ETSC's Transport Safety Dinner on "Safe & Sober" took place on 25 April 2007 in Brussels. Panelists included: Werner De Dobbeleer (Belgian Road Safety Institute), Martin Mönnighoff (German Police University), Björn Stafbom (Swedish Road Administration), Joël Valmain (European Commission) and Lennart Pilskog (Volvo Trucks). Jörg Beckmann (ETSC Executive Director) opened the event and chaired the debate.

Staying Safe & Sober on European Roads

In a report produced in response to the Commission's mid-term review of the European Road Safety Action Programme, the European Parliament has recently called on Members States to consider introducing a zero alcohol limit for new drivers and professional drivers. In light of this call, and of the recently developed EU Alcohol Strategy to reduce injuries and deaths from alcohol-related road traffic accidents, ETSC has organised a Transport Safety Dinner to discuss ways of preventing abuse of alcohol by commercial drivers. The event also marked the launch of a new three-year ETSC "Safe and Sober" campaign for preventing drink driving in commercial transport.

Successful national campaigns bear fruit

Speaking at the event, Werner De Dobbeleer from the Belgian Road Safety Institute informed the audience that Belgium had recently witnessed significant reductions in the number of people driving under alcohol influence. These improvements were in large part the result of the Bob campaign advocating safe, responsible and alcohol-free driving (for more details see at www.bob.be). Started in 1999 in cooperation with the Belgian brewers association, the campaign was then picked up by 14 other Member States under the name of EuroBob. The success of the Bob campaign could be ascribed to the successful combination of awareness raising and enforcement measures.
Martin Mönnighoff, German Police University, elaborated on enforcement, with a particular emphasis on the German experience. He stressed that German enforcement policies on drink driving had produced excellent results: in the previous year the number of drink driving accidents had in fact decreased by 50%. Instrumental to this success was a well enforced BAC of 0.5 mg/ml. Another important element had been the change in societal attitudes. Drinking and driving had become socially unacceptable and economically unaffordable: a drink driving offence could lead to the withdrawal of the driving license and for many drivers this could also mean

losing their job. The next step would be extending the fight against alcohol influence on drivers to drugs.
Björn Stafbom of the Swedish Road Administration stated that Sweden's strategy relied on several instruments such as keeping the driver informed, improved enforcement and increased use of alcohol interlock technology. Over the recent years the focus has increasingly switched to commercial and young drivers. Enforcement efforts have been stepped up, with 2 million drivers tested and every police car equipped with a breathalyser.
Both innovative ways of promoting alcolocks and their improved technical quality were responsible for their growing market share and acceptance by the driving community. As an element of a rehabilitation programme, alcolocks were proposed to drivers who had lost their license but could have it back on the condition of equipping their car with such a device. The use of alcolocks was also increasingly required in the process of public procurement of transport vehicles. Finally, alcolocks were tested in private cars.
Political leadership was paramount in developing this technology and in reaching Sweden's aim of equipping all vehicles with an alcolock by 2012 at the latest, said Björn Stafbom.

Ambitious EU legislation in the making

According to Joël Valmain from the European Commission, the relevant EU legislation currently in force is very weak, as drink driving issues usually fall within the competence of the Member States under the subsidiarity principle. A Recommendation, adopted in 2001 after 13 years of negotiations and deliberations, recommended BAC level of 0.5 mg/ml for private drivers and 0.2 mg/ml for commercial drivers and young and novice drivers. Another Recommendation, dating from 2003, referred to the enforcement of drink driving legislation in the Member States.
To redress this balance, the Commission will soon present a proposal for a Directive on cross-border enforcement which would also target drink driving offences, Joël Valmain said. Another important piece of legislation will be an EU Alcohol Strategy, proposing a zero BAC for professional drivers and young and novice drivers.

Safe & Sober partner shows example to the industry

Lennart Pilskog from Volvo Trucks shared his company's experience in preventing drink driving. Over 20,000 commercial vehicles by Volvo have been equipped with alcolock technology. This approach was paying off in terms of saved lives, with its positive effect clearly demonstrated by casualty statistics. Alcolocks were also becoming a tool to identify drivers with an alcohol problem and to help them to overcome their dependency.

Lennart Pilskog praised the contribution which "Safe & Sober" campaign would make to raising people's awareness of the drink driving problem on European roads and finding effective solutions for tackling it.

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