

Parliament wraps up spending hearings

By Toby Vogel - 23.01.2014 / 05:00 CET

The European Parliament's budgetary control committee this week wrapped up a series of hearings with European commissioners, senior officials and heads of European Union agencies on the Union's spending in 2012.

The committee's lead MEPs will now finalise their reports prior to discussion in the committee scheduled to start on 17 February. The committee is expected to adopt revised reports in mid-March and a plenary vote has been scheduled for the second plenary in April, the Parliament's last in its current composition.

MEPs on Monday (20 January) quizzed Lászlo Andor, the European commissioner for employment, social affairs and inclusion, with many questions about whether the Commission should rely on financial information provided by the member states.

On Tuesday, the committee heard from Algirdas Šemeta, the commissioner for taxation, customs, statistics, audit and anti-fraud; Catherine Day, the secretary-general of the Commission; Klaus Welle, her counterpart from the European Parliament; and David O'Sullivan, the chief operating officer of the EU's diplomatic corps, standing in for Catherine Ashton, the EU's foreign policy chief, who was in Switzerland for peace talks on Syria.

In addition to questioning the reliability of member states' data, the MEPs also doubted that corrections and recoveries were the best way to protect the EU's financial interests. Corrections are payments from the member states to compensate for errors found during audits of EU funds spent in the member states. The Commission outlined revisions to its approach to corrections in December.

Day defended the Commission's practice of keeping replies to MEPs' questions to 25 lines or fewer, saying she had yet to see a parliamentary question whose substance required a longer reply. She denied that the Commission practised 'parachutage' – the appointment of commissioners' personal staff to civil-service posts toward the end of their mandate.

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