COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY INTO EMISSION MEASUREMENTS IN THE AUTOMOTIVE SECTOR (EMIS)

THURSDAY 12 JANUARY 2017

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Hearing of Mr Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development, Slovakia
IN THE CHAIR: MARK DEMESMAEKER
Vice-Chair of the Committee of Inquiry into Emission Measurements in the Automotive Sector (EMIS)

(The meeting opened at 10.00)

Chair. – Colleagues, we can now proceed with the next point on the agenda, the hearing of Mr Victor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development in Slovakia. Welcome, Mr Stromček. Thank you for accepting our invitation.

Mr Stromček has been State Secretary since April 2013. He is expected to give us an account of how the European legislation on car emissions is implemented in Slovakia, including information on how the national type approval system works. In his capacity as representative of the country holding the Presidency of the EU, Mr Stromček is also expected to comment on the debate that has taken place on the subject of emissions measurement within the Transport Council, and on expected steps ahead.

With one million vehicles produced in 2015, Slovakia is the sixth largest producer in the EU, the second largest ‘new’ Member State producer after the Czech Republic, and the highest per capita producer globally. Slovakia currently hosts production for Volkswagen, PSA, Kia, and is expected to start production for Jaguar Land Rover next year. The type approval authority in Slovakia is part of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development, which Mr Stromček represents. There are 10 authorised and notified technical services. However, Slovakia does not grant type approval according to Regulation No 715/2007.

We must remind the Members present that they have received by email the replies to a preliminary set of written questions, which they can also find in the dossier of the meeting. We have one hour and 40 minutes foreseen for this debate and we shall start with the introductory statements, after which Members can ask their questions in accordance with the ping-pong principle which we all know. The first round of questions is asked by the rapporteurs, followed by one representative from each political group, with a slot of five minutes each. I now invite Mr Stromček to give his introductory remarks. You have 10 minutes, Mr State Secretary.

Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development. – First of all, I would like to thank you for inviting me to this committee. Though I have already said it many times today, I would like once more to wish everyone a happy New Year and many professional successes. This committee is exceptionally important for us, since Slovakia is among the largest producers of cars in Europe. If we look at the per capita rate, then we are in fact the largest. We therefore want our economy, which depends on the car industry for approximately 20% of its GDP, to operate in a transparent environment. We want there to be clear rules in place and we want it to be clear to everyone that cars will be judged by their quality, and not by the extent to which they are influenced by some software or other. Recently, we have witnessed a change in the approach to transport emissions.

In the past, attention was focused mainly on greenhouse gas emissions, which have a harmful effect in terms of promoting climate change. The European Union responded to those problems by establishing appropriate emission limits, while producers focused on reducing them. However, this was often done at the cost of higher NOx emissions. It is therefore clear that those problems cannot be resolved separately, and we should seek out a systemic solution that would create a stable framework for the future.
As regards the Presidency of the Council, it has already been mentioned that we ceased to hold the Presidency two weeks ago and that it has been passed on. We have sought to take precisely this balanced and systemic approach, in particular with regard to negotiations on the proposal for a regulation on type-approval, which is one of the key solutions for dealing with a whole range of problems. During the Slovak Presidency, we managed to reach an agreement on the technical articles of the regulation concerning certificates of conformity and simplification of the system for registering end-of-series vehicles. We also managed to reach an agreement on the financing of market surveillance activities.

I am convinced that the Slovak Presidency has achieved, within its short mandate, the best possible outcomes on the technical aspects of this key proposal. As you yourselves know, there remain some open questions, but we believe that it will be possible to achieve consensus there too.

However, as regards Slovakia itself – and this is precisely the reason that I am sitting here: to tell you about our perspective on Dieselgate – we would like to tell you something about our automotive industry. First of all, it is very important to state that no cars made in Slovakia were approved in Slovakia. They were all approved in other countries. We are car manufacturers, although in category M not a single car has gone through approval procedures. The majority of cars were approved in France, Luxembourg, Germany and the Netherlands. In this context, the only vehicles approved in Slovakia are trailers and tractors, i.e. vehicle categories that are not the subject of today’s discussion. Our approval body, which is part of the Ministry of Transport, obviously works in a responsible manner, but with completely different types of vehicles. Concerning our reaction, either that of the Ministry or of the bodies responsible for carrying out market surveillance following the outbreak of the emissions scandal, we discussed the matter with the Slovak trading standards inspectorate. Acting within our competences, we contacted importers of vehicles from the Volkswagen group. After Volkswagen, Škoda, Audi and Seat had presented us with corrective measures, which were approved by the approval authorities, Slovak importers informed the Ministry and the Slovak trading standards inspectorate of those measures. As I have already stated, this is a very sensitive issue for us as one of the major car manufacturing countries. You can therefore be sure that Slovakia’s position is always to be helpful and to strive for a solution to the emissions issue. But the most important thing for us is establishing clear rules for the future so that we know how we are supposed to operate.

Concerning what we did beyond the issue of emissions: Slovakia treats the issue of emissions very sensitively. This is why we have made so many changes in recent years relating to the reduction of emissions. This is the main advantage of rail travel. Almost 50% of the population is now able to travel by rail for free. Users of modern cars or higher-class trucks are treated more favourably: they pay lower tolls than users of older – and thus more environmentally harmful – vehicles. We have tightened up laws on the control and technical inspection of cars, and we are trying to ensure that cars that do not comply with the limits – we are talking about passenger vehicles with older dates of production here – do not use our roads. Therefore, in the future, in order for us not to end up as a European Detroit, we are making significant efforts to create and connect the manufacturers who are now producing cars in Slovakia. Furthermore, we are trying to create automotive clusters by promoting modern technologies.

It is far from a secret that the future of the automotive industry will not be based on diesel engines, but neither will it be based on petrol engines. It will be based on cars using alternative fuels, car-sharing and autonomous cars. All this will help to ensure that we can play a part in reducing emissions and helping to improve the environment.
Another key issue that we strongly support – and which has been mentioned several times today – is the real-world testing of emissions. We believe that once this is up and running, it will address some of the open questions that are the reason for today’s meeting.

In conclusion, it has been said today that you have more-or-less completed your final report and that we are here right up to today at this hearing. So please allow me to apologise for the fact that we are still sitting here. Elections took place last year, and over the course of one year we have had three ministers. Furthermore, our country has been holding the Presidency of the Council. These are not reasons for you to automatically forgive us; we have tried as far as possible to summarise things so that we could reach this point as soon as possible. So one more time, we apologise.

