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FOURTH ROAD SAFETY WEEK

Conclusions of the seminar on aggressive behaviour on the road

Note by the secretariat

A seminar on “*Aggressive behaviour on the road, can it be changed?*” was held in the Palais des Nations on 5 April 2004, on the occasion of the launch of the Fourth Road Safety Week in the UNECE Region

The conclusions of the seminar presented at the end by its Chairman, Mr. Bernard Périsset (Switzerland), who is also Chairman of WP.1, are reproduced below.

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Seminar of 5 April 2004

“Aggressive behaviour on the road, can it be changed?”

Conclusions by Mr. Bernard Périsset

The major role of human behaviour, of all the factors at the origin of road traffic accidents, is undeniable. Aggressiveness on the road is an alarming phenomenon, not only because there is a tendency for it to develop throughout the world, as the results of the 2003 study by EOS Gallup Europe so clearly demonstrate, but also because it seems that we are beginning to be accustomed to aggressiveness, in other words, we tolerate the unacceptable.

Aggressiveness is a multifaceted phenomenon which may have a variety of causes - psychological, social, biological or a combination of these factors - and assumes a variety of forms depending on the continent and the country. This can be explained in part by differences in culture and in the perception of what is acceptable driving behaviour. A number of aspects must be taken into account in studying aggressiveness at the wheel. According to Andrew Howard (AA Motoring Trust, United Kingdom), the following should be considered:

- Aggressiveness as an instrument versus aggressiveness as a mark of hostility (is a person aggressive in order to gain an advantage?);
- The role of delinquents or violent individuals (are they aggressive drivers because they are aggressive in all circumstances?); and
- Perceived aggressiveness (is every instance of what is felt to be aggressive behaviour actually aggressive?).

If all these parameters, and many others described in the first part of our seminar, are taken into account - for example, as Ms. Forward (VTI, Sweden) pointed out, drivers who most tend to be irritated by the behaviour of others are precisely those who break the rules - it seems difficult to try to give a single definition of aggressive driving. Ms. Delaney and Mr. De Voogd (EOS Gallup Europe) propose the following approach: *“A driver’s behaviour is aggressive when it is deliberately so, when it is liable to increase the risk of a collision and when it is motivated by impatience, annoyance, hostility and/or an attempt to save time.”*

Our society cannot accept any form whatever of aggressive behaviour on the road. For that reason it is absolutely essential to make the public aware of the risks related to or incurred by aggressive driving. As in the case of many other factors behind accidents - alcohol in particular - the question of aggressive driving should not be considered in isolation from aggressiveness in general. The problem must be dealt with as a whole, as a social problem. I am aware that this is a task that will take time and that will only bear fruit in the long-term, but it is assuredly the best means of providing a lasting response.

More immediate solutions must be found, however. A psycho-social concept of aggressiveness and considerations relating to the road traffic system have led Mr. Linneweber (University of Magdeburg, Germany) to put forward four proposals with a view to reducing the probability of aggressive interactions:

- Improve the homogeneity of traffic flows;
- Adapt traffic regulations to the modifications of the system;
- Extend the individual's responsibility to the functioning of the segment of the system used; and
- Give a more precise definition of the criteria that destabilize the system.

Better organization of roads and traffic, particularly by the judicious use of new technologies, will make it possible to cut back aggressive and dangerous driving behaviour.

Although quite genuine possibilities exist for improvement in terms of infrastructure development and traffic management, they will still not be enough to achieve what Mr. Le Breton (France) calls "socially aware driving". His paper and those of Mr. Zuiderhoek (Netherlands) and Mr. Kirjanov (Russian Federation) clearly illustrated the need for a consistent chain of controls/sanctions/re-education that will make drivers aware that, since our society does not tolerate aggressive driving, their behaviour will be monitored and, where appropriate, punished with all necessary severity. The example of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, presented by Ms. Vegega (United States of America) is quite striking: notable changes in behaviour were observed following the reinforced presence and action of police on the roads together with wide media coverage.

The system gains in efficiency if prevention and punishment are combined in an educational setting; awareness-raising sessions, introduced for offenders or holders of a probationary permit, enable a better realization of the interactive and social dimension of driving and thus the modification of the aggressiveness of certain road-users towards others.

The ultimate ideal would be not to have to "modify" attitudes to make them more compatible with road safety objectives, but to "forge" them from the start, when training children and young people to respect the values that underpin daily life and to show tolerance, particularly as regards those weaker than themselves. This was my understanding from listening to Ms. Parker (University of Manchester, United Kingdom) speaking about the psychology of aggressive driving and pleading for an approach oriented towards the development of a genuine safety culture that would improve social interaction and respect. Indeed, this week's slogan or "quality label" is precisely "Respect is safety"!

We still have to put the message over! In her paper on communications strategies, Ms. Bernacer Sales (Spain) clearly demonstrated the need to develop a positive global approach, directed at attitudes and behaviour, in association with all public and private partners. Mr. Van Aershot (European Federation of Driving Schools), speaking about training classes in

driving schools, which, he said, are increasingly becoming classes in social behaviour, stressed not only the need for a global approach in education but also the importance of making provision for a continuous training process which does not come to an end when the age of access to a motor vehicle arrives.

I must also mention here all the types of action presented by Mr. Kroes (European Federation of Road Traffic Victims (FEVR)), to be undertaken or reinforced in order to provide better assistance to the victims of aggressiveness on the roads.

This one-day seminar has shown us what directions we should be taking to curb the upsurge in aggressiveness at the wheel, in order to prevent and discourage it. It is now our duty to transmit all these lessons to our authorities, our organizations and our associations so that they can be implemented by everyone according to their individual responsibilities, if we do not want this seminar to have been a purely academic exercise.

The Working Party on Road Traffic Safety (WP.1) for its part will determine the measures to be incorporated as necessary into the international legal instruments of which it is in a sense the “guardian”: the 1968 Vienna Conventions, with their world coverage, and the 1971 European Agreements supplementing them. WP.1 will also identify specific and more detailed measures which it will recommend member States to take in the areas of education, information, the “controls/sanctions” chain and traffic organization and management; these measures will be incorporated into the Consolidated Resolutions (R.E.1 and R.E.2). Lastly, since WP.1 is an excellent platform for the exchange of information and experiences, it will follow the activities successfully undertaken by the various participants as a result of this day of reflection and make them public, thus encouraging the sharing of the best practices that will enable road-users to demonstrate an attitude of social awareness.

In concluding, I should like to express my gratitude to the Economic Commission for Europe, and in particular to the Executive Secretary, Ms. Schmögnerova, and to the Director of the Transport Division, Mr. Capel Ferrer, for organizing this seminar and to WHO for its collaboration. I would also like to thank warmly all those who were responsible for the preparation of the event, in particular Ms. Marie-Noëlle Poirier and all the staff of the Transport Division. My thanks go also to the two Chairmen of the meetings - Mr. Alexander Yakimov (Russian Federation) and Mr. Pim Hol (Netherlands) - the speakers, Mr. Büschi (Switzerland), moderator of the panel and the NGOs who took part in it, and the representatives of ECMT and the European Union. Lastly, I would like to thank each of you not only for having participated in this seminar, but also for passing on our message: Respect is safety!
