

Vice-President Siim Kallas

**Opening speech
for European Road Safety
Day**

6 May 2013, Brussels

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the fifth European Road Safety Day, where I am pleased to see so many participants here today. Thank you for coming.

This year's Road Safety Day is special and has a carefully chosen date. This conference is the European Commission's contribution to the United Nations Global Road Safety Week, which starts today. We fully support the UN's Decade of Road Safety Action.

I am proud to show the EU's commitment to this global campaign by opening today's conference.

The EU is the world's leading region for road safety. Every year, some 1.3 million road deaths – all tragedies – occur in the world. Fewer than 30 000 of these happen in the EU.

Outside Europe, only Israel and Japan come close to the EU's best-performing countries for road safety. Australia and Canada have fatality rates of around the EU average: 55 dead per million inhabitants.

The USA has almost twice that number. And Russia has almost four times as many - around 200 dead per million inhabitants.

Road safety does not happen on its own – it requires a lot of dedicated hard work. It takes investments of time, knowledge and resources. We would of course be happy to share our experience with our neighbours and partners around the world, so that we can all learn – and hopefully the world's roads will then become safer.

I am happy to see the EU's road safety figures for 2012 showing a 9% fall in the number of road deaths compared to the previous year. But still – every death is one too many. Even with Europe's admirable improvements in road safety, there is still much to be done.

Take serious injuries, which are often overlooked and are a major health problem. For every person killed in a crash, there are an estimated 4 life-long disabled, 10 serious and 40 slight injuries that occur mostly inside built-up areas.

While EU Member States have made clear progress in reducing road deaths, injury numbers are still unacceptably high and not falling at nearly the same rate.

We also need to do more to protect vulnerable road users - pedestrians, cyclists, children and the elderly. This is one of the Commission's policy objectives for its road safety work. Their safety is gradually improving, but it has not yet improved as much as the safety of car drivers.

Risks for pedestrian safety are also likely to increase. Europe's cities are growing, as are traffic volumes in towns and cities. This is where the risk of a pedestrian being killed or seriously injured is highest. We must respond to this challenge and the earlier the better. It is cheaper and more efficient to take road safety into account at the planning stage than to try to fix the problems afterwards.

Today's conference will discuss precisely this area - the safety of vulnerable road users.

I hope that the discussions will be constructive. I would encourage you all not only to pinpoint the problems – but also to propose some realistic solutions for tackling pedestrian road safety, and the specific challenges in urban areas.

Looking to the future, road safety must remain a high priority on the political agenda of each Member State. There is always a risk that we settle down and become satisfied with our low road death figures. This must not happen.

From next year, I intend to open up more political discussion at the annual European Road Safety Day. In the past, we had the Verona conferences and ministerial meetings – I would like to revive that spirit.

But first, let us focus on today, where there is a full agenda ahead. At the end of the conference, I hope you will all join me on a "long short walk" taking place here in Brussels. These are being arranged all over the world during the UN Global Road Safety Week.

I hope you will help me make the Brussels walk into one of the most successful ones.

I wish you all a successful conference with constructive discussions.

Thank you.

