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AN INTELLIGENT APPROACH TO SAFETY ON EUROPEAN ROADS

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity for sharing a few, hardly scientific, thoughts with you on e-Safety and our policy in this issue.

My presentation will be in four parts: first, I will quickly recall the purpose of our European road safety policy. Then, I will evoke the vision for safety on European roads. In the third part, the strategies implemented for achieving the vision will be discussed. Fourth, I will address the topic “e-Safety” within the framework of the established road safety strategies.

I do not have charts today. You can find plenty of charts, statistics and evidence in the Commission’s mid-term review on the Road Safety Action Programme, which will be adopted tomorrow.

¹ Check against delivery ; the following remarks are of a personal nature and can’t be construed as opinions or statements by the European Commission

1. ROAD SAFETY POLICY: THE PURPOSE

The primary purpose of road safety policy is of course to reduce the negative impacts of road transport on life and health of road users. Thus understood, road safety policy is part and parcel of the sustainable mobility agenda within the framework of the common EU transport policy. The Transport Policy White Paper of the Commission of 2001 puts our road safety policy exactly into this context.

However, and this is quite important for our assessment of e-Safety, road safety policy has also to be seen as an important contributor to general health and protection policies. Many contend that road safety action is a prime instrument to reduce ballooning public health expenditure. This is particularly true in low- and middle-income countries around the world, but also of relevance within the European Union. Indeed, today, worldwide statistics point out that more than 1 million people are killed by road accidents every year and more than 10 million people are injured or disabled. The victims are mostly young and/or professionally active persons, and apart from the human tragedy, their loss is a heavy mortgage on the future of a nation.

Finally, providing safety and security is a basic requirement of any State or Government organisation, the very foundation of the *contrat social* between the individual and the Government. This is especially true in our age of anxiety: all surveys show that safety and security rank high on the list of pre-occupations of our citizens, and Government needs to respond actively to such concerns.

2. THE VISION

For our European road safety policy, we enjoy the great advantage of having a clear vision on our mid-term objectives. The Commission Transport White Paper of 2001 spells out a reduction of 50% in terms of fatalities by 2010. Translated into figures, this means, for EU 25, a reduction from 50.000 to 25.000 fatalities.

Such a vision is very powerful. Its ethical component is immediately visible, it is easily understood by everybody, and thus raises enthusiasm and fosters commitment. It is therefore no surprise that the European institutions, many Member States and large parts of civil society have endorsed this objective.

In our science-oriented setting of today's conference, one may add that a more specific elaboration of the objectives could be useful. What is our vision about the number of injured we decide to tolerate on our roads? What about specific targets for vulnerable parts of our society, such as children,

young drivers, cyclists, or elderly? We should find common ground on such figures too, in order to further give directions to achieve the objectives of our policies.

However, what I would like us to remember is the fact that we have a powerful and motivating vision of our road safety policy, and we can be proud of this.

3. THE STRATEGY

Obviously, to achieve a vision, one needs a strategy, which defines (1) priorities, (2) levels of action including task sharing and (3) methods.

1. In our road safety policy, there is a clear **priority** on actions with highest impact: as speeding, driving under influence of alcohol and not wearing seat-belts are causing the highest number of fatalities, policy initiatives on European level regularly address these problems. Other priorities can be geographic or time-relevant ones. The statistics give us clear indications which EU Member States are doing well and which ones need to perform an extra effort. One could thus prioritize Community actions on those EU Member States, whose road safety performance is below EU average. Finally, when defining priorities, one needs also to keep the overall momentum for a policy. Thus, fast progress in some areas is essential to stimulate adherence and to nourish enthusiasm also for longer-term projects, such as infrastructure safety management or widespread introduction of new technologies such as e-Safety devices.

2. A strategy will also define **levels of action**, and any political strategy needs to address the technical and the institutional level to reach its vision. On the technical level, EU road safety policy endeavours to be data- and research-based. Broadly speaking, the Commission, through its fast-evolving CARE data base and the numerous research projects it sponsors, has a fairly good idea of the issues and ways forward to resolution. On institutional level, the challenge to effective policies lies in the respect of the subsidiarity principle: road safety, by its very nature, is to a large extent a local or national competence. However, there is clear added value for European initiatives and legislation in a number of fields to increase effectiveness of road safety action across the board.

For e-Safety, linking the technological with the institutional level remains a central challenge. Technology without policy framework stays a gadget. A policy framework that is not informed by developments in technology stays utterly outdated.

3. EU road safety policy has developed its own version of the Community **method**. One central pillar of our method is the principle of **shared responsibility**, explicitly espoused by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission: beyond the questions of institutional prerogatives, the European Union institutions have committed themselves to achieve our target of halving the fatalities on European roads. Politically speaking, the principle of shared responsibility is the antidote to a legalistic interpretation of the subsidiarity rule, and can usefully be employed by institutions to remind each other to do their job in a reasonably satisfactory and speedy way.

