

European Road Safety Day, 6 May 2013

Pedestrian safety in EU urban areas

On 6 May 2013, the Commission organised the European Road Safety Day in Brussels. The topic of the full-day conference was "pedestrian safety in EU urban areas". Some 170 road safety experts from NGOs, the industry and the Member States participated in the conference.

The event was also an EU contribution to the United Nations Global Road Safety Week, starting the same date. The UN Global Road Safety Week was part of the United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020, with events on pedestrian road safety taking place all over the world.

The European Road Safety Day was opened by Vice-President Siim Kallas. Mr Kallas stressed in his speech the fact that, while the EU is clearly the world-leading region when it comes to road safety, every death is still one too many and work must continue. He underlined the need to focus not only on the fatal accidents but also on the serious road traffic injuries.

Ms Isabelle Durant, Vice-President of the European Parliament, spoke about the need to pay more attention to the most vulnerable road users – to design cities for pedestrians and to adapt the "street code" – *code de la rue* – to the cyclists and pedestrians who are the ones most exposed to risks in the urban area traffic. She proposed that it is time to promote pedestrians' rights, similar to previous campaigns on passengers' rights.

Mr Frédéric Péchenard, Interministerial Delegate for Road Safety, France made a presentation on the development of pedestrian safety in France. He emphasised that, since the pedestrian fatality rates are not reduced as much as the car driver fatality rates, the share of road deaths being pedestrians is slowly increasing. This provides strong incentive for focusing on pedestrian road safety. The responsibility lies to large degree with those who risk causing most damage to others – "the strongest must take care of the weakest".

The intervention by Mr Olivier Onidi, Director at DG MOVE, provided information about some on-going Commission initiatives for the sake of pedestrian road safety: improved design of lorries; deployment of in-vehicle safety systems; the upcoming urban mobility package and soft measures such as the CIVITAS project and the European Road Safety Charter. In addition the Commission is considering the possibility of revisiting the infrastructure safety management directive to further explore its road safety potential.

During the first panel, issues of risks, accident causes and responsibility were discussed. The President of the European Federation of Road Traffic Victims, Mr Jeannot Mersch, opened the panel, followed by the President of the European Cyclists' Federation, Mr Manfred Neun, and the Director-General of the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile – FIA, Region I, Mr Jacob Bangsgaard. Three main risk areas were identified: speed of vehicles, insufficient safety of infrastructure and unsafe road user behaviours - by all groups of road users. The panel concluded that mutual respect and adaptive behaviours are key to make the roads safe and cities liveable. Specific risks relating to the reduced mobility of elderly, of visibility of pedestrians during dark hours and of the possible conflicts between pedestrians and cyclists were also discussed. A representative of the organisation Responsible Young Drivers in the audience proposed that it might be more useful to refer to car crashes than to car accidents, as the latter gives the impression of unavoidability.

The second panel went more in-depth into best practices of improved urban road safety. Dr Dinesh Sethi Programme Manager at the World Health Organisation presented the recently released WHO pedestrian safety manual. Mr Andrés Martínez from the Municipality of San Sebastián explained the success story of pedestrian safety projects in that city. The President of the International Federation of Pedestrians, Mr Geert van Waeg, showed concrete examples of areas for improvement in Brussels. The panel concluded that speed is clearly a main risk issue and must be taken into account as an integral factor in urban mobility planning. The need for proper spatial planning, separating vehicles from vulnerable road users, was underlined. Enforcement of traffic rules was concluded to be a key issue: a necessary complement to education and infrastructure measures.

The third and final panel was more forward-looking, discussing road safety potential in new technology and in-vehicle safety systems. Mr Antonio Avenoso, Executive Director of the European Transport Safety Council; Dr Michiel van Ratingen, Secretary-General of the European New Car Assessment Programme EuroNCAP and the Executive Director of Polis: European Cities and Regions Networking for Innovative Transport Solutions, Mr Sylvain Haon, provided insights and information about latest developments. For example, Dr van Ratingen showed how the EuroNCAP increased testing of pedestrian safety features such as more forgiving vehicle fronts has encouraged rapid progress and development among car manufacturers. Among other issues discussed was the risk of pedestrian and car driver distractions, the potential benefits of pedestrian detection systems and the link between safety and comfort of road users, provided by intelligent transport systems. It was concluded that there is potential for road safety in modern technology - as support to the individual road user.

Finally, Mr Matthias Ruete, Director-General of DG MOVE concluded the conference by stressing that road safety responsibility is shared. To make streets safer a cultural change is needed, requiring political involvement at all levels. To this end, Mr Ruete announced the intention of inviting to an informal ministerial meeting for broader political discussions next year. Mr Ruete also stressed the relevance of the Safe System and underlined that modern technology is not the solution but it is one contribution – the individual road user remains the most important factor in road safety.

After the conference, meeting participants walked to the Schuman roundabout and joined Vice-President Kallas in a public road safety manifestation called "the long short walk", initiated by the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA). Similar walks are organised all over the world during the UN Global Road Safety Week. The walk ended at a road safety technology exhibition in Autoworld in the Cinquantenaire Park, where participants could test simulators and different types of road safety equipments.