



Road Safety Newsletter



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2014 European Road Safety Day Safe and smart infrastructure

Central Athens was the location for this year's European Road Safety Day, organised by the European Commission on 9 May 2014. Under the banner 'Safe and smart infrastructure', the full-day conference was co-organised with the Greek EU Presidency in the Zappeion Conference & Exhibition Center. It attracted some 270 participants, mostly policy-makers and road safety experts from NGOs, industry and the Member States.

The event opened with a video message from Mr Siim Kallas, Vice-President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Transport. He noted that road safety is an EU success story, saving thousands of lives every year. But he was adamant that complacency is not an option and that efforts in this field must continue unabated. He also highlighted the success of Europe's infrastructure safety management principles. Its motorways, where these principles are mandatorily applied, are today the world's safest and account for just 7% of EU road deaths, notwithstanding their high traffic volumes and high speeds. The next challenge is to roll out similar gains to the rest of the road network, especially as the EU seeks to halve road deaths by 2020.

Participants were then greeted by the two Secretary-Generals of the Ministry of Infrastructure, Transport and Networks, Mr Nikolaos Stathopoulos and Mr Stratos Simopoulos. Both speakers shared messages about the complexity of road safety work in general and the initiatives taken in Greece in particular, backed by sobering accident statistics. Greece still remains among the EU countries with the highest road fatality rates – 81 dead per million inhabitants in 2013, compared to the EU average of 52.

The conference continued with two sessions on specific topics.

“If we reduced speed limits by just one kilometre an hour, we could reduce deaths in Europe by 1 300”

Antonio Avenoso, ETSC

Building better infrastructure

Session one looked at the feasibility of fast-tracking safer and smarter infrastructure. Three road safety experts, who had been invited as panellists, introduced the topic with short presentations.

Mr Kallistratos Dionelis, Secretary-General of ASECAP, concentrated on motorways and how road managers see them. What are the main problems and needs for safer infrastructure? He stressed the role of infrastructure management and the importance of continual maintenance in keeping roads safe and competitive. He also had a message for those who believe all solutions lie with smart technology: “ITS are no more than tools. If you want road management, you first need road managers!”

Safe roads, especially from the perspective of road users, were the main focus for Professor Horst Schulze, Chairman of the Forum of European Road Safety Research Institutes. His presentation graphically showed how ‘self-explaining roads’ help drivers to follow the rules and behave safely, even on foreign roads. The design of roads and road users’ behaviour are intertwined and must be addressed as such by policy-makers. Hence his organisation’s recent document, ‘Towards safer roads in Europe’, which looks at nine key challenges for road safety research for the next decade.



Professor George Kanellaidis from the National Technical University of Athens pleaded for Greek and European road safety efforts to be more closely linked. He called for EU-wide implementation of the Safe System approach, the launch of a European Road Safety Agency, and for education to underpin all road safety measures. Road safety should now be an issue for EU decision-makers, he added.

A lively debate ensued, with panellists fielding audience questions on a range of issues. Among them were the safety of vulnerable road users, ways to improve driver education and training, the lack of reliable road safety data for evidence-based work, and the proper division of responsibility between the EU, Member States and local authorities.

The chair, Mr Szabolcs Schmidt, head of the European Commission’s road safety unit, concluded that infrastructure safety contributes to the overall safety situation. He also said that the EU simply must prioritise infrastructure safety – because traffic accident costs are too high.



Introducing the right technology

The second session looked at intelligent transport systems (ITS) and cooperative systems for smart and safe urban mobility.

The main elements of safe and smart mobility were covered in the presentation by Professor George Giannopoulos, Director of the Hellenic Institute of Transport, including the key issues for further development of modern road safety technologies. He outlined the merits of a systemic approach before explaining how intelligent safety technology can benefit car occupants as well as the elderly and disabled, among others.

Kicking off with statistics on road safety in urban areas, Mr Antonio Avenoso, Executive Director of the European Transport Safety Council, made the case for using certain smart technologies there. These can for example greatly improve safety for vulnerable road users. He focused on the benefits of Intelligent Speed Assistance, backed by good speed maps, because ISA could also help keep speeds down in low-speed zones – where motorised and non-motorised road users interact most frequently. “If we reduced speed limits by just one kilometre an hour, we could reduce deaths in Europe by 1 300,” he noted. As for ITS, he said it is not a road safety panacea, but should complement traditional road safety measures.

Safety actions tested on the streets of London were broadly examined by Ms Natalia de Estevan-Ubeda, head of ITS Policy and Strategy at Transport for London (TfL). One focus for the TfL is reducing deaths of vulnerable road users, using technology where appropriate. “When introducing a technology, we need to look at the whole system, including driver behaviour,” she said. “The mantra should be: never surprise the driver!” She also called for a legal framework or standards for ITS, an area where the EU could provide useful support, before noting that experience gathered from London’s 56-plus road safety actions should feed into discussions at EU level.

The following discussion with the audience included questions on the dangers of technology distracting road users, the challenges of data access and data protection, and the root causes of road safety problems.

In his conclusion, Mr Schmidt said that everyone must redouble their road safety efforts because the “low-hanging fruits are now gone.” ITS offers clear benefits which should be fully explored, so as to improve driver behaviour, protect vulnerable road users and boost road safety in urban areas.

Wrapping up the European Road Safety Day, Mr Michalis Papadopoulos, Deputy Minister of Infrastructure, Transport and Networks, made a presentation on work done by the Greek Transport Ministry. It emphasised the value of lifelong learning, enforcement and new initiatives such as the roll-out of e-Call and the Greek national road safety strategy.

