



Conference on Improving Road Traffic Safety in South-Eastern Europe Setting Regional and National Road Traffic Casualty Reduction Targets

Hosted by Evia Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Hellenic Chambers Transport Association with the support of the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Greece

25-26 June 2009, Halkida, Greece



Conclusions and recommendations

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) conference “Improving Road Traffic Safety in South-Eastern Europe: Setting Regional and National Road Traffic Reduction Targets”, kindly hosted by the Evia Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Hellenic Chambers Transport Association, with the support of the Hellenic Ministry of Transport and Communications was held in Halkida on 25-27 June 2009.

The Conference was opened on behalf of the Greek Minister of Transport and Communications by Mrs. Evagelia Tsaga, Director General in the Ministry and Mrs Eva Molnar, Director of Transport Division, UNECE. Mr. Panagiotis Simosis, President, Evia Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Mr. Evagelos Spanoudakis, President of the Chania Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Vice-President Hellenic Chambers Transport Association welcomed the participants.

The conference was attended by 150 participants from the public and private sectors from Greece and other South Eastern European countries, including delegations from the Ministries of Transport, Public Works, Interior, Health and Education from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey, as well as France, Italy, and the Netherlands. The European Commission also attended. Among the conference participants were also the representatives from the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, in Chambesy, Switzerland, the South East Transport Observatory (SEETO), the FIA Foundation, the Global Road safety Partnership (GRSP), the European Federation of Road Traffic Victims (FEVR), the National Technical University of Athens, the Hellenic Institute of Transportation Engineers the Hellenic Road Safety Institute “Panos Mylonas”, the Hellenic Association of Safe Transport, the Hellenic Chambers of Commerce and Industry from all Greece, the Hellenic Basketball Federation, FIBA Europe and players from the national basketball team of Greece, together with representatives of the local authorities and the business community. The representatives from mass media at national and local levels followed the sessions and participated in the Press Conference.

With 1.3 million people dying worldwide and millions more injured or disabled every year as a result of road crashes, road traffic safety has become a major global social, economic, development and health concern. Only in Europe as much as 127.000 die every year and 2.4 millions more are injured or disabled causing in addition to human suffer, overwhelming costs running into hundreds of millions of dollars a year mounting to 1.5 to 2.5 % of Europe's GDP. Despite some progress registered in last years, South Eastern European countries are still suffering from high numbers of casualties from road traffic crashes that persist in the region. However, road traffic risks are known and can be prevented. These include, excess speed driving, driving under the influence of alcohol, non-use of seat belts, child restraints and helmets, as well as non respect of vulnerable road users, such as pedestrians and cyclists and unsafe road infrastructure.

The participants noted that strengthening multisectoral international collaboration among governments and international organizations from public and private sectors around the world and raising awareness on the global road safety crisis was among the main messages to the international community contained in resolution 62/244 on improving road safety, adopted by the sixty-second United Nations General Assembly, on 31 March 2008.

As part of the United Nations global project on setting regional and national road traffic casualty reduction targets, which is being implemented by the five United Nations Regional Commissions and is supported by resolution 62/244, this conference provided an excellent opportunity for experts from Europe to discuss measures for improving road safety, sharing best practices and further raising awareness on road traffic safety issues.

The global road safety agenda and the ongoing plans and initiatives, the road traffic safety in Europe, South Eastern Europe and Greece, in particular was among the issues heavily debated by the participants. The participants learned about the most recent developments that have taken place as a consequence of enforcing multidisciplinary approach in road safety, about comprehensive programmes and policies that are implemented or planned, as well as about the social, economic development and health impacts associated with road traffic safety. The recommendations of the report of the OECD Working Group "Towards zero – ambitious road safety targets and the Safe System Approach" were presented. The Safe System Approach and the contribution of setting and achieving ambitious road safety targets to the delivery of road casualty reduction was discussed.

Transport experts from France, Italy, and the Netherlands shared their country experiences where developing national road safety plans, setting targets and effectively implementing them had produced tangible results. The participants were of the opinion that these examples of good road safety practices are valid

sources of inspiration for them in adopting national road safety targets and/or prioritizing steps towards achieving targets by 2015.

The participants also appreciated the continuing commitment of UNECE in promoting global actions in a systemic and proactive way through the development of global safety-related technical regulations and legal instruments addressing the main factors of road crashes i.e. the road user behaviour (driver), the vehicle and the infrastructure, as well as the activities of the other UN regional Commissions in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. They were informed of the EU related policies and efforts, including the progress of the implementation of the EU-27 member States commitment to halve road traffic fatalities by 2010, comparing to 2000. They were also informed of FIA Foundation's and its Global Road Safety Commission efforts in addressing road traffic safety problems around the world, in particular in low-and-middle income countries, as well as of the agenda of the First Global Ministerial Road Safety Conference to be held in Moscow, 19-20 November 2009 and the proposed adoption of the "Decade of Action 2010-2020-Time for Action". The work of the South East Europe Transport Observatory (SEETO), as well as the National Technical University of Athens and the non-governmental organizations (Global Road Safety Partnership [GRSP], International Road Assessment Project [iRAP], European Federation of Road Traffic Victims [FEVR], Road Traffic Safety Observatory of the Technical Chamber of Greece, Road Safety Institute "Panos Mylonas" and Hellenic Association of Safe Transport,) was also discussed.