In conclusion, I am among those people who consider the EU to be an excellent project and believe that it will be successful in the long term, at least that is how it looked last year. Slovakia can manufacture as many cars as it wants, but demand is EU-wide. We have an open economy. Everything we produce, we produce for the European Union. We therefore seek to be a good partner for each and every country representing a European country or the European Union. For this reason, I believe that the automotive industry can also learn lessons from this and – as I have already said several times – there will be clear rules on how it should operate. Thank you very much for giving me the chance to have the opening words. Thank you for your attention. I await your questions.

Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy (ALDE). – Many thanks, Minister Stromček, for your presence and your presentation. Let me also congratulate you on your successful Presidency. I hope you slept a lot during the Christmas break, because I know that such a six months is quite tiring.

My question concerns the Council as an institution, and for me that is the main reason why you are here, because of the Presidency of the Slovak Republic. We have seen since September 2015 that a lot has happened. We have seen this House starting this Inquiry Committee, we have seen the Commission coming up more rapidly with its type approval proposal, we have seen infringement procedures from the Commission, but from the side of the Council as an institution it was completely silent. I have the feeling that the only thing the Council has done is discuss proposals that came from the Commission.

So my question to you is: after the scandal broke and it was all over the news, headlines everywhere – this was about one of the basic rights for European citizens, namely clean air – can you explain why the Council never had a real debate, any reflection? How could this happen, as an institution? I know it happened in individual Member States, but being one of the three main institutions of the European Union why did that never happen in the Council?

Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development. – This is what happened over the past year during Slovakia’s Presidency of the Council. You are aware that the directive, which is still relevant, was under discussion for four years before any conclusions were adopted. After our six months, of the 98 articles, only around 15 items remained open. In the case of the 19 annexes, which account for 600 pages, the only ones to remain open were the political issues. In July 2016, a discussion took place in Council, so I think that this problem did not arise recently or in 2015. All I can say today to every one of you who bought a car, even 20 years ago, and looked in the catalogue to check its fuel consumption, is that the stated fuel consumption did not reflect reality. It was simply the result of pressure. Car makers tried to compete with each other over who had the lowest fuel consumption, since this made cars more attractive to potential buyers. They would buy cars with low fuel consumption not because they produced fewer emissions, but because they had lower operating costs. 20 years ago, no car buyers took much account of the amount of
environmental pollution that the car did or did not cause. I would therefore like to put a counter-question: If you bought a car in the past, did you compare its fuel consumption, as listed in the catalogue, with its real consumption? If so, what led you to do that? What steps did you take to change that situation? I do not mean to say that this was correct, and I am not trying to justify anybody. I am just saying that the problem that we are dealing with now has been going on for much longer.

Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy (ALDE). – I am sorry to interrupt but I am more looking at a political role of the Council as an institution. This is something that people were concerned about. We have seen that the system, the European Union system, did not deliver on cars, on car emissions.

This was a huge political crisis. If we have a political crisis it comes immediately onto the agenda of the European Council, whether it is refugees or something else. This was such a crisis, but in a different field. But there was complete silence within the Council, nothing has happened. How can people trust the Council as a political institution when it is silent when such a crisis turns up?

Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development. – I personally do not think that they are keeping quiet: They are taking specific steps to change the specifications and to make systemic changes. I do not that it is necessary to talk so that every newspaper hears about it. What is important is that we see results. And after six months, those results are rather clear. Preparations have accelerated rapidly, and we are rapidly trying to achieve systemic changes, which – I repeat – does not mean that someone did not make mistakes in the past. No-one is perfect. We are people, not robots. We make mistakes. To think and pretend now that no mistakes were made – that would be a mistake in itself. But first of all it was necessary to address technical issues. This topic that has arisen is still a priority technical issue. Is it a sensitive issue for people? Does it affect the environment? Then it is natural that it will become a political issue too. And yet, we are still discussing technical parameters. It should be a priority to create a technical framework as quickly as possible, and we managed to do this during our Presidency. We can now discuss it and fine-tune the necessary political issues. I would therefore not like to comment on whether someone was communicating clearly, sufficiently and regularly enough. It is significant that today we have a completed technical solution on the table, and we can discuss this.

Jens Gieseke (PPE). – Chair. Thank you very much, State Secretary Stromček, for coming here today after the very tiring Presidency of the Council. In your introduction you said that Slovakia was the champion among car manufacturers. Your statistics seem to bear that out: congratulations! In 2015, for the first time, you produced more than a million vehicles. That is equivalent to 184 cars per 1 000 inhabitants, which is a world record. As you described in your introduction, that has created a great many jobs in the car industry. How many of the vehicles produced are diesels?

Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development. – I assume that it follows the European example, since all cars made in Slovakia are, for the most part, exported to Europe. So there is no difference; when we look at the share of diesel cars in Europe, it is probably also an accurate reflection of the share of cars made in Slovakia.

Jens Gieseke (PPE). – In your introduction you said that the very high proportion of diesels – we may disagree as to exactly what the percentage is, but it certainly exceeds 50% – was
due partly to the fact that we have certain rules dictated by the EU’s climate policy. You only hinted vaguely that that was the case. Could you be a bit more specific?

Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development. – I mentioned that there was pressure from car buyers – our customers – in the past, and that they wanted to buy cars with low operating costs. Of course, having a diesel with low fuel consumption was a hit, and obviously the price of the diesel fuel was lower than the price of petrol. From this perspective, we now see this trend of moving away from diesel cars, and car makers will, in my opinion, more-or-less specialise in petrol engines, while the future is in alternative fuels. But in Slovakia, around 46 000 cars affected by this emissions problem have been registered. I am not sure if I correctly understood your question.

Jens Gieseke (PPE). – We are currently revising the rules on type approval, and the work that we are doing in our committee also provides material for the Committee on the Internal Market, where it is intended that the rules on type approval should be rewritten. Looking back to your introduction, you said that you produce more than a million vehicles per annum in Slovakia, but that type approvals are issued only for trailers. So in order to obtain approval, it is necessary to go to France, Holland or Luxembourg.

Otherwise, in Europe the subsidiarity principle is generally applied: anything that can be dealt with on the spot should be dealt with on the spot. If I apply this principle of subsidiarity to Slovakia, it seems logical that, where so many vehicles are produced, type approval procedures should also be conducted on the spot. If, on the basis of your experience at the Ministry of Transport, you were to make proposals for a reform of type approval and market surveillance, what form would they take in your case?

