according to a former staffer in the office. This allowed Brok to keep the "general expenditure allowance" — currently €4,513 per month — that Parliament gives MEPs, said the ex-staffer, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Brok's office denied any profit had been made from the visits and has declined to say whether any surpluses were refunded to visitors. POLITICO has found no evidence so far that any refunds were made.

“First of all, your conclusions are still incorrect. Second, the matter is being checked, as you are aware” — *Elmar Brok*

The 72-year-old lawmaker is regarded as one of the most influential MEPs and plans to retain senior positions in Germany's CDU party and the center-right European People's Party after stepping down from Parliament.

In interviews published Tuesday and Wednesday, he told German-language media outlets that he has asked a tax consultant to look at financial records related to his visitor groups.



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"All the documents went yesterday to a tax consultancy recognized by the Parliament, in order to check if there is a mistake anywhere," Brok told Switzerland's Neue Zürcher Zeitung newspaper. He said this would include looking at the "participant contribution" he charged visitors.

In response to questions from POLITICO, including whether he now accepts made surpluses from visitor groups and would offer refunds, Brok's office replied in a terse email: "First of all, your conclusions are still incorrect. Second, the matter is being checked, as you are aware."



Elmar Brok is the European Parliament's longest-serving lawmaker | European Parliament

Brok's office did not respond to a follow-up question on how it is possible to be sure the conclusions are incorrect if the matter is being checked.

Call for clarity

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In interviews, Brok said the Parliament had previously verified that he used its visitor subsidies correctly. But the allegations center on the €150 fee he charged visitors, which he said was for additional costs not covered by the Parliament subsidies. Adding these to the Parliament funds allowed Brok to generate a surplus even after all expenses had been paid, according to the documents obtained by POLITICO.

Transparency advocates expressed alarm that Brok had been charging visitors and called for the matter to be cleared up quickly.

"It is scandalous and unacceptable that citizens have to pay money to their MEP for a visit," said Léa Briand, a spokesperson for German NGO Parliament Watch. "Should it be found that educational trips were a fully fledged business model for some MEPs, this would further increase disillusionment with politics."

Brok is not the only MEP who asks for a financial contribution from visitors as the Parliament's subsidies don't cover all costs, German magazine Der Spiegel reported on Wednesday, citing unnamed EU lawmakers. The key issue is that the money is properly accounted for at the end, with any surplus swiftly handed back to the visitors, sometimes even in cash on the bus home, Spiegel said, citing the lawmakers.

“Only the EU electorate can put an end to this, the MEPs themselves clearly never will” — *Anuška Delić*

Anuška Delić, a Slovenian journalist who has led a Europe-wide effort to get MEPs to disclose more about how they use public funds, said Brok's case "should not come as a surprise."

"It is but another case on top of the ever growing pile of documented cases of MEPs' abuses of various funds and privileges awarded to them," she said via email. "Only the EU electorate can put an end to this, the MEPs themselves clearly never will. All attempts to thoroughly change the flagrantly untransparent system of MEPs' allowances have been voted down by a majority of MEPs."

Asked to comment on the allegations, a spokesperson for the European Parliament said that on initial examination "it cannot be said that Mr Brok breached Parliament's rules." But the spokesperson added that the Parliament "cannot say anything without having all the details."

Both the European People's Party and the CDU in Brok's home region of North Rhine-Westphalia declined to comment.

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VERMERK

07.12.2016 [REDACTED]

Kostenplan

für die offizielle Besuchergruppe Paderborn
in Straßburg vom 13. bis 15. Dezember 2016

Income

Einnahmen: 14.910,80 EUR

- **EP-Zuschuss: 8.760,80 EUR** (für 47 Personen)
 - 86,40 EUR Fahrtkosten (480 km * 2 * 0,09 EUR)
 - 60,00 EUR Übernachtung
 - 40,00 EUR Essen
 - = 186,40 EUR pro Person
- **Teilnehmerbeiträge 6.150,00 EUR** *Participant contributions*
 - 41 Personen x 150,00 EUR Eigenbeteiligung
 - 7 Personen (6 Gewinner, 1 Busfahrer) zahlen keinen Eigenbeitrag

Outgoing

Ausgaben: 8.594,25 EUR

- **Hotel 3.560,00 EUR**
 - 10 Einzelzimmer: 10 Zimmer * 45,00 EUR * 2 Nächte = 900,00 EUR
 - 19 Doppelzimmer: 19 Zimmer * 35,00 EUR * 2 Personen * 2 Nächte = 2.660 EUR
- **Bus 1.770 EUR**
- **Abendessen: 2058,00 EUR**
 - Essenspauschale: 1.470 EUR (49 Personen * 30,00 EUR)
 - Getränke: 588,00 EUR (49 Personen * ca. 12,00 EUR)
- **Heißgetränk auf dem Weihnachtsmarkt: 235,00 EUR** (47 Personen * ca. 5,00 EUR)
- **Stadtführung: 420,00 EUR** (2 Stadtführer, Sondergenehmigungen für Bus, Organisation)
- **Bootstour: 551,25 EUR**

Surplus/Buffer

Überschuss bzw. Puffer: 6.316,55 EUR

➤ **Dieser Betrag ist höher als die Teilnehmerbeiträge!**

This sum is higher than the participant contributions -

The cost plan, obtained by POLITICO, for a visit to Strasbourg by his constituents.
