SECBeltMonitor



Editorial

Road safety is not distributed evenly across Europe. In some countries of the enlarged European Union, the risk of being killed in a traffic accident is up to eight times higher than in other countries. For pedestrians, the risk differs up to tenfold from one country to another.

That is why, the European Transport Safety Council set up a project a year ago, which focuses specifically on those countries whose road risk is higher than the former EU-15's average. These countries include all the new EU Member States, Italy, France, Belgium, Portugal, Spain and Greece. Together, they form a belt stretching from the South-West to the North-Eastern parts of Europe. ETSC has named them the **SEC Belt countries**, with SEC standing for Southern, Eastern and Central European countries.

From 2002 to 2003, most of the SEC Belt countries (except Czech Republic, Spain, Lithuania and Slovakia) have been able to reduce road fatalities. Two countries have been particularly successful, including France and Estonia, where traffic deaths dropped by more than 20% within one year.

This issue of SEC Belt Monitor focuses on the spectacular developments in **France**, as well as recent trends in **Belgium**. Both countries have achieved substantial improvements over the last years. How has this been possible? Who are the key actors? What can other SEC Belt countries learn from their experiences?

Following an introduction into the road safety policies of these two countries (Trends and Figures, p. 1), Pierre Gustin, Executive Director of ETSC's French member, La Prévention Routière Française, gives his view of how changes in France came about and what is needed to sustain the momentum (Opinion, p. 2). Belgian Minister of Mobility Renaat Landuyt outlines Belgian road safety policy, and Patric Derweduwen, Managing Director of the Belgian Road Safety Institute explains his Institute's role in shaping Belgian road safety policy (Country Focus, p. 5).

Trends and figures

In France and in Belgium, the attention given to road safety has risen substantially in the past years. In both countries, leading politicians have made the issue a priority, and there have been high-level meetings organised gathering all relevant ministers around one table. Subsequently, strategies were worked out, which focussed heavily on measures to improve driver behaviour, including increased police enforcement and higher traffic fines.

The results achieved so far are more impressive in France than in Belgium, even though Belgium started its new policy first in May 2001, and France only second in September 2002. The reasons are manifold. In France, centralised structures allow for a clear message to be passed to all actors as soon as the top political level is involved. In Belgium, the complexities of a federal state make progress in a specific policy area a question of hard-won compromises. Moreover, due to elections and party-political skirmishes, Belgium has seen four Transport Ministers come and go at federal level since 2001, not all of whom were equally dedicated to road safety. In addition, centrifugal forces are at work in Belgium that aim to regionalise policy areas such as road safety.

In addition, France had a few measures in place before 2002 that have been unavailable in Belgium until very recently. For example, accidents statistics are published promptly in France and can be used to demonstrate progress to the public. Also behavioural indicators are available regarding speeding, drink driving and seat belt use. These statistics are collected by the French National Road Safety Observatory.

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In Belgium, accident figures used to be unavailable until 6 months into the next year. Only in October 2004, a monthly quick indicator ('barometer') was set up. Behavioural indicators on drink driving and speeding are being introduced for the first time by the Belgian Road Safety Institute (IBSR/BIVV).

Accident figures show that road safety has achieved the political priority it deserves both in France and in Belgium. Drivers in both countries have accepted the challenge and value more and more the safety of themselves and others.