On the one hand – as we have discussed this morning in connection with the draft report – people are calling for a stronger role for Europe, which means greater centralisation, and perhaps also a European agency with strong powers, which might also reduce the rights of the Member States, while on the other hand of course it is right for approvals to be issued where vehicles are manufactured. What advice would you give to the Institutions in this context?

Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development. – Slovakia today operates within the system established by the European Union. We are not able to order controls or tests on individual cars. It is the role of the producer to ensure that all of the safety elements are in place, since emissions are only a part of this. Our personal opinion, if you wish to hear it, or my personal opinion as a representative of Slovakia, is that we will obviously be happy to see Europe’s position strengthened by carrying out some control or audit of these tests.

Of course, we would not be opposed to the possibility of having each country directly testing their cars or having cars tested in the country in which they are produced. On the other hand, though, we must consider the fact that there is a single European market. We have free movement of goods and services. From this perspective, the principle by which something is tested in the same place it is produced is in stark contrast with what we are talking about, namely that we have a single market and that it does not matter in which country a product is made – it is acceptable throughout Europe. For this reason, mutual recognition for this type-approval is in force.

I would summarise as follows: it has been shown that, since the system has failed in the past, it was not a good system. Therefore, as I stated at the beginning, we appreciate your work, which is helping to accelerate the overall changes to the testing of cars. Following all these discussions, it is abundantly clear that some sort of centralising element must be added in
order to monitor the execution of this approval, and there must be an auditor for those processes. This role could be played by Brussels itself. You know well that, after the discussions that took place in Brussels on whether it would be a single unit, this is proving quite difficult. This will need some more time.

I will give you an example of how we have dealt with this – and we are a small country, so we can hardly be a benchmark for the entire European Union. However, we have had very similar problems with the technical and emission controls of cars that are taking place in Slovakia. That is why we changed the law so that there is almost zero tolerance for someone breaching their legal obligations with regard to a car that has already been on the road for a longer time. This equates to the immediate removal of licence and a prohibition to continue operating in that industrial sector. We simply do not want someone to provide a service and evade the law, to mislead their customers, to prefer to take their car to their neighbour for controls, since the neighbour is ‘friendlier’ than the person who does his work properly.

I think that an identical or similar principle should apply from the perspective of type-approval of vehicles, and this responsibility should not be borne exclusively by the producer of the car, but also by the entity that approves it. In the event that the entity that approves the car is not capable of doing it properly, it should also be sanctioned. There should be strict liability at every level of this approval process.

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Jens Gieseke (PPE). – OK, thank you. That also explains your answer to Question 1, in which you warned that fresh red tape would be generated. But, if the procedures are organised more efficiently, you are in principle also in favour of stronger European organisation of market surveillance, by a European agency for example. Whether such an agency is likely to be set up will be a matter to be determined during the procedure within the Committee on the Internal Market.

Finally, one last question arising from your introduction. You described the future of the internal combustion engine in very critical terms and mentioned difficulties with diesel technology and petrol engines. People always speak airily about the future of electric vehicles. I myself have serious doubts about that, because obviously electric vehicles are only sustainable if the electricity is genuinely produced from renewables. So an electric vehicle which derives its power from a coal-fired power station, or perhaps a lignite-fired one, is not genuinely sustainable. That leads to my question: what view do you take of this headlong rush towards electric vehicles? Or do you take a differentiated view: so long as we can optimise diesel and petrol engines, should we instead pursue both that option and the electric one?

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Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development. – Certainly, it is a two-track approach for a simple reason. As you have correctly stated, we must deal with the situation as it is just now. It would not be a proper solution if we said that although we have problems with the current engines, the future is in alternative engines, so we do not have to deal with the situation that exists today. We would not resolve this situation in which more and more cars are being produced that are simply harmful to the environment. On the other hand, it is often our daily means of transport, even a working tool. Therefore, there is certainly a two-track approach.

I can provide another example: apart from the fact that we treat truck drivers favourably when they drive modern trucks that meet higher environmental standards. We also do the same with the registration of cars. Cars with lower cubic capacity that consequently produce significantly fewer harmful emissions for the environment are subject to much cheaper fees
than those with higher cubic capacity. We are therefore also trying to create a framework to influence motorists’ behaviour so that they prefer more environmentally friendly cars. Another topic that is also worth discussing at central level concerns the following – I will provide an example that we discussed back home: There is the example of Formula One, which in the past would use any type of engine that could be used for a particular race. Once the engine was fitted, another one would be taken. Of course, this was linked to making the competition more interesting. Greater and greater restrictions arose owing to technological advances, so that those companies that were not able to invest as much still had equal status, and the focus was more on competition between the drivers rather than the technology per se.

It might be worth stating the extent to which restrictions should be introduced and the maximum capacity of engines that can be used for day-to-day operations. Or in city centres we could prohibit cars with high cubic capacity from entering city centres. We could alternate between cars with odd or evenly numbered licence plates. Perhaps there are more such tools we could use to limit the use of cars with high cubic capacity.

I agree with you that the future of the automotive industry is in alternative fuels, and these are not petrol or diesel. This is why we are following a two-track approach: in order to seek out possibilities to limit, as much as possible, the production of excess emissions affecting the environment.

In response to the second part of your question: those would be electric cars. I believe that advances in modern technology will also mean that electricity will no longer be produced from coal. There could certainly be other alternative fuels and engine types, namely hydrogen. There are more such possibilities today. However, I believe the future of electricity generation as well as cars will involve significant changes with the advent of new technologies.

Christine Revault D’Allonnes Bonnefoy (S&D). – Thank you, Minister, for coming to this Committee of Inquiry. It is true that it would perhaps have been more appropriate to have heard what you had to say before we had finished the report, and particularly the factual part, as none of the issues we can discuss today will appear in it as it is already finalised.

Having said that, I appreciate your pointing out that there is an overriding need to come up with a European response to this situation, and one which is global and systemic. We agree with you on that. In this respect, I would have liked to have known your views on having a systemic response, and monitoring and enforcement of EU regulations across the board.

What do you think of the idea of having an independent European agency, with supervision or arbitration, to deal with cases where additional elements come to light even when the national authorities have type-approved vehicles? Do you think that this might be one way forward? In any case, it is one of the options that we are proposing and which we have discussed. I hope it will be included in the report.

I would like to have your views both as a Minister of one of the Member States, and as a member of the Slovak Council Presidency, since you held that office for six months.

Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development. – Let me set the record straight: as I have already said, none of the cars that were produced in Slovakia were approved in Slovakia. In all of the discussions that we had with individual car brands, we spoke about how we had proactively asked about their views. We wanted to have direct access to information from the source, so that they could inform us about their views on the matter. It was also very important for us to know, in our communications with those companies, how we could remove the software that they had
installed and which was not fully correct. This affects around 46,000 vehicles back in Slovakia. It affected Volkswagen, Audi, Seat and Škoda. On the basis of these consultations, we are largely proceeding with the exchange of software. The last one was added in mid-December 2016, so we expect that this software will gradually be changed this year. We are following this situation very closely to ensure that we have up-to-date information. All the subsequent steps relating to the testing of those vehicles would mean changing the system. To reiterate, Slovakia will always be very proactive in cooperating to ensure that this changes. As I have said, we do not want to be lumped together with the unfair practices of some manufacturers if this proves to be the case. We want to produce cars that meet the parameters that are set out in the catalogues. Slovakia will always try to produce high-quality cars for all of Europe and meet all the demanding criteria, not only in terms of emissions, but also passive safety. We will also always meet the standards that are expected by the European Union.

Christine Revault D’Allonnes Bonnefoy (S&D). – This joint authority that could conduct audits already exists; it is the JRC. But we have come to realise, and this is one of the points in our report, that it has never had a mandate from the Commission to look into precisely whether there were defeat devices and where they were to be found. That is indeed one of the things which we are going to have to put right.

I have a second question which concerns your reply to question 5 – you mentioned this in your previous intervention – regarding your inspectors who conducted investigations at carmakers. Can you tell us more about the results of their enquiries? Did you ask them to look for defeat devices? If so, what steps did you take when you got the results? You talked in particular about Volkswagen, which builds vehicles in Slovakia.

Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development. – Let me set the record straight: as I have already said, none of the cars that were produced in Slovakia were approved in Slovakia. In all of the discussions that we have had with individual car manufacturers, we spoke about how we had proactively asked about their views. We wanted to have direct access to information from the source, so that they could inform us about their attitude to the matter. It was also very important for us to know, in our communications with those companies, how we could remove the software that they had installed and which was not fully correct. This affects around 46,000,000 vehicles back in Slovakia. It affected Volkswagen, Audi, Seat and Škoda. On the basis of these consultations, we are largely proceeding with the exchange of software. The last one was added in mid-December 2016, so we expect that this software will gradually be changed this year. We are following this situation very closely to ensure that we have up-to-date information. All the subsequent steps relating to the testing of those vehicles would mean changing the system. To reiterate, Slovakia will always be very proactive in cooperating to ensure that this changes. As I have said, we do not want to be lumped together with the unfair practices of some manufacturers if this proves to be the case. We want to produce cars that meet the parameters that are also set out in the catalogues. Slovakia will always try to produce high-quality cars for all Europe and meet all the demanding criteria, not only in terms of emissions, but also passive safety. We will also always meet the standards that are expected by the European Union.

Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy (ALDE). – I would like to come back to something that Mr Stromček said in the first round of questions, namely that we are currently talking about a technical problem and not a political problem. I think that is not the right conclusion. We have some pretty strong conclusions in our draft report where we say that, due to political decisions, we have created the problem that developed into Dieselgate, so once again I would like to ask the question.
This is a huge political problem. We have seen that the European system is simply not functioning well. We have seen that Member States are not applying the European rules in the right way, that certain politicians have taken a political decision at national level and at European level in order to frustrate the system that we have created, at the expense of 500 million European citizens who do not have air that is as clean as it should be.

So I would like to try once again. Why did the Council, as an institution, not do anything about the political crisis that is behind Dieselgate? That is something completely different from the usual procedure that was already ongoing with RDE, type approval etc., etc. That is something else, because that is not normally the way the European Council, or the Council as an institution, deals with political crises. Can you once again explain to me why the Council as an institution, and as the only European institution not doing anything, decided to do nothing?

Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development. – I personally do not think that it did nothing. I will try once more to restate our position on the situation. I agree with you that this is a political problem, since, of course, the emissions issue has affected too many users, too many motorists, and every EU citizen. So the fact that this is a naturally sensitive issue makes it a political issue. I have never denied that. But it arose owing to technical standards and specifications that proved insufficient, and where the system is bad, the technical system has failed. The position was: firstly, to resolve the open questions concerning the technical specifications, and then – and I spoke about this in my introduction – there remained some political issues that had to be discussed jointly. We are talking about this – an agency, a central agency: yes/no. Will we be carrying out tests in some way or another? Will we be taking powers away from some states so that we can change their rules and thus curtail their powers? You have to say it out loud if that is the case. We are saying that Slovakia does not have a problem with any change that helps ensure that an improved systemic solution can be found and that such a situation will not recur. This is not only the case in the automotive industry, but also in many others. The entire structure of the EU economy is gradually changing. But we differ from the others. We are better, as we always move with the times and are more progressive. For instance, who was trying to deal with environmental issues 20-30 years ago? They are now standard for us. In other countries or continents it is not even a topic for discussion. Or take our view on the European Union itself. Another very positive example is roaming. If you went to another country 10 years ago, everyone charged roaming fees, so it was not very easy when you went on holiday, even within the EU. And today, thanks to the positive actions of Brussels, a different systemic solution is in place that is much cheaper and much more user-friendly. There are many such examples of when Brussels has played a positive role in making sure that Europe works better. I believe that this is one of those occasions. This situation has not been going on for two or even three years. It has been going on for many years now. When you saw something in a catalogue and it did not match your real consumption, nobody ever took notice. Let’s address it today: We do not have a time machine. We cannot go back in time. Today we have the opportunity firstly to set the technical rules and, on that basis, to open a political discussion on the last remaining open question. Then we can conclude all of them. It most likely would not be correct to speak out politically on how to approach this issue or deal with it. Much better would be to first of all address the technical specifications, to say what should be changed in this system, and then on that basis – once we know we have something to resolve – we should talk about how to resolve it. For that, the political agreement of all sides is needed.

Kateřina Konečná (GUE/NGL). – Chair, I would like to thank the State Secretary for taking the time to join us and to explain some of Slovakia’s positions. As a citizen of the Czech Republic and an MEP representing that country, I also understand how important the
automotive industry is for a country, as the automotive industry accounts for very similar shares of our GDP and employment. We also understand how sensitive this sector is for our economy.

Nonetheless, you spoke very often about how to move forward and what should be done moving forward. What do you think should be done to address what has already happened? I do in fact think that consumers have been misled. It is clear that European consumers will pay much more for this than the consumers of other countries, such as the USA, South Korea and others, where criminal proceedings are ongoing and consumers are receiving compensation. Meanwhile, our consumers, our ‘Joe Bloggs’ who bought cars believing that they had been properly declared, have no opportunity to protect themselves.