The Road Safety Day in Athens was the sixth edition of this European event. Previous ERSDs have covered topics such as youth and road safety and the safety of pedestrians.



Czech winner of 2014 ERSC infrastructure award

A European Road Safety Charter special 'infrastructure commitments' award was presented to Professor Karel Pospíšil by European Commission Vice-President Siim Kallas, during an ERSD 2014 press conference in Athens. Professor Pospíšil, who accepted the award on behalf of his Transport Research Centre (TRC) in the Czech Republic, learned at the ceremony that the Brno-based institute had scored the highest total score and topped four out of five selection criteria. The award committee this year comprised 14 members of the European Commission's road safety unit.

The TRC works closely with the Czech Ministry of Transport and covers research in all fields of transport, including road transport. Its commitment to the Charter includes actions associated with the National Road Safety Observatory, public information on road safety research, education of users and road transport professionals, plus awareness-raising and training of authorities.

"We are delighted to receive this award for our contribution to road safety development," said Professor Pospíšil. "Around 15% of our research is covered by European funds and we're involved in many European projects. All four of our divisions contributed to this award." He underlined the TRC's contribution to his nation's 10-year national safety strategy and the fact that this led to a 20% decrease in fatalities on Czech roads between 2009 and 2012. The TRC is also developing a new methodology for motorcycle education, including how riders can become more visible in traffic.

"We can also investigate accidents independently, thanks to an agreement with the police," he added. "The police collect 40 parameters about each accident; we can collect up to 5000 on everything from road and vehicle conditions to the driver's attitude, health and age, etc. We also have an agreement with hospitals and doctors to do research on the health progress of victims after accidents." He noted that all resulting data is anonymised, allowing the police or insurance companies to do scientific research and helping the TRC to create safety recommendations for the government or for car-makers.

The European Road Safety Charter award is presented to organisations that have made extraordinary or especially inspiring commitments to the Charter. More information about the award and current signatories to the Charter can be found at www.erscharter.eu.

Professor Karel Pospíšil,
Czech Transport Research
Centre, winner of 2014
ERSC infrastructure award

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Road safety exhibition

The ERSD 2014 included a road safety exhibition, with 12 road safety organisations highlighting their goals and achievements in safe and smart road infrastructure. There were information stands plus a range of innovative road safety equipment for conference-goers to test. Among the EU-level organisations present were the Motorcycle Industry in Europe, the European Association of Operators of Toll Road Infrastructures, and the European Transport Safety Council. Greek participants included Make Roads Safe Hellas, the Hellenic Institute for Transport, and ITS Hellas.

A team of volunteer advisers was also on hand from RSI Panos Mylonas, a Greek NGO dedicated to preventing and reducing traffic accidents. Founded in 2005 by Mrs Vassiliki Danelli-Mylona, following the tragic death of her son in a road accident, this institute works closely with authorities, schools and others to raise awareness of all aspects of road safety as well as to improve driver behaviour and improve road infrastructure. Its mobile roll-over simulator, which has travelled all over Greece to show people the importance of wearing seatbelts, was on display outside the conference venue.

During a tour of the exhibition, Commission Vice-President Siim Kallas expressed admiration for all these road safety bodies and their displays. After assessing the collision weight scale test demonstrated by RSI Panos Mylonas, he acknowledged learning a valuable lesson. In the event of a 90 km/h collision, his briefcase, packed with five kilos of paperwork, would become a dangerous projectile with a force equal to several hundred kilos. "This illustrates well why safety belts and proper securing of goods in moving vehicles is so important," concluded Mr Kallas.





Fruitful ministerial meeting sets safety-first tone

Launch of EU road safety app



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Motorists with a smartphone or tablet may soon be taking to Europe's highways with more confidence.

Armed with the 'Going Abroad' app, which runs on all common platforms, they will be able to quickly check the road safety rules in force in every EU country. The app was developed using content on the Commission's 'Going abroad' website. The aim is to provide holiday-makers, travellers and professional drivers with the information they may need to drive safely abroad. Also available offline, the app will feature two fun games to entertain passengers, a quiz on European road safety and a memory game. Its release is planned for late June – right on time for the start of the summer holidays.

On 8 May 2014, at the invitation of the Hellenic Presidency of the EU, transport ministers from across the Union plus Iceland, Switzerland and Norway gathered for an informal meeting in the Zappeion Center in Athens. They spent several hours debating 'Current road challenges for smart infrastructure'. Topics included funding for road safety, intelligent infrastructure/vehicles and the enforcement of road traffic rules across borders. Many participants called for a more integrated EU approach to road safety.

Summing up, European Commission Vice-President Siim Kallas noted that everyone – including the EU and Member States – has the same objective of reducing road accidents and making roads and traffic safer. He argued that all road safety policy and initiatives "must come from the ground, with the EU doing what is reasonable at European level", and that systems' interoperability will become increasingly important. He cited the life-saving potential of the in-vehicle emergency call (eCall) system now being rolled out across Europe.

In his closing speech, Michalis Papadopoulos, Greece's Deputy Minister of Infrastructure, Transportation and Networks, remarked how EU road safety was continuously improving but that efforts to save lives should never cease. He said that road safety is an issue of shared responsibility, requiring action to be taken at several levels and by stakeholders from the public and private sectors.



→ Coming soon:
<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=1090368&sitelang=en>



Find out more...

If these subjects have revved up your interest, then check out the road safety website at: ec.europa.eu/roadsafety

European Youth Forum for Road Safety (EYFRS) also has a Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/EYFRS

EYFRS has its own website at: ec.europa.eu/eyfrs
Visit these sites for inspiration and information.

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