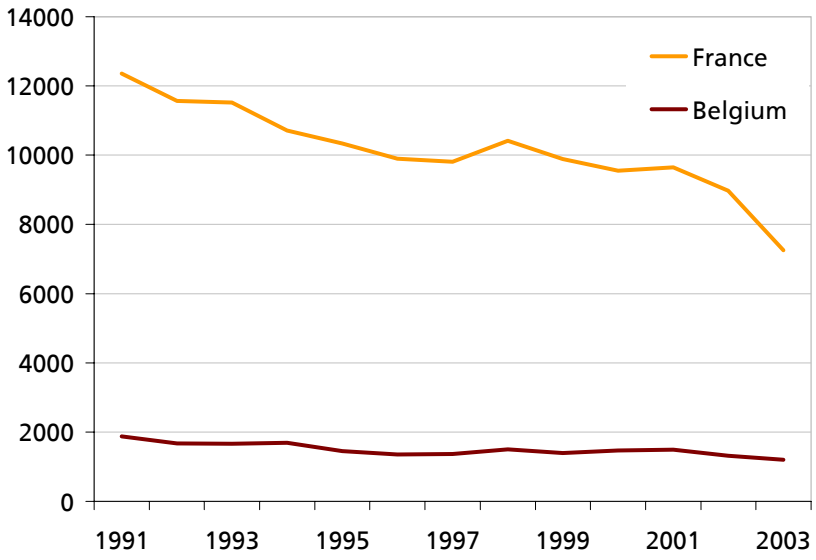


Fig. 1 Traffic fatalities in France and Belgium between 1991 and 2003.
Source: CARE database

Opinion

"2002 was a turning point"

On 14 July 2002, French President Jacques Chirac expressed his determination to make the fight against road violence a "national project for the five-year term". On 17 September 2002, a high-level meeting (États-Généraux) on road safety was convened, and on 18 December 2002, the Inter-ministerial Committee on Road Safety adopted a first series of important measures. The resulting improvement of road safety has been – and it continues to be – spectacular.

Pierre Gustin, Executive Director of ETSC's French member Prévention Routière Française, outlines France's road safety policy before and after 2002. He also gives his view as to what needs to be done to keep up progress in the future.

Ever since 1972 to 1974, during which the first in a series of safety measures were rolled out, the number of French road casualties had never fallen as quickly and as substantially as it did in 2003. Until then, many observers thought the French were simply resigned to accepting an average of 8,000 road fatalities, which had been the case since 1995 – a tragically high number with a disproportionate impact on young drivers. Viewed from this perspective, 2002 was a trend reversal year.

Prior to 2002

France – with the same vehicles and basically the same infrastructures but a longer network of roads – continued to lead its main European partners in terms of the number of individuals killed or seriously injured on the road.

"Observers thought the French were simply resigned to accepting an average of 8,000 road fatalities per year."

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It seemed that drivers were unable to grasp the seriousness of the risk, and that the level of enforcement – and consequently, of penalties – was insufficient. As a result, speeding and a more general disregard for the rules of the road were prevalent phenomena.

Road safety measures taken before 2002

1973: Speed was limited to 90 km/h on secondary roads, and to 120 km/h on motorways. Drivers and their front-seat passengers were required to wear seat belts outside city limits, and motorcyclists were obliged to wear helmets.

1978: The first law intended to curb drunk driving was passed.

1979: Drivers and their front-seat passengers were required to buckle up at all times, even within city limits.

1984: Sanctions against exceeding authorized blood alcohol levels (0.8g/l at the time) were beefed up.

1990: Speed within city limits was reduced to 50 km/h, and back-seat passengers were required to use seat belts.

1992: The point system was introduced for licensed drivers, and safety testing became obligatory for all vehicles on the road for more than five years.

1995: The legally authorized blood alcohol level was reduced to 0.5 g/l.

After 2002

2002 was a turning point in the fight for stepped-up road safety measures: public policymakers decided to make a real commitment to solving the problem, supported by media coverage of the issue and public outrage. Improvements in the enforcement and punishment of acts of road violence, which were implemented by the French government in mid-2002, served as a highly effective platform for non-governmental efforts to prevent accidents by educating the public, led by *La Prévention Routière* and its 230,000 members.

"Policymakers decided to make a real commitment, supported by media coverage and public outrage."