How do you see a way back? We will have to conclude this matter somehow, and we will have to tell European consumers not only how we will protect them in the future – and I fully agree with you that this will undoubtedly lead to a great political debate – but what we will do for those people who have been cheated. They bought cars – you say because of lower fuel consumption, and I don’t deny this, but we also have to take into account that some definitely bought them because they wanted lower emissions – and they were simply cheated and left without compensation.

1-010-0000

Víktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development. – First of all: in some instances there are court cases, as consumers always have the possibility of going to court. On the other hand, when you look at it from our point of view, it is far more important to set rules for the future. We cannot go back in time, as I have already said today. We can reassess all that we have been able to do over the past few years. I could also ask you what we have done over the past few years on this issue. That does not mean that I am trying to make excuses for anybody who is simply taking advantage of the laxity of this approach. It is always more important to learn your lesson and prevent this from happening in the future. When you look at the mood of motorists, at how they decide to buy a car, Dieselgate or any other issue covered in this way has not influenced the behaviour of the end-consumer, i.e. the motorist. The customer is interested in operating costs and passive safety when buying a car. The research into what is of greatest interest to car buyers is clear. Moreover, it varies depending on what segment the car belongs to. So you cannot find a generalised and simple approach to dealing with this. It is true that there is a difference between how America deals with this and how the EU deals with this. But how we deal with this in the EU is important. I always say: we must tend our own garden and hope that our neighbour can also thrive. But that does not mean that I will be comparing myself to what is going on around when it does not directly relate to the thing we are supposed to be worried about. For me it is much more important for those living in the EU today to live in the cleanest possible environment, as far as emissions are concerned. They should be able to buy high-quality cars, and what they read in the catalogues should be true and should reflect reality. If the mistakes that have been made help us to learn a lesson and set new rules, then it would be sufficient to say that the scandal was worth it. Dealing with the issue in any other way would just be resolving individual issues with individual buyers, and if you take a good look at the directive – and I am no legislative expert – you will find that these devices were even mentioned in it. They were never deleted.

1-011-0000

Kateřina Konečná (GUE/NGL). – Chair, I have a short follow-up question. When you say that we will learn a lesson, you mentioned how you resolved the situation in the Council, that we will adopt something new if we must take a political decision and if we want a major new European agency to audit, check and monitor. Did you also talk about what should be learned and what procedures should take place in the Commission so that what happened will not be repeated? It is clear that the Commission knew for several years that defeat devices were
being used. It was informed of this by various agencies, and it didn’t take any decision right up until journalists seized on the story and turned it into a political scandal. Did you also speak in Council about how procedures could be pursued in a different and more transparent manner in the Commission itself?

1-012-0000

**Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development.** – Please don’t get upset, but that is rather a question for the Commission, not for me. To draw up a bill without the landlord would be improper. This is my view on the matter: I certainly think that another one of the positive externalities in this case is the fact that we all find out that tolerance for not responding to suggestions – and it matters not whether it is the Commission, a Member State, Parliament or an executive body – is getting lower and lower. When I talk on behalf of Slovakia, for instance, it is out of the question that you would think of a suggestion and hold your tongue or ignore it. This is a much faster age we are living in. With the advent of electronic media and social networks, all of these communications are simply becoming more dynamic. They can take a trivial matter that seems unimportant to you and blow it up into a major issue. This is sometimes a negative phenomenon, but it means that we are becoming more open to suggestions. Even in the future, this will be one of those lessons that the Commission will have to look at in depth, and the Commission will also play a part in making sure that its own practices are evaluated in more detail. I don’t think that anyone should neglect their obligations. But the question remains to what degree it is appropriate to ‘adjust the mirror’, when to focus on each and every suggestion and fully investigate them. After all, you can’t do it all. Once again: This is mainly a question for the Commission. While I am here, I will try to look more to the future than to the past since this moves us forward.

1-013-0000

**Bas Eickhout (Verts/ALE).** – Thank you, Mr Stromček, for your introduction and for your answer. I think what you notice here in this room is a bit of a feeling of annoyance. Everyone is saying that this is a huge scandal, it is painful to Europe that this is happening, and then, at the same time, when we look at decision-making, even after the scandal broke out, you don’t really see the urgency of changing that scandal. You can say no, that’s not true because we had discussions, but can I just mention a couple of positions that Slovakia is still taking since the diesel scandal broke out.

For example, on the discussion on RDE, the second package, the conformity factor, you wanted the implementation of that delayed for five years compared with the Commission proposal – we can see that from all the positions that are now visible to us – so you even pleaded for a delay of five years in implementing an RDE test which is so crucial. Everyone is saying it is so crucial and yet, in decision-making, you say, well, we need five more years. I am really struggling to reconcile that with the urgency that you have mentioned.

And the second one concerns the presumption of conformity. Slovakia has consistently said that once the RDE test is used for conformity, there should be no possibility for any legislator later on, or any third actor, to test another time with RDE whether that emission is still valid. You have continuously opposed that option. For me, that is also very strange given that we have seen that there were too few checks up till now. Why is Slovakia taking these positions?

1-014-0000

**Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development.** – I’ll start from the end. I don’t have information on whether we would reject the option of rechecking. We have always said that we need to come up with systemic solutions. I will address the first part of your question. It is true that we abstained from that vote, since we wanted there to be uniform rules for all types of checks. We see this in two dimensions. Firstly: when you’re developing a car – from the car maker’s point of view – the period between the development phase and the time it is placed on the market and used is
rather long, and the car must undergo testing in that period. Both the production and approval processes last a long time. This is not a matter of IT, where you can simply change a motherboard and then be able to adapt to innovations. It requires certain technological advances, mainly in terms of engines and the overall organisation of the production of the car. We were always talking about setting a framework that could be realistically achieved in terms of production. This doesn’t solely relate to IT: it can also affect bicycles where you can change the number of chain rings. This is something that can be done relatively quickly during production. Here in the automotive industry, production and approval take some time. Let’s talk about this when the time is right. However, I cannot agree with what you say – that we have opposed RDE testing. Let’s say that there should be clear rules and clear conditions, that they should apply to everyone and that they should be practically achievable. That is all I have to say on your question.