Another instrument in road safety springs directly from the principle of shared responsibility: the wide-spread reference to sharing best practice. If all are responsible in a political sense, without necessarily a legal obligation, it ensues that the exchange of knowledge and mutual help play a central role in achieving the shared objectives.

The second guiding principle in EU road safety policy is the **integrated approach**. Our traffic system is – ideally – an integration of infrastructures, vehicles and humans, and traffic problems need therefore to be addressed not in isolation, but always with a view to the whole system. Thus, one cannot look at the vehicle alone to resolve traffic problems, but needs to take into account also the behaviour aspect (eg. human-machine interface) and the related infrastructure issues. Secondly, the integrated approach requires that one needs to get all constituents together for devising and implementing policies. It is not advisable to develop solutions only with industry, or only amongst administrations, or only with certain suppliers.

Finally, the integrated approach works also as a mechanism for setting priorities and resource allocation. As a matter of policy, one may not want to put all one's energy into the quest for full perfection in a far advanced sector of the system, when the policy and performance standards in other sectors can still benefit from major improvements. In a mature system, the marginal costs for incremental increases towards perfection are high, while large benefits for the whole system with lower marginal costs can be achieved in settings with large room for improvement.

4. E-SAFETY

First of all, let me utter a truism: **e-Safety is a good thing**. The emergence of affordable and more powerful information and communication technology has a significant impact on all our lives, and naturally touches on road safety. The contribution of technology towards to objective of both saving lives and minimising the impact of accident is, of course, to be welcomed. Intelligent transport system (ITS) applications are an ideal

candidate to exploit the synergy between the ranges of solutions being implemented.

However, I would want to dwell on a few **caveats** in the e-Safety initiative. **First**, there is an **important social dimension** to our use of roads. The road is one of the last public spheres in our societies, where we need to live and act together. The road is therefore a precious field for fostering basic civilised behaviour: respecting the rules and the others, controlling our power and emotions, and forgive mistakes - just to name a few virtues. Therefore, e-Safety should increase responsible actions of traffic participants, not diminish the need to act responsibly.

Second, I would advocate a strict **conceptual discipline** in order not to create confusion on e-Safety. Not all new technologies for cars are for safety; they can be for comfort, professional use, traffic management. Safety is a precious public good; there may be a temptation to declare technologies as safety technologies to get policy makers interested in promotion and funding, while the normal business case should prevail. But safety is only one field for technology application and intelligent technologies, and not the only field. This would be a confusing, too narrow and finally meaningless concept. Thus, safety or e-Safety should not be used as a promotional tool with a hidden agenda. If research and deployment are fostered to strengthen the competitiveness of industry in an area which has a future, this is good in itself. One does not need a far-fetched safety rhetoric to justify such initiatives.

Third, there may be room for improvement in the **process organisation** of e-Safety, when we're discussing how we will reap the benefits of high technology for road safety. I suggest that we are relying on our agreed methodology in road safety: an integrated approach based on shared responsibility. The first commandment is thus to get all stakeholders together. There should not be artificial boundaries between industry research and policy research. We will further want to avoid administrative isolation, where one administrative department would target its actions towards policy makers, while the other talks to industry. This is the end of the integrated approach.

In the development of the e-Safety technologies, users should be involved during the process, and not when the process is finished. Wide consensus on the objectives and the usefulness of new technologies is a precondition to creating standards and interoperability – a regulatory activity. Without standards, there is no possibility to create markets. And without markets, there is no industrial success, and widespread introduction of new technologies remains wishful thinking.

Finally, the development of e-Safety should also be mindful not to create divisive technologies between road users, but also between groups of countries. Road safety technology must not create classes of car owners or traffic participants, differentiated by the protection they enjoy. Likewise, given the importance of road safety for the global health agenda, e-Safety should also provide benefits for middle- and low income countries with a high road fatality rate. These countries will benefit significantly from cheap and effective ways to protect their citizens on the road.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to summarise my thoughts as follows:

1. Our road safety policy has clear objectives and workable methods. E-Safety has the potential to contribute positively to these objectives within the co-operative framework which exists already.
2. There must be honesty about the purpose of e-safety, its application, its benefits and costs. This process needs to bring all together. Otherwise, acceptance suffers. If acceptance suffers, the will to introduce and indeed use effective solutions is seriously hampered.
3. e-Safety must be underpinned by robust business models. Their emergence, in turn, is fostered by creative regulatory action which enables markets and creates stable investment horizons.

I welcome very much the commitment of ETSC on the issue of e-Safety. I do hope that ETSC will continue to follow this dossier closely and participate actively and openly in the debate.