For example, a new billboard campaign – more hard-hitting and visible – was launched by *La Prévention Routière* in early 2002, in an attempt to influence not only public policymakers but also the media and public opinion. The ads used direct and vivid language to describe the scandal of road violence, too often perceived by the public as the ineluctable price to pay for the privilege of greater freedom of movement.

Even more importantly, an intense effort to mobilize members of *La Prévention Routière* in June 2002 helped to sway public opinion against the president's traditional gesture of pardoning the perpetrators of road related misdemeanours.

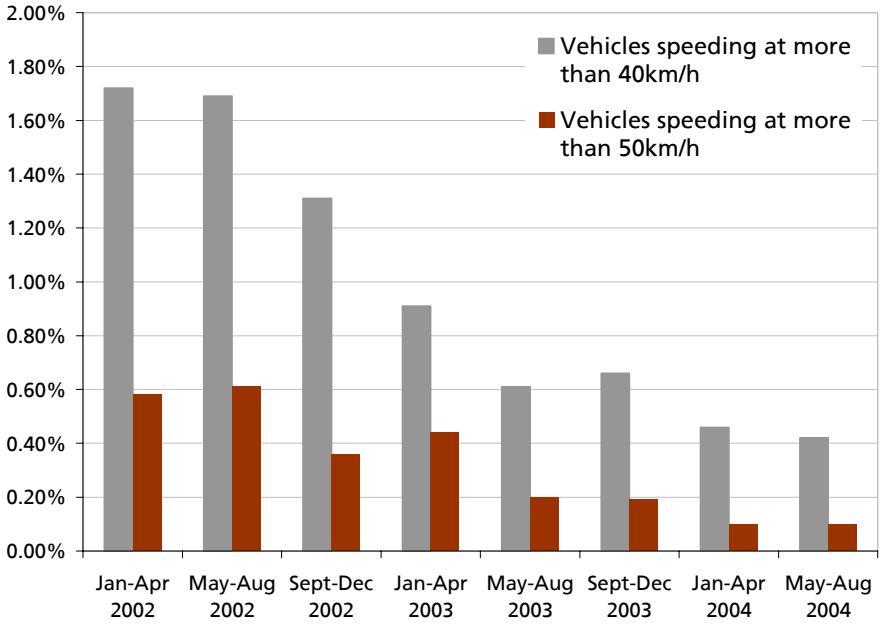


Fig. 2. Vehicles exceeding the speed limit in France by 40/50km/h. Source: Observatoire national interministériel de sécurité routière, France.

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This bad habit, which comes around every time France elects a new president, had anticipatory effects that were absolutely devastating, including general disregard on the part of many drivers for the rules of the road in the months running up to the election. Worse still, law enforcement officers also relaxed their guard and, as a direct result, the number of road fatalities systematically rose

The success of this ambitious opinion campaign – the traditional pardon was in fact rescinded by the President – led to a broader, nationwide debate on the issue of road safety. This was the catalyst that sparked the government's decision to make road safety one of its top priority projects over the five-year term that began in 2002.

At the explicit request of the French President, several government ministries got involved (Transportation, Justice, Interior, National Education, etc.) and so did their administrations, with the activation of an inter-ministerial committee charged with the task of quickly passing new legislation aimed at making the fight against road violence and in favour of stronger enforcement more effective.

Road safety measures taken after 2002

January 2003: Law against driver use of controlled substances

March 2003: Tougher penalties for the failure to wear a helmet or a seat belt, and prohibition on the use of cell phones while driving

June 2003: Installation of radar systems and a probation license for first-time drivers, as well as mandatory training courses on road safety for those convicted of the most serious driving-related crimes

2004: An awareness-raising campaign run by *La Prévention Routière,* entitled "Refusing to be Killers."

In the end, it is the combined effect of these actions – and in particular the consistent expression of political will at the highest level of the State since July 2002 – that has led to the spectacular drop in the number of casualties observed since the second half of 2002, and repeated in both 2003 and 2004. which is nearly one year of victims, based on statistics for 2001 – the annual toll is still unacceptable. Many and substantial improvements remain to be made, especially now that we are beginning to see a natural peak in the rate of progress recorded to date.