1-015-0000

Bas Eickhout (Verts/ALE). – On the first point, on the presumption of conformity, maybe you want to check the minutes yourself as to what Slovakia took as a position and then you will have your own position at your disposal. On the second point, on the five-year delay that you are putting forward, I just want to mention that at this moment, in the United States, the same brands have cars already on the market with other technologies that deliver better on reductions, so maybe the car manufacturers can already do it but they are not doing it because they know that the checks in Europe are not so strong.

That brings us to another point that Slovakia is taking. Up till now, on in-service conformity, it seems that Slovakia says that only bench testing should be done for in-service conformity, and not real driving emission standards. Again, a totally awkward position, so why that position from Slovakia?

1-016-0000

Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development. – I will first of all try to address the testing, which you compared to what goes on in the USA. I see an opportunity here for Brussels. If I were a car maker, then I too would only do as much as I had to. After all, my role as an entrepreneur is to achieve the best economic outcomes. Just as telecommunications charged roaming fees for as long as they could, until Brussels intervened, it is natural for any enterprise to try to achieve the best economic outcomes within the existing rules. This is why I see this as an opportunity to create centralised testing and to improve the capabilities of this testing. Part two: we have always said – and this is our long-held position – that we believe RDE testing to be the only correct solution. We have never been against this. We have always said – as I mentioned in my response to your previous question – that we wanted uniform deadlines for all types of real-time testing. It would then be possible to implement a systemic resolution for the testing, and even for its application vis-à-vis producers. Then perhaps we could also say in Committee – and I am wondering about this myself – where these statements made on Slovakia’s behalf came from. I have asked colleagues who have attended every meeting, and they do not know. Once we have finished, we can go further into the details, and I wonder who would say something like that.

1-017-0000

Wim van de Camp (PPE). – Thank you very much, Chair. I should also like to thank the State Secretary for coming and for the answers he has given which in fact have, on the whole, been clear. In your introduction, you made an interesting observation about the types of car that you produce, but whose type approval comes from other countries. How would you describe your experience of this? Do you consider it acceptable, or do you feel that you would ideally have preferred the Slovak Government to be involved? I was rather fascinated to hear you say that approval had been given elsewhere and that you just went ahead and produced the vehicles, as it were. That is my first question.
Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development. – I’ll speak in general terms. As I have said, it is a part of the European Union, and we are happy that the principle of the freedom of movement of goods and services applies. Slovakia is a state that is also seeking to build added value, and it is always very desirable to have research centres and testing centres located in your country. We would therefore be very pleased to see another opportunity like this for Slovakia to develop its industry. On the other hand, as long as those cars will be approved somewhere in the EU, we would have absolutely no problem with that. Of course, that is provided that the testing of those cars is fair and problem-free. We don’t want Slovakia to be associated with the production of sub-standard cars or cars that are environmentally unfriendly. So in order to implement the rule in the event that it was changed so that cars produced in one country were also tested there, this is what we said: of course, we have no problem with that and we would do that. This also applies (b): as long as those cars will be approved somewhere in the EU, we would have absolutely no problem with that. It is far more important for us to create such a system in cooperation with Brussels to ensure that such situations do not occur. I don’t want to say that we are completely indifferent about where in the EU those cars are approved, but it is much more important for us that the approval process is carried out properly so that it doesn’t give rise to the sort of discussions and questions that we are having to resolve today.

Wim van de Camp (PPE). – Thank you. My second question is about the agency. In this House, we are still discussing this intensively, we are discussing the pros and cons and whether things could be done differently and better. But as a representative of the Slovak Government you are saying here that you want an agency. The question is: can you enlarge on that somewhat? Why do you want an agency? And the second question on this point: what view do you take of the discussion of this subject within the Council at the moment?

Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development. – I will merge the two questions into one, as I think – and probably everyone will agree with me on this – that the system has to be changed and that we have to make sure that this situation does not recur. As to how the agency operates, that is a political question, and the Member States will have to talk about how we will affect the competences of individual countries in terms of the approval process. From our point of view, it would be appropriate for that agency to operate as some type of ‘supervisor’ of all activities forming part of the approval processes in the individual Member States. From our point of view, we are not interested in taking away competences from countries and creating a single central unit that would monitor approvals or would approve all cars. Our position is more that we don’t have to have a huge revolution, but it is important that we improve the current system. Those who are currently approving cars or specific types of cars should know that there is an independent body above them that is able to test them. It is much more important to be able to sanction them in the event that they fail to uphold the functioning of the system or the agreed-upon rules. It is important for us to say on the political front what the purpose of making this change is, and this is a purely political matter. If I may, I would like to continue speaking from the ‘expert’ perspective. It is much more important for the agency to have sufficient powers and competences. And once more, the main thing is that the agency must be able to sanction those who fail to abide by those rules. Since they have an agency that only exists to evaluate specific processes, without being able to take any steps other than issuing recommendations, it doesn’t make much sense.

Christine Revault D’Allonnes Bonnefoy (S&D). – Minister, you have stated several times that cost issues produced a number of choices, and you indicated that reducing CO₂ emissions was more attractive financially, but there ended up being more nitrogen dioxide emissions. Except that – and you can see this from the factual part of the report we have drawn up – and
this was clearly indicated by all the experts on this matter, there is no paradox between reducing CO₂ and also reducing Nox.

In the same way, you stated that consumers preferred diesel, because it was cheaper. I imagine that, since then, you have increased taxes on diesel to ensure that consumers do not see it as financially worthwhile, and also continuing with diesel as something extremely bad for their pockets in terms of health costs.

What policy has the Slovak Republic therefore been pursuing to encourage people to use diesel fuel or not? What is the current situation as regards atmospheric pollution in the Slovak Republic? I am French and we have been experiencing a winter of high CO₂ and Nox pollution and fine particulate matter – and one which I think, unfortunately, will continue in the same vein – in which these issues are not solely long-term ones, but also very current ones.

I imagine that you have the same concerns. What is your situation and what policies are you implementing as regards the financial regulation of various types of fuels? Furthermore, on the issue of employment – I am going to ask all my questions now so that you will have time to reply – as Slovakia is home to many automobile plants, I imagine that you have had discussions with them aimed at ensuring the people working at these various factories are helped to retrain so that they can work on other types of engine with an eye to the future. It is clear that various carmakers are in the process of changing engine types, and one should clearly be thinking about jobs and about these specialised workers who had special skills and be steering them towards other types of work. I imagine that this matter is therefore also being discussed within your government and your ministry. I would also like to have some information on that.

Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development. – What has Slovakia done? First of all, I will respond with regard to the environment: fortunately we are not facing a situation as unpleasant as the one being faced in France. But this doesn’t mean that we do not attach equal importance to it.

