

Session IV: Quality Assurance and Mutual Recognition of the Training

Introduction by Mr. Poul Christensen, European Transport Workers' Federation

Intro

Thank you for being given the opportunity to introduce this session.

Given the fact that my introduction shall be followed by a debate, I do not aim at a neutral – on the one side, on the other side – introduction.

On the contrary – I shall pass to you some rather profiled points and views from the organization that I represent, the ETF – the European Transport Workers Federation

Mutual recognition

The question of mutual recognition has been raised in several evaluations, reports, debates etc.

Including the STARTS project, a joint IRU/ETF project co-financed by the Commission. A European level evaluation project that discovered a lot of interesting details in the implementation of the 2003/59 directive.

Some facts on the problem of mutual recognition:

- More than 1 million European drivers or future drivers pass an initial or periodic training session every year. At the end of the required modules, they receive either a certificate or a code 95 in their driving license. With that, they can drive in their home country AND abroad
- A very limited number of these drivers pass their training modules – or part of them – in another EU member state. Some of these drivers hit a wall – they cannot have a code 95 added to their driving license – the simple explanation being, that the hosting state driving license authority cannot “open” their home state driving license, and add the code.

Another problem related to mutual recognition is that - in practical life - periodic training modules, picked here and there in different EU member states, might not be recognized at the end of the required 35 lessons, the simple explanation being, that some national authorities do not accept modules passed in another member state.

As said before, only a very limited number of drivers experience these challenges. Less than 1 out of 1000, I guess. More than 999 out of 1000 drivers pass their training, receive their certificate - or their code 95 - and continue their professional driving activities. But even if it might be a limited problem, some action could be considered, given the fact that we respect the principle of mutual recognition.

Having come that far, we face, however, the quality assurance issue.

Quality Assurance and training of professional drivers:

Luckily, when it comes to training of professional drivers according to the 2003/59 directive, a lot of fine teaching and learning takes place throughout EU, contributing to the improvement of the traffic security, the environment, the transport efficiency and the work conditions.

But, unfortunately, we have also learned through the STARTS project, that examples of doubt-some implementation, low quality schools, unacceptable teaching and poor learning outcome is to find here and there.

And even cheating! That periodic training certificates or "95" driving license codes can be achieved by just paying some cash to "Mr. Big" or to a corrupt authority official. Well, does this really happen? Or is it just rumors and gossip? We don't know. But we heard it a little too often. We want to be assured that this won't happen in the future.

How can we be assured about quality teaching and no cheating?

Our answer is: Only by regular and reliable checks from bodies that we trust.

We – the European transport workers unions - want – on the national level - reliable national government bodies to provide quality assurance.

- government bodies that check that the content of the teaching lives up to national standards
- government bodies that set up such national standards, in full respect of both the words and the aims of the EU standards – for the time being, the 2003/59 directive
- government bodies that check that the teachers can teach and that the schools can organize the teaching – based on national and European standards for teachers and schools
- government bodies that have the knowledge and the competence to guide the schools, helping them to improve (and punish them if they repeatedly don't raise their standards to required and acceptable levels)
- at the EU level, ETF wants a European quality institute subject to Commission authority
 - o to check the national bodies - that they actually have set up national standards that live up to the directive 2003/59 standards
 - o to check that the national bodies actually check
 - o BUT - first of all an EU level quality institute that
 - collect and spread best practice experiences
 - promote dialogue between the national partners
 - provide train-the-trainers, train-the schools and train-the-inspectors activities
 - initiate European level changes in standards and procedures
 - advice the commission and the EU-parliamentarians etc.
- An EU level institute could also host a European database of nationally approved schools, teachers, training modules and who passed which training modules.

When it comes to the training activities, we insist on

- an initial qualification model, consisting of training and test, meaning that we want the "test only option" to be taken out
- stricter dead-lines for the completion of periodic training
- a minimum-standard syllabus at EU level

If the quality of the initial and periodic training could be assured basis like this, we are willing to contribute to a European system, where the initial and periodic training will be fully and mutually recognized.