TEXTS ADOPTED

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Priorities in EU road safety

A5-0381/2000

European Parliament resolution on the Commission communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the 'Priorities in EU road safety - Progress report and ranking of actions' (COM(2000) 125 – C5-0248/2000 – 2000/2136(COS))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to the Commission communication (COM(2000) 125 – C5-0248/2000),

– having regard to the Commission's proposal for a Council directive relating to the maximum permitted alcohol concentration for vehicle drivers (COM(1988) 707[1]),

– having regard to its previous resolutions on road safety and in particular its resolution of 11 March 1998 on promoting road safety in the EU- the programme for 1997-2001[2],

– having regard to the Council's resolution of 26 June 2000 on improvement of road safety,

– having regard to Rule 47(1) of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism (A5-0381/2000),

A. whereas 95% of all traffic accidents occur on the road; whereas it is totally unacceptable that more than 42 000 deaths and over 1,7 million injuries are caused annually by road crashes across the European Union, of which several thousand give rise to severe disability, and whereas it is vital to attempt to contain this situation,

B. whereas inadequate road safety must be viewed as a major public health problem given the number of deaths and injuries due to road accidents which cause serious physical, psychological and material harm to the victims, their families and society as a whole,

C. whereas in the EU in the last decade the number of serious and fatal accidents has decreased, but this trend appears to be flattening out; whereas, also, road traffic is expected to increase substantially in the next few years, and that is one reason for stepping up action,

D. whereas road accidents are the most common cause of death amongst children and young people and in fact amongst all EU citizens under the age of 45, which has a devastating impact, not only on families, but also on society as a whole,

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1 OJ C 25, 31.1.1989, p. 9.

2 OJ C 104, 6.4.1998, p. 139.

E. whereas the most vulnerable groups of road users, such as the young and the elderly, pedestrians and cyclists, as well as motorcyclists, run the greatest risks; whereas the separation between motorised traffic, on the one hand, and pedestrians and cyclists, on the other hand, reduces these accident risks,

F. whereas the particularly serious accidents which have occurred in road tunnels in recent years, for example in the Mont Blanc tunnel and the Tauern tunnel in Austria, have made it necessary to rethink active and passive safety measures from top to bottom, the aim being to ensure that users will be able to pass without fear through the road tunnels in operation and those under construction,

G. whereas the main problems on which road safety strategies should be focused are common to all Member States; whereas there are significant differences between the Member States in the number of road deaths and therefore major improvements can be obtained by progressively reducing the disparities and bringing all Member States up to the standards of those with the best results; whereas there are significant differences in the number of fatalities between road transport and other transport modes and the road sector must approach the same level of safety as other transport modes,

H. whereas the EU has explicit Treaty obligations to act on road safety with exclusive powers for ensuring a high level of protection in car and motorcycle technical standards (Article 95), powers to act in any other area of road safety where the EU can add value over and above the efforts of Member States (Article 71) and established powers in several areas since the 1980s, such as seat-belt use in cars and driver licensing,

I. whereas the adoption, by the EU, of measures to increase transport safety is an explicit objective of the common transport policy and must be incorporated as a fully-fledged element of transport policy in the common policy on sustainable mobility,

J. whereas the most precise estimations of the total socio-economic costs of road accidents in the EU (including estimates for under-reporting of non-fatal accidents) exceed EUR 160 billion annually, which is almost 2 % of GDP; whereas attributing an economic cost to road fatalities and damages shows that the cost of preventing accidents is far less than the economic cost of crashes, and therefore additional resources, both in terms of staff and budget, are fully justified at local, national and EU level,

K. whereas such a policy might require major investment to plan and build a safe traffic system; but whereas low-cost road engineering measures, such as safety barriers, may be implemented quickly and, like the production and promotion of EU technical guidelines based on best practices, may significantly improve traffic safety; whereas, however, the safety barriers must meet the specific safety requirements of motorcyclists,

L. whereas road accidents are caused by failures in the traffic system as a whole; whereas such systems must be designed to take account of the needs, mistakes and vulnerabilities of road-users and the infrastructures for which planners are responsible,

M. whereas improving road safety is the joint responsibility of the EU and the national, regional and local authorities with responsibility for the planning, operation and use of

traffic systems; whereas the motor vehicle industry, transport and insurance companies and, in particular, road-users themselves, also have a special responsibility for improving road safety,

N. whereas an efficient road-safety policy requires strong political leadership at all levels, from local authorities to the EU,

O. whereas the detrimental effects of excessive and inappropriate speed on road safety are universally acknowledged,

P. whereas alcohol is