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**DRIVING UNDER THE EFFECT OF DRUGS AND MEDICAMENTS**

Reflection paper prepared by the representatives of  
Italy, the Russian Federation and the European Commission

Studies and researches have proved that each year thousands of people are killed or permanently disabled as a consequence of driving after consuming drugs, or other chemical substances, or proper medicaments.

This Working Party has already been considering the problem of alcohol on driving, and so the problem of driving whilst under the influence of drugs and medication should also be considered.

Some recent research asserts that some pharmaceuticals may be the reason of every fourth or fifth accident. The main, largest and the most dangerous part of them are that ones, which influence the reaction rate and coordination of movements.

This is a necessary step in order to give to the central and local governments the guidelines to help preventing the thousands of injuries and deaths which every year occur on our roads.

It is well known that driving requires concentration, skills, common sense and a concern for the safety of everyone on the road, especially for the vulnerable user.

Alertness, perception of the dangers and reaction times make the difference in the interaction between the driver and the external environment.

Drugs and medication and many other licit or illicit substances can seriously impair the senses of the driver, and lessen his/her ability to interact and to be able to deal safely with unforeseen or unexpected events and lead to lethal events both for drivers and for all the road users.

Contrary to alcohol abuse, the drug driving is thorny weighty problem for which Governments have not yet identified a common effective strategy, both from the legislative and from the operative point of view.

Nowadays, it is not even easy, especially on a road side check, to identify and classify if the subject is liable to be said of driving under the effects of drugs and medicaments mainly because it is utmost difficult, if not almost impossible, to have a mapping list of all the types of chemical substances which may impair driving.

From the operative point of view, the classification of medicaments is much more easier than the codification of drugs - whether extracted from plants or chemically-produced.

## **A. Legislation**

Governments should exploit and enforce a complete programme to reduce the number of fatalities and injuries due to the driving under the influence of drugs and medicaments.

Governments should encourage researches and best practices exchange programme to arrive to define a common shared classification of dangerous substances and to set a common strategy of planning, enforcement education and information to fight the problem.

Legislation should be used to consider the problems of drugs among the drivers under different point of view, and policy makers should urge the pharmaceutical stakeholders and research institute and universities to implement programme to categorise the group of drugs according to their molecular structure and their toxicological effects for driving.

Legislation should aim at monitoring the experimental and epidemiological studies measuring the influence of drugs on driving performances. The data raising from these studies should be bring to effective and restrictive measures able to detect the use of drugs among drivers and to curb the dangerous effects of some medicaments on driving.

Government should consider the opportunity to set or increase penalties for the offence of impaired driving,

Special policies in order to discourage the use of drugs , should be considered deploying resources to eradicate the problem through welfare and social policies , principally when the drug driving is linked to an intensive or dependent use.

Legislation should considerer special measure of punishment for drug driving, from suspension to withdraw of the driving licence.

Different drug supervised treatment options should be considered as compulsory for drug drivers, and the driving licence should be given back only after the complete treatment and subsequent examination have been successfully carried out.

Governments should set specific legislation aiming at having direct effect on the behaviour and risk perception of persons driving under the effects of drugs or medicaments. As for alcohol, increasing drivers' perception of the risk of being detected is one of the most effective measures of preventing impaired driving.

## **B. Enforcement**

The reaction of a person to drugs depends on several factors, and can be influenced, for instance, by habitual exposure to drugs and by genetic differences, by the type of drugs, by the eventual mixture of the different drugs or by the use of alcohol simultaneously.

This is why classification or rating of all the different effects of drugs on driving is inadequate.

Nevertheless, general guidelines could be set to address traffic police officer in charge of enforcement, so that they could be able to perform at the best the control and fight of the drugs driving.

Indeed testing for drugs at road side is not as easy as it is for alcohol. Few drugs are detectable with a breathalyzer. Blood or urine tests could be much more indicative, but collecting these fluids by the road or outside a disco is a quite cumbersome and complicated process.

As a matter of fact, legislation should take into account two different stages to detect drugs-drivers: testing for the impairments of driving performance and testing for the presence of drugs.

In this operative framework, according to the situation and the possible setting of road side checking station, enforcement rules will be set.

Special equipped sites for roadside checks should be planned to perform enforcement activities all the year round as a routinary activity, and in an increased number in high risk times (weekends) or in special occasions ( mass contests i.e. sport, festival).

Because of the difficult immediate discern of drugs when stopping a suspect driver , police should be continuously up dated and trained in recognising the cues indicating potential impairment ( reduced coordination, slow reaction time, decreased inhibition, euphoria, bizarre behaviour, talkativeness, increased confidence, agitation ).

In presence of the potential impairment, special dedicated tests should be carried out for detecting the type of drugs or medicaments the driver has been using. To ensure this, personnel involved in these actions of enforcement should be trained in drugs and medicaments related driving problems.

It is also recommended that police officers and technicians designated for these enforcement road side checks should receive special dedicated training by physician or trained skilled nurses on how to perform the examinations, to ensure the right use and maintenance of the instruments in conformity with the standards.

### **C. Public Information and Education**

Government should regularly plan campaigns to publicize the severe enforcement on driving affected by drug and medicaments.

Governments should provide regular awareness and information campaigns to alert the public about all the possible consequences on driving of drugs or some medicaments consumption. Informational campaigns should also be used to create make- belief educational programmes in which drug use or medicament misuse while driving is unacceptable.

In addition, to provide a general deterrent effect, Governments should regularly publicize the plans of police enforcement activities to combat these substances impaired driving.

Schools should also include in their curriculum information about the temporary and permanent effects due to drugs assumption and driving under their influence.

Moreover, driving schools for new drivers should provide similar information on the effects of drugs and medicaments on perceptual and motor skills and reasoning, as well as the dangers of drinking and driving and what can be done to prevent drinking and driving.

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