Slovakia, as a small country, has an advantage in that it can be more flexible. We have always tried to be proactive in terms of environmental protection. As I have already said today, this is why we currently have different fees for the registration of cars depending on how environmentally friendly they are – on how great their impact on the environment is. Cars with lower cubic capacities are subject to much lower fees than those with higher cubic capacities.

The same principle applies with trucks: the more modern the truck, the lower the fees that must be paid to Slovakia’s National Motorway Company, which is now responsible for operating the entire network of motorways and expressways in Slovakia. In the future, we want to spread the scissors further and further apart as we want to motivate people to renew their vehicle fleets, to buy cars with the lowest cubic capacity that they can. Likewise, when someone decides that they need to buy a car with greater cubic capacity, then of course they will have to pay appropriately for that too.

All car makers who produce cars in Slovakia may be producing them in Slovakia, but they are guided by what their customers in the EU – and often beyond – need. So in our discussions we are always interested in what type of cars will be made in our country. However, as I have said, cars are not approved in Slovakia, and the vast majority of those cars are destined for export to countries such as France, Germany and other EU Member States.
In the case of the aforementioned arrival of Jaguar Landrover, this is an even more global firm that, with the UK’s departure from the EU, will be able to export the vast majority of its products beyond the EU. Therefore we are trying not only to gather together car makers in our automotive cluster, but also to regularly incentivise and put them at an advantage so that they can develop and produce modern cars in Slovakia. This will mean a lower environmental burden, and for us – speaking frankly – it will also mean that we are more competitive than others. Slovakia cannot always rely on the fact that we have a highly qualified workforce, for which we do indeed have a very good reputation.

We radically changed the structure of our education system when we returned to a ‘dual’ education system, so now we are not producing students who enter the labour market and who are unable to find work. Now we are able to explain to students which subjects it pays off to study, and where we can guarantee them access to work.

We are trying to do the same thing with car makers, not only with regard to education, but also development. Of course, the more they develop in Slovakia, the greater the added value will be. We won’t be just an assembly line, since in the future those will be replaced by robots or semi-robots, but if we want to remain an active player on the automobile market – and we do – we must invest in development and go along with this trend.

Wim van de Camp (PPE). – Thank you very much, Chair. I shall continue briefly. It is nice, State Secretary, that you say that Landrover is now also coming to Slovakia. Fortunately, nearly all British makes of car are continentally owned. After Brexit, that will make life easy, of course. Let me return briefly to the Council, because you have said: ‘I shall combine your questions’, and that is of course always convenient from your point of view. But can you say a little more about your assessment of that debate within the Council? I mean: are you (plural) convinced that those national processes should be subject to greater European influence?

Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development. – First of all on relief: of course, we are grateful for the arrival of Jaguar Land Rover. It is the largest investment in the EU in the last seven years, and we were fighting for this up to the last minute with Mexico. So we are glad that we managed to keep Jaguar Land Rover in Europe, and we see this as a victory for Europe as a whole, and not only for Slovakia. As regards the second part concerning the Council, it was twice a topic of discussion in the Council: once in June and once again in December; once during the Dutch Presidency, and once during the Slovak Presidency. There was consensus in the Council that there is a need for greater implementation – and improvement – of the existing rules. This is the most important thing for the Council. There was also discussion of introducing a ban on switching off defeat devices. There is also consensus in the Council about the fact that we should have this new market surveillance being carried out by this quasi-agency. These discussions have taken place in the Council and they will continue, and your great efforts and the excellent report you have produced serve as a great basis for this to happen. I also think that this will also be very helpful for the Council to get to know what people in your countries think; where they can count on some sort of support or, on the other hand, where they see problems. I’ll try to end where I began in my introduction: we really – and I am not saying this because we are sitting here – consider this to be a fantastic forum for discussing this problem, since this is just the beginning. The end will come when we have developed new rules that will be approved. And it is good that you too are present here at the very beginning. So I thank you very much for not only inspiring the Council, but also every Member State. Member States also have the opportunity to find out what other Member States think about the situation.
Wim van de Camp (PPE). – Thank you, Chair. By way of conclusion, I have one other question. How do you in fact explain what you have said about the public in previous answers? If I may speak about the situation in Slovakia, but also about the attitude of people in the Netherlands, they are not particularly concerned about the EMIS scandal when it comes down to it. Sales of certain makes of car are simply continuing as before. What do you think about this? Have we politicians lost touch with the public? A few times this morning you have said: ‘that is a political question’. I saw from your CV that you are an engineer. That is all well and good, but we should not be afraid of political questions. And what is actually going on here?

Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development. – I admit that: responding to it is possibly the best example. Take another telecommunications company that we’ve mentioned, Samsung: when it famously introduced its latest mobile phone, it expected sensational sales. Now people can’t even get on a plane with those phones. Does this mean that Samsung has ceased to sell all other mobile phones? Or will it learn its lesson from this and prepare a new phone for the market and try to regain the trust of its customers? You mentioned politics: Whenever there’s an election campaign and the votes are counted, a politician finds out whether he has managed to convince voters and whether they will vote for him again. A company that suffers from credibility problems has to confront them at two levels: Firstly, there is the decrease in the value of its shares, and it has to convince all its shareholders that the failure does not mean that the entire company will cease to function and be unable to invest in itself, or that it will be unable to develop. You can look at the increase in their value or at their current value to see to what extent they have managed, or not, to do this. Secondly, there is regaining trust among customers, who may feel that they have been cheated. Look at it again through the sales figures for those car brands. They will also be important not only for that company, but also for all the others. The new wariness and the reduced tolerance for overlooking certain things could ultimately prove to be beneficial. As is the case with Samsung, this company too has successfully overcome a crisis. I believe that these discussions have helped it to learn a lesson that will prevent similar situations from occurring, and this will lead to improvements for motorists. They will be able to buy high-quality cars, and what they read in the catalogues will be the truth. At the end of the day, once all the steps have been taken, it will be a well-managed process that will benefit everyone involved and help protect the environment. And this is, of course, the most important thing when we talk about emissions.

Seb Dance (S&D). – Thank you very much. I find myself in agreement with Mr van de Camp on the question of Brexit. I think it will make Slovakia ultimately a far more attractive destination for manufacturing for UK companies than the United Kingdom, and that is certainly a tragedy that we will have to grapple with.

