

History of the 1958-Agreement

Dear Mr. Chairman, dear Mr. van Meeuwen, dear Mrs Molnar, dear participants from all over the world,

When the ECE-secretariat contacted me to ask whether I would be willing to deliver a speech at the 50th anniversary of the 1958-Agreement I was very honoured. But nevertheless I asked “Why me, why the German ambassador?” And Mr. Ramos answered: Well, you are the E – 1 country!

Well the encircled letter “E” with a number, everybody has seen it on some of his car equipment and parts, for example on the windscreen. Germany was honoured to be the country given the number “1”, showing that a vehicle or a vehicle part was approved there. But does everybody outside this room know where it comes from? An event like this will help to multiply the knowledge about the valuable work UNECE does in Geneva.

More than 50 years ago with growing prosperity, the number of motor vehicles throughout the world was expanding at an enormous rate. The freedom of movement was considered to be a major ingredient of the quality of life. The motor vehicle became a major instrument of economic development and social progress. Jobs directly linked to the manufacture and use of vehicles constituted a major source of employment in many countries, and the development of road traffic turned out to be an essential condition for the economic development of practically all countries. At the same time, problems that motor vehicles generated - and still generate today - in terms of safety, environment and consumption of natural resources lead most of the world's Governments to conclude that the elaboration of regulations at international level governing the

construction, ownership and use of vehicles was necessary. And as a consequence the development of international traffic naturally made it essential to harmonize vehicle construction regulations, being closely linked to the use of vehicles. But it was quickly realized that in international trade, the existence of disparate construction regulations for cars generates significant problems:

- different regulations lead to different specifications for products rising manufacturing costs
- the elaboration of different regulations leads to unnecessary duplication of scientific and technical research in the various countries
- compulsory checks - some arbitrary - prior to the marketing of vehicles are barriers to free trade.

In order to find a solution to these problems, a number of European Governments decided to set up a coordination structure. And they did it with a vision not limiting them to regional thinking by using the United Nations and its Economic Commission for Europe as a basis.

Thus on 6 June 1952 by an UNECE-resolution the ECE-Working Party on the Construction of Vehicles - the famous WP.29 - was established within the framework of the Inland Transport Committee.

The group held its first session from 10 to 13 February 1953, attended by nine governments and five non-governmental organizations. The first report - which is available for you in the room today in three languages - shows what was of concern at the time: Whether one or two red lights should be installed at the rear of motor vehicles. Soon, a program of work took shape and the work concentrated on accident prevention. And a first big step towards a coordinated harmonization process was done: The conclusion of an agreement already

signed in Rome in 1956 in the form of an exchange of letters between the governments of the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands. The subject: The adoption of uniform and harmonized requirements for 2 headlamps emitting an asymmetrical passing beam.

Dear participants, transportation facilitation was the primary concern of the UNECE Inland Transport Committee. As well trade considerations were important at a time when Europe was in the process of reconstructing itself. In March 1958, the **Federal Republic of Germany** proposed an agreement to be established under the auspices of UNECE in order to facilitate the adoption of uniform conditions of approval and the reciprocal recognition of approval for motor vehicle equipment and parts. Thus the agreement was done on 20 March 1958 and it entered into force on 20 June 1959, upon the signature of several European countries. The 1958-Agreement concerning the Adoption of Uniform Technical Prescriptions for Vehicles was born - a document that not only addressed safety concerns but also the problem of diverse state regulations disrupting the free flow of commerce across borders. WP.29 was naturally appointed the administrative body of the agreement. And the harmonized headlamp regulation that was concluded in Rome became the first UNECE regulation to be annexed to the 1958-Agreement.

Since then WP.29 - known today under the proud and fully deserved name “World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations” - together with its subsidiary groups of experts began to look beyond active safety and into addressing the reduction of the effects of accidents on the human body. Later problems of environmental protection, air quality and the limitation of noise from motor vehicles were covered - still relying on the one and only 1958-Agreement.

But the 1958-Agreemnt proved to be able to meet another challenge coming up: Globalization. More and more non-European countries became interested in the work and in the possible accession to the 1958-Agreement. Three years after its revision in 1995, Japan became the first non-European country to accede in 1998, followed by Australia in 2000, South Africa in 2001, New Zealand in 2002 and South Korea in 2004 as well as other countries. The global effects and challenges for ECE-Transport become clear, when looking at the success story of the 1958-Agreement. Developed in and for the UNECE it has proved its justification of existence and received a “seal of quality” by the fact, that non-ECE countries joined it - realizing the benefits it offers.

All in all, the 1958-Agreement has 48 contracting parties to date. And meanwhile it has 127 regulations annexed to it and constantly being updated to be as innovative as the technologies they represent and to cover new policy decisions.

Undeniably, the results of the 50 years of operation of the 1958-Agreement are one of the big success stories of UNECE, let me call it a “bread and butter activity” of ECE transport. They made it possible to build up a set of international regulations capable of providing a basis for the technical construction and approval of all categories of vehicles in European and non-European countries.

The World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations will not only continue to update its regulations, but will gain a sharper profile in an area where it has not only the responsibility but the capacity to do so: The reduction of vehicle emissions as a contribution to global warming and climate change. It will examine the development of fuel quality standards, further harmonize vehicle regulations for the application of alternative engines like hybrid

technology, hydrogen and fuel cells etc - after having started with the question whether one or two red lights should be installed at the rear of motor vehicles 50 years ago. And still a vivid and up-to-date 1958-Agreement is the framework for this exercise.

During this entire period of 50 years, it has been possible to maintain alignment between the UNECE Regulations annexed to the 1958-Agreement and the corresponding directives issued by the European Community. Maintaining this consistency should stay a categorical imperative for the countries involved.

The 1958-Agreement is of outmost importance for car manufacturing and importing countries alike. It is creating the preconditions for worldwide trade of vehicles, free of nontariff barriers, thus making selling and buying cars easier and - well - cheaper for all of us and contributing uniquely to global road safety and environmental protection. I am looking forward to the next 50 years of the 1958-Agreement, for the benefits of society, economy, industry, and, last but not least, us: the drivers.

Thank you very much for your attention.