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Disappointing performance from Verheugen leaves many questions unanswered

EMIS hearing

On 30 August, the EMIS committee heard from one of the key players in the control of car emissions, the former European Commissioner for Industry, Günter Verheugen, who finally accepted to speak to the committee after several refusals to take part.

Mr Verheugen started the hearing by stating that the legislation was absolutely clear to everyone taking part in the process from the beginning, and that up until the scandal broke last year no one had ever raised a question regarding ambiguous wording. However, by the end of the hearing he acknowledged that "exceptions should have been formulated with greater clarity".

On the question that was raised several times by several MEPs - why no lessons were drawn from the HDV scandal in the US where they discovered defeat devices in 1998 and which led to stronger wording in legislation for trucks and motorcycles in 2001 and 2002 respectively but which was not taken into account in car legislation from 2007 – the former Commissioner simply could not give an answer.

Given that defeat devices had been recognised as early as 1998, Verheugen's reaction to the question of whether he ever suspected that emissions test were being cheated (“I didn’t even know it was possible from a technical point of view, we had no indications”) is nothing short of remarkable. He denied all knowledge of such devices, despite the fact that the DUH (the German car testing agency) had reminded him of the possible existence of defeat devices in a letter in 2009: "I have never seen such a letter".

Overall it was a disappointing appearance.

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