You have given an indication that you would support the idea of a European oversight, but there is some question, I think, about the level of its responsibilities, that you have indicated concerns about. Just picking up on your comments earlier about not replicating what happens in other parts of the world because it might not be appropriate here, I understand that, but surely the process of learning from best practice works both ways. We here in the European Union expect others to adapt and to learn from policies that we get right, and similarly where we get policies wrong, we would want to adapt and learn from them.

What are the elements of bureaucratic burdens that you refer to in your answers to question 1 that you are particularly concerned about in relation to the potential responsibilities of a European oversight agency? What are your principal concerns, and what would you ask us to avoid?
**Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development.** – On the issue of bureaucracy, I would sum it up in one sentence: an agency makes no sense if it does not also have powers. Creating an agency would make sense if it had its own competences and responsibilities, and if it knew how to apply in practice the things it finds during tests and audits. Any other sort of agency would make no sense. There is no sense in someone coming who – when he says that he has found something that is not fully compliant – has no tools at his disposal to implement his findings in reality. A very similar situation to what we are currently dealing with could arise there. From the bureaucratic point of view, it won’t matter if this means some degree of red tape or increase in bureaucracy if it leads to transparency and to all those involved in the process of type-approval knowing not only what their powers are, but also their responsibilities. So Slovakia will always advocate for supporting such an agency, but only under the proviso that it also has the powers to translate its findings into real-world implementation.

On the other matters: as you well know, discussions are ongoing in the Chamber on ‘pre-review’, on Member States being able to share best practices with each other, and on them communicating as much as possible with each other on these matters. This may be an element of the solution, but it is certainly not the only solution. It merely stands in addition to us saying that uniform standards apply throughout the whole European Union. What is needed is not an increase in bureaucracy, but a joint assessment of technical services. It is, after all, also very important for the same rules to apply to everyone. Therefore, we have proposed SK Press accreditation for those institutions so that they can provide such services.

**Seb Dance (S&D).** – It seems as if there is a kind of emerging consensus about the need for an effective oversight here, and you are right that there is obviously a political discussion that needs to be had on what that looks like in terms of specifics, but there are other elements that have been feeding into this process. Of course the type approval procedure is being looked at in another committee and there have been several suggestions made by yet another committee, the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety. I wondered what your views are on each of these. I appreciate that you might not have a view on all of them, but it would be helpful to have a set of ideas on what your thinking is on these.

The first is a national fee structure to finance type approval paid by the manufacturer applying for type approval and set by each Member State individually, and this is aimed at breaking the commercial link between manufacturers and type approval authorities and technical services. If you have a view on that, that would be great.

Second, on the national levy of EUR 10 per vehicle sold to finance the oversight, a forum for exchange of information and coordination and market surveillance activities in Member States, and a standing committee of independent auditors auditing the work of national type approvals. I appreciate that is a slightly long list in the time available, but if you have a view on those ideas we would be very grateful indeed.

**Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development.** – Yes, the list was rather long. I discussed it on several occasions with my colleagues. As regards the Council itself, it was mentioned that this would prevent producers from paying providers – i.e. those facilities performing the checks – directly. All the Member States ended up supporting it. But it turned out to be rather difficult to implement. In terms of the future, we see an opportunity in strengthening the supervisory powers of those responsible for the individual technical services. This is precisely what would be affected by the aforementioned accreditation and the newly established agency that would, in some form or other, carry out the checks.
As regards the group of auditors, we are in total agreement with you in this particular case. I have said this many times today in my various responses.

**Bas Eickhout (Verts/ALE).** – Looking to the future, one of the big discussions we are going to have is also on the fourth RDE package, on in-service conformity. Talking about learning from each other, I think one of the things that we can learn from the United States is that they are now working with surprise tests. One of the problems we have is that, because we do not really trust each other as countries, there is a bit of ‘what kind of test are you going to do?’ because we want to check exactly what it looks like. Any test that we have prescribed until now is in full detail so that any car manufacturer knows exactly what to expect regarding how the car will be checked now and in the future. The Americans are saying that one of the things that is crucial is a surprise test: just do a test that people cannot prepare for, because then you can really circumvent any defeat device. What is your position, working in the fourth RDE package on in-service conformity, on surprise tests?

**Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development.** – Firstly, I would like to say that as far is Slovakia is concerned, we do trust the countries that are testing cars. I don’t want it to sound like we are producing good cars and that someone is testing them badly. If that is how it sounded, then that is not the case at all. We are just saying that the system has to be changed and that rules have to be introduced so that such a situation does not arise again. On random spot checks, my response is straightforward: these go on in sports, and since they were introduced to sports, things have greatly improved. There is much less doping since it is being uncovered much more often. This is a point of view. Random checks would also be very useful in the automotive sector. It just has to be clearly stated, and it will depend on the legislation that is adopted and on how particular tests are carried out. You know that comparing the fuel consumption of the same car on the same stretch of road is sometimes impossible. It depends on the traffic, the air temperature, and whether the driver has his ‘pedal to the metal’, as they say. All these things, as long as they are clearly specified – provided that it will be clearly evaluated in the legislation that will result from the general consensus – could be beneficial. I reiterate that there must be clear rules so that those values that are measured can then be properly assessed, and there must be no subjectivity from one side or another. This is what the whole thing is about.

**Bas Eickhout (Verts/ALE).** – Just a final comment from my side. I am also sure that all the type-approval authorities did their testing as prescribed. The problem was that the car manufacturers knew exactly how their cars would be tested and therefore could do tricks. For example, by lowering emission devices after 22 minutes in tests that they knew would last 20 minutes; that was what was happening. So the type-approval authorities did their job maybe, but they never went beyond the specific parameters of the tests. That is why in service conformity it is important that the element of surprise should be part of the discussion.

**Viktor Stromček, State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development.** – I fully agree with you. This is precisely the reason why we are sitting here. They tried to define a method of testing that proved to be unacceptable in the long term, since it wasn’t the most appropriate. And now we need to simply start over again and create a clear framework. We have total consensus on this. When we look at it, there could also be efforts to introduce a globally harmonised testing procedure, for example in respect of light vehicles. We are simply standing at the beginning of a new phase. If we join our forces, we will come up with something that cannot be bettered and that will be beneficial to both the environment and to motorists.
Chair. – Thank you very much. At the same time, that is the end of this hearing. I should like to thank all our colleagues very much for their contributions, including the Minister, for this hearing, which I believe has been useful and very interesting. Colleagues who wish to put additional questions in writing should send them to the EMIS Secretariat by Thursday, 19 January. I declare this meeting closed: we shall reconvene towards three o’clock.

The meeting closed at 11.40.