

Road deaths among the young 'alarming'

EU official says Cyprus has a long way to go

By Natalie Harni

THE EUROPEAN Commission's vice president for transport expressed alarm yesterday over Cyprus' higher-than-average number of road fatalities among the 18-24 age group.

Cyprus was the host country for the 4th European Road Safety Day, which took place yesterday. Statistics released showed that from all road fatalities on the island in 2010, some 23 per cent were under 25 years old compared to the EU average of 19 per cent.

"The tragic loss of young lives on European roads is unacceptable....I am most concerned by accidents due to drugs or alcohol especially among young men and women," said Stijn Kallas, the Commission's vice president responsible for transport.

Kallas was especially concerned by the high numbers especially since Cyprus was the country hosting Road Safety Day this year. This year it was dedicated to the young, due to the high number of fatalities.

According to Kallas, the only way to continue saving lives was to change young people's driving mentality.

Szabolcs Schmidt, head of the European Commission's Road Safety Unit said that Cyprus has a long way to go in slashing its road fatalities in half, adding that in Europe around 61 people in every one million are killed in traffic accidents whereas in Cyprus the relative figure is 88.

Traffic accidents are still



Drivers between the ages of 18 and 24 account for the biggest number of fatalities

the first cause of death and of disability in young people, in both the world and Europe. Around 19 per cent of road fatalities in the EU in 2010 affected young people aged between 18 and 25 years of age although this age group comprises only 10 per cent of the total population.

The EU's objective is to slash road deaths in Europe by half by 2020.

Cyprus' Traffic Department chief Demetris Demetriou said yesterday the police were doing everything they could to cut down on the number of deaths.

"Whatever we should be doing we're doing....we're battling onwards," said Demetriou adding that they do

actually look into what other countries are doing about the problem.

Demetriou however said that it's the same in every country: "It's like this in most countries and the factors (that cause accidents) have been analysed."

The 4th European Road Safety Day was marked on the island by a conference, jointly organised with the Cyprus EU presidency in Nicosia.

The conference brought together youth groups, road safety organisations and road safety officials from all EU member states, as well as from neighbouring countries for a day of discussions, presentations and workshops.

According to the communications ministry permanent

secretary Alecos Michaelides, road safety education has to begin at school and continue even after someone has obtained their licence.

He said that significant results came out of the seminar yesterday such as the need for teaching correct driving attitudes from a young age, zero tolerance for drivers who drink drive and sessions aimed at reforming repeat offenders.

In 2010, around 31,000 fatalities from road accidents EU-wide involved young people between 18 and 25 of which 80 per cent were men and 20 per cent women.

Road deaths for the 18 to 25 age group decreased by 49 per cent in the EU between 2001 and 2010.

EIB bolsters key investments in Cyprus