"More than 5,000 have been saved since 2001, but the annual toll is still unacceptable."

To ensure that these improvements are lasting, recurrent initiatives aimed at education and prevention are needed. Specifically, the goal is to:

- Better explain why more severe sanctions are needed to punish those who fail to observe the rules of the road;
- Target new audiences and focus on new causes of road accidents (prescription drugs, fatigue, lack of vigilance, etc.);
- Step up enforcement, in particular by increasing the number of automatic radar systems, which began to appear in late 2003 (100 in 2003; 1,000 in 2005).

For *La Prévention Routière,* this is a desirable goal toward which it is working with the public.



Pierre Gustin has been Executive Director of Prévention Routière since October 2000. Between 1972 and September 2000, he worked in different organisations representing the French transport and maritime insurers. Pierre Gustin has been Director General of CESAM (*Comité d'Etudes et de Services des Assureurs Maritimes et Transports de France*) and of AFSAT (*Association Française des Sociétés d'Assurances Transports).*

Road safety development in France since 2002

2002: 10% decline in the number of fatalities (7,655) and serious injuries

2003: 21% decline in the number of fatalities (6,058) and serious injuries

Through October 2004: 10% decline in fatalities and 9% decrease in serious injuries compared with the same period in 2003 (meaning an estimated number of fatalities for the year 2004 of 5,522).

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Country focus: Belgium

"I want to give a voice to the silent majority which supports road safety"

Following a high-level meeting of ministers (États-Généraux) on 18 May 2001, a number of road safety measures were introduced in Belgium. The goal was to cut by 50% the number of traffic fatalities until the year 2010. Actions included an increase in police checks on speeding, drink driving and seat belt use, higher fines for the most dangerous traffic offences and an extension of 30 km/h zones, especially in school surroundings.

More than three years after the launch of the new policy, national statistics show that road safety is improving. ETSC has spoken with **Renaat Landuyt**, Belgian Minister of Transport.

"Enforcement is and will remain important"

ETSC: Road safety in Belgium has improved considerably over the last year. Latest statistics show a drop of injury accidents by 11% in the first 9 months of 2004 compared with the same period in 2003. Which are the measures that have yielded this success? Have the increased fines had an important role to play?

We cannot tell at this moment just how much influence individual measures have had. What we can say however is that the attention paid to road safety has increased, and that there is a increased awareness of safe traffic behaviour than there was before.

ETSC: In general, priority has been given to measures targeting behaviour. New rules have been introduced for the sanctioning of traffic offences, and police enforcement has been increased.

These measures have been most important, because irresponsible behaviour lies at the bottom of most traffic accidents.

ETSC: You attach great importance to traffic law enforcement. Last month, you presented latest accident figures side-by-side with a policeman who talked about increased controls on the motorways.

Enforcement is and will remain important. Rather than changing the law and the traffic fines once again, I believe we should focus on the proper enforcement of the existing rules. This is one of the major results of the work done so far: For the police, traffic enforcement has become a core task and is not seen anymore as something that can be done when there is spare time.

ETSC: As part of the new traffic law, local police zones in Belgium sign every year so-called Road Safety Conventions with the Ministers of Transport and of the Interiour, in which they commit to a set of road safety measures. In turn, they receive additional funding for their activities. Most of the Conventions for 2004 have now been accepted and analysed. Are you happy with the way the police zones will spend the money?

I must say that a great variety of measures have been proposed, and the police have been very creative in proposing new measures to improve road safety. We will at some point analyse the approaches taken and draw our conclusions. The idea is to single out best practices and to improve the tool.

But I also want the Public Prosecutors to take up their responsibility, not just the police. So far, the Prosecutors enjoy a high level of autonomy, and their follow-up of the offences detected by the police is not always satisfactory. The government should come to an agreement with them next year in the framework of the National Safety Plan.

