



The Greens | European Free Alliance
in the European Parliament

Dieselgate Press Briefing: Why the EU car industry needs independent oversight

On Tuesday 4 April, the European Parliament will deliver its final verdict on the Dieselgate scandal. MEPs will vote on the findings and recommendations of the Committee of Inquiry into Emission Measurements in the Automotive Sector (EMIS).

Central to those recommendations is the establishment of an independent and transparent market surveillance agency. The inquiry found that both the European Commission and Member States should have acted on emission fraud sooner. Adding independent scrutiny would remove the politics from the issue, and make it much easier to spot and prevent future breaches of the rules.

The European Parliament's Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) committee has been working in parallel on the legislation on approval and market surveillance of motor vehicles (or "type approval"). MEPs will vote on the IMCO report on the same day. However, while the inquiry committee has been clear on the need for an agency (and the Environment Committee backed it as well), IMCO voted against.

The Greens/EFA group will be tabling amendments to the IMCO report to reinstate this proposal.

What were the key findings of the inquiry committee?

The report makes clear that both the EU Commission and Member States should have acted on emission fraud sooner and makes recommendations for future action. Member States failed to monitor and enforce the ban on defeat devices, or to make sure vehicles were built to comply with emissions limits on the road (and not just in the laboratory).

There was also clear evidence that the Commission was repeatedly made aware of the likelihood of illegal activity, yet took no action to stop it. This amounts to maladministration in view of the Commission's obligations as guardian of the treaties.

Why is an independent agency necessary?

The EMIS report concludes that neither Member States nor the European Commission are sufficiently impartial to guarantee independent, neutral enforcement. Recent experience is testament to the fact that, although the law was clear in prohibiting defeat devices and requiring emission limits to be met on the road, proper enforcement has never been a priority. Even since the scandal emerged, Member States and the Commission have not been forthcoming in solving this. If neither national authorities or the Commission can be relied on, an independent agency is the obvious solution.

What would an independent agency do?

The agency would test vehicle emissions in the laboratory as well as in real driving conditions and make its findings available to the public, while also sending them to the Commission and national type approval authorities. The agency would not be in charge of fines or punishments - that power would remain with the European Commission - but independent and transparent oversight would force EU governments and the Commission to take swift and decisive action when issues arise.

How would it work?

The EU's existing Joint Research Centre labs could be used for the testing; all that is required in addition is independent management to make sure that politics and market surveillance are kept separate. This would deliver a major benefit with little additional resource.

Who is opposed?

MEPs from EPP, ALDE and GUE voted against in IMCO. Opponents say it would represent too much EU bureaucracy, or unjustifiable and unaffordable EU spending. However, as is clear from the above, the proposals are actually very modest in terms of the resource and expenditure. There is also pressure from some Member States who are extremely protective of their domestic car industry and don't want additional oversight.

Apart from the agency, what else is needed?

Consumers also need stronger protection when there are abuses of the system. To date, there has been no meaningful attempt to provide compensation for the people who bought cars advertised with falsified emission ratings. An EU wide compensation scheme is needed and the Greens/EFA group will table an amendment to the EMIS report recommendations, calling on the Commission to come forward with a proposal for a system of collective redress for EU consumers.