Monday 22nd January 2001

PRESS NOTICE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Presenting the 3rd European Transport Safety Lecture to be held in the Belgian Parliament tomorrow evening "Independent accident investigation: every citizen's right, society's duty", Pieter van Vollenhoven, Chairman of the Dutch Transport Safety Board will call for immediate EU legislation requiring Member States to ensure that all transport accident investigation is carried out by independent agencies. He will also call for Member States to establish independent multi-modal transport safety boards at national level as has been done in Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, the US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

Addressing transport safety policymakers and professionals from across Europe, the principal recommendations of the Lecture are:

"1. Independent investigations into the causes of disasters, accidents and incidents are invaluable to society in general and in ensuring safety.
   - They are the only way to show society exactly what happened.
   - They can put an end to any public concern in the wake of an accident.
   - They can help the victims and their families to come to terms with what has happened to them.
   - They can teach us lessons for the future, and prevent the same thing happening again.
   - And they are an important aid in safeguarding democracy, since they make our actions transparent.

2. Evidence shows that, in many cases, investigations into the party or parties to blame for a disaster or serious accident are not the right instrument to discover exactly what went wrong. These investigations tend to look into the direct causes and not the underlying causes. What is more, suspects are not obliged to make statements that might incriminate them.

3. At international level, independent investigations have only been declared applicable to aircraft accidents. Under the provisions of the ICAO Convention and EU Directive 94/56, people can claim the right to independent investigations in the aviation sector.

4. There is no logic in restricting independent investigations to this sector.

5. Independent investigations should be anchored in law, so that they can be kept strictly separate from investigations into the party or parties to blame. Whenever a serious accident, disaster or incident occurs, two separate investigations will have to be carried out, one into the causes, the other into the party or parties to blame.

6. Society – Members of Parliament and Ministers, victims and their families, the media, and the general public – should actively lobby for the introduction of independent inquiries in their countries.

7. The European Commission should start by declaring EU Directive 94/56 applicable to all transport sectors. At a later date, independent investigations can be introduced in sectors such as defence, industry, health care, the environment and so on.

8. The public has a right to a society in which truly independent investigations can and will be carried out."

Introducing the Lecture, Herman De Croo MP, Speaker of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives and Chairman of ETSC's Board will say "As we await the forthcoming discussion by the EU institutions of the strategy and content of the common transport policy to 2010, there could be no better time to focus on this fundamental area of activity and to highlight appropriate EU actions. I am sure that this Lecture and the review on transport crash investigation to be published by ETSC next month will make a full contribution to defining the way forward."

The Lecture is to be followed by contributions from principal guests: Francois Lamoureux, Director-General of the Commission's Energy and Transport Directorate, Mark Watts MEP (PSE,UK) and Claes Tingvall Director of Road Safety for the Swedish Roads Administration.

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The full text of the Lecture will be available from the ETSC secretariat (hard copy) and on ETSC's web-site www.etsc.be on Wednesday 24th January, 2001.