"We will start a large communications campaign"

ETSC: Another important issue is the improvement of accident statistics. From 2005, the police will use a new application to register acci-

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dents. Also the communication of accident figures will be improved. You have announced a new "barometer", i.e. a monthly presentation of accident figures to demonstrate the latest trends.

This "barometer" has just come out for the second time, and we are proud to present not only the figures from the Federal Police, but from all police forces and police courts in Belgium. I think this is in itself an important road safety measure, because it shows the drivers that their improved behaviour bears fruit.

In fact, this "barometer" is only a small part of a large communications campaign, which will be started next year. The idea is to increase the support for road safety by giving a voice to the silent majority.

ETSC: And does this "silent majority" approve of the high fines for traffic offences?

Well, yes. They avoid them by respecting the rules.

ETSC: Which other measures can we expect in the future? In the papers, I have read about a new initiative to introduce a penalty point system in Belgium?

This is a good example for what I mean by "more attention paid to road safety". There are no concrete plans to introduce a penalty point system, but in the media there is a new story every day on road safety – because that is what people want to read about, they have become interested in the topic.

ETSC: The new policy is currently undergoing an evaluation. What can we expect from that?

The principle of 'fast' and 'strict' will remain, even if there may be some minor technical changes.

"There are two countries we can learn from – France and Sweden"

ETSC: Also in France, major efforts have been made to improve road safety. The results are impressive. Is there anything that Belgium can learn from France?

There are two countries which are an example for us here in Belgium, and these are France and Sweden. France has been – like us – performing poorly and is now catching up at an impressive rate, mostly through improved enforcement. Sweden on the other hand has a more global approach, tackling not only user behaviour but also road infrastructure and vehicle design.

To follow the Swedish model, we would however have to concentrate all competences related to road safety in the same hands. That means, we would have to make road safety a regional rather than a national task. In Flanders, we would then have the possibility to work faster and achieve better results. There are some very strong political forces in Flanders who could drive that process. In the Brussels and Walloon regions on the other hand road safety is not yet a top priority.

ETSC: Being the Transport Minister for the whole of Belgium, what can you do to improve the situation in all the regions?

I want to prove that there is substantial support for road safety also in the Brussels and Walloon regions.

ETSC: What do you think is the greatest obstacle for road safety work in Belgium?

The fact that competencies are spread over so many different levels makes coordination a difficult task. Vehicle safety is a European responsibility, behaviour is at national level, and infrastructure – including cameras and traffic signs – at regional level.

ETSC: Is there anything that Belgium has done better than France?

In France I heard they want to install 1000 automated cameras by the end of 2005. We have that number today in Flanders alone.

ETSC: Thank you very much for this conversation, Minister.



Renaat Landuyt, has been Belgian Minister of Mobility since 20 July 2004. Between 1999 and 2004 he was Minister of Employment and Tourism in Flanders.

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"The discussions focussed on the fines rather than safety"

What is the role of road safety research in policy-making? **Patric Derweduwen**, Managing Director of the Belgian Road Safety Institute (IBSR/BIVV), explains how his institute has helped to shape Belgium's new road safety policy.

In preparation of the new road safety policy, IBSR was heading the Advisory Committee that was asked to outline to the 7 ministers concerned how road safety in Belgium could be improved. On 25 February 2002 we presented our report largely referring to previous research, which was very well received and widely discussed in society. To achieve rapid progress, we said, priority should be given to improving compliance with the existing road safety rules. We did not propose to change the existing traffic law, except for some minor amendments regarding repeat offenders

Several of our recommendations were then taken over by the ministers, including the objective of cutting road deaths by 50% until 2010, and a 10% increase in Federal Police checks on speed and alcohol every year. Also our idea to set up indicators to record user behaviour and attitudes has been accepted. In addition, ministers proposed changing the traffic law to increase fines for the most serious offences. Unfortunately, discussions in the media focussed on these fines rather than on the other measures, such as improved enforcement and prosecution policy.