During a special panel dedicated to the basketball champions, the players of the Greek national basketball team, the Hellenic Basketball Federation and FIBA Europe promoted the "Fair Play" and "Team work" in maintaining safe roads across Greece and elsewhere. Stressing that individuals often do not recognize the importance of complying with the rules, thinking that a mistake or minor "bending" of rules affects only themselves, the Greek basketball champions invited people to abide by the rules and start work as a team and play fair in road traffic.

The representatives of the Hellenic Chambers of Commerce and Industry participating in the conference adopted a Declaration, in which they resolve to support UNECE work, use their network in Greece to support promotional campaigns and raising awareness aimed at sensitizing road users to improve their behavior, advocate for specific measures improving road safety, establish a funding mechanisms designated to support efforts for improved road safety in Greece, and invite South Eastern European countries to take actions, agree road safety goals and fully implement UNECE road safety related legal instruments.

The participants welcomed the encouraging positive developments but recognized that road traffic casualties are still dramatically affecting their countries, especially the young people, and that road safety is not just a transport issue, but it is a social and economic hazard, negatively impacting their country

development efforts. The common understanding was that improving road safety can be seen as a social contract in which all the participants from both public and private sectors should be accountable for their respective actions and failures.

While attention should mainly focus on road crash prevention measures, post-crash measures are equally important to ensure minimal loss of life and trauma of persons engaged in crashes. To this end close cooperation and coordination among relevant agencies such as police, ambulance rescue services, fire fighting and hospitals are indispensable.

Noting that the absolute and universal value of the human person integrity and life constitutes a basic element of human rights, the participants underlined the responsibilities of road users, as members of the community, to behave according to the road traffic rules and respect each other.

Taking stock of the increasing importance of tourism as an economic development factor, the participants felt that safe roads may present an additional advantage in attracting tourism in south-eastern Europe.

In the framework of international collaboration among government, business and civil society on an action oriented plan to upgrade road safety and support victims and their families, the participants noted that religious institutions could play a key role and that this represents an area that should be explored.

The participants visited Evia's most critical sites for road traffic safety and realized that the Evia's road network is problematic with regard to safety. They felt that this fact needs to be seriously considered by the competent authorities of Greece. Moreover, they had the opportunity to visit some of the most beautiful parts of Eastern Evia and experience the famous Greek hospitality.

Considering road safety as a problem which can only be solved through collective efforts and cooperation at all levels, the participants agreed on the following

Recommendations:

1. The lessons learned during the conference, especially about road safety initiatives and practices that can help Governments to set and achieve road safety targets at relatively low cost and within a short time frame, should be disseminated to the other government authorities involved in road safety in the countries participating in the seminar (Ministries of Interior, Transport, Health and Education).
2. Quantifying the road safety problem through good national statistics and research is an essential first step in establishing campaigns to improve road safety. Countries should therefore adopt/improve methodology for data

collection and set-up/improve the existing national computerised databases on road crashes. To this end, UNECE Glossary and database on road traffic accidents would be an appropriate basis.

3. Governments have a primary role to play in creating safe road traffic conditions through safe infrastructure, legislation, enforcement and education and they also need to optimise their expenditures. Reducing the number of road casualties leads to reduced costs for the Governments and the society. It is recommended to countries that have not set road safety targets yet, to begin to analyze and model data in order to produce evidence-based casualty reduction targets. In addition, data should be collected in order to have indicators in terms of different road safety problems or groups of road users (for example, separate targets for drinking and driving, use of seatbelts and child restraints and wearing of helmets). When setting targets, effectiveness should prevail on any other consideration, to the maximum extent possible.

4. Political will and commitment are key elements needed to properly address road safety as a priority under all its aspects but mainly to secure funds for improving infrastructure, for education, training, and enforcement which are high-cost measures.

5. International cooperation and knowledge-sharing in road safety should be further strengthened taking into account the needs of low and middle income countries. To this end, as a first step, a number of advisory missions should be conducted after the conference upon request of countries in order to assess their road safety problems and help them develop targets in a bilateral setting.

6. It is recommended that Governments actively participate in the decision-making process concerning the UN Conventions on Road Traffic and on Road Signs and Signals, 1968, which takes place in the Working Party on Road Traffic Safety (WP.1). This would also provide for an appropriate forum where individual member countries learn from each other's experience and are able to compare their progress in achieving the targets with other countries in the region.

7. The results of the conference should be included in the final report of the project, which should be communicated to the Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety to be held in Moscow, in November 2009, and further promoted as guidelines to be followed by countries in all the United Nations Regional Commissions' geographical areas.

The participants were invited to participate actively in the Road Safety Round Table with the title "Are We Victims of Development Success?" organized by the UNECE on 23 September 2009 in Geneva.

The participants expressed their gratitude to Evia Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Hellenic Chambers Transport Association, for warmly hosting the conference in Halkida in such excellent conditions, the Hellenic Ministry of Transport and Communications for supporting the event, to speakers for having shared their experience and provided for possible solutions to improve road safety in South Eastern Europe, and UNECE for having organized the Conference.

The proceedings of the conference, including presentation and all conference material will be published on the UNECE website at www.unece.org.

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