Generally speaking, the new policy has been positively received, and the public attention on road safety issues has greatly increased. Also important is that the cooperation with the police has improved. There is still more to be achieved, but we are starting to see the benefits from these important changes. For 2003, we expect to register about 1.200 road deaths in Belgium, which would represent a 20% drop in 2 years time.



Patric Derweduwen has led the Belgian Road Safety Institute since September 2000. He has increased the number of staff by 50% and taken on the coordination of many European research projects. The Institute was founded in 1987 and receives funding from public authorities through car inspection points. The Belgian Minister of Mobility is President of the Institute.

Some of the goals adopted by the Belgian government

Casualty reduction: cut traffic deaths and severely injured by 50% by 2010; 33% by 2006

Behaviour indicators: indicator system for speed, alcohol and use of protective systems

30 km/h zones: create 30 km/h zones in 60% of all school surroundings by 2006; 90% of all communes must have 30 km/h zones covering 75% of their area by 2010

Speeding: increase enforcement and communication; carry out 40 million speed checks (i.e. 8 controls per vehicle) per year by 2010

Drink driving: increase controls; check 1 in 10 licence holders by 2005

Seat belt use: reach 61% seat belt wearing until 2005, 81% by 2010 through campaigns combining information and enforcement

Penalty fund: create a fund from additional traffic fines to assist local police zones in their road safety work

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SEC Belt brief

Best in Europe

ETSC's annual "Best in Europe" conference was held in Brussels on 27 October 2004. The conference provided a platform for SEC Belt countries such as Malta, France, the Czech Republic and Poland to present Best Practice in road safety policy-making at local, regional and national level.

Policy Papers

As reported in the previous issue of SEC Belt Monitor, ETSC has organised, in the course of May 2004, three different seminars in the SEC Belt countries with the aim of identifying the main problems vulnerable road users are facing in these countries.

The output of the above mentioned seminars is an ETSC Policy Paper identifying the risks and opportunities for improving the safety of vulnerable road users in the SEC Belt. Each part of the Policy Paper deals with one of the three areas of road safety work, vehicles, infrastructures and users.

The Policy paper formulates key recommendations to EU and national policy makers for improving the safety of vulnerable road users. It will be published in the course of February 2005, and 300 copies will be sent to key decision-makers at national and European level.

Exhibition concept

A concept for a mobile exhibition on road safety has been drafted by ETSC. It identifies 8 themes to be exhibited at 8 stations distributed over 4 containers. These themes are: 1. An introduction to ETSC and European road safety work, 2. Risky mobility, 3. Fatal statistics - from data to policy, 4. "Who is responsible", 5. Safer cars, 6. After the accident, 7. On the road, 8. With the user.

Data Working Party

The ETSC Working Party dealing with data collection, analysis and dissemination in the SEC Belt countries has agreed on the general contents of the new ETSC Review on accident data. This Review will not only provide an update of previous ETSC statistical work but will dedicate a substantial part of the analysis to the identification and promotion of clear policy recommendations for action at EU and MS level. The Working Party will meet again at the beginning of 2005.

Evaluation Working Party

The Evaluation Working Party held its second meeting in September 2004 in Vienna. During this meeting, all contributions to the ETSC Review on evaluating national road safety policies were analysed and commented on by the Working Party members and new tasks were defined. The third meeting, to be held in March 2005, will be dedicated to the analysis of the first draft of the new Review as a whole.

VI International Conference "Global safety in the European Union"

ETSC was invited to actively participate in this year's edition of the International Conference "Global safety in the European Union" held in Portorož, Slovenia, from 20 to 22 September 2004. ETSC's Policy and Research Officer, Antonio Avenoso, gave a presentation on "Linking European road safety policies with national road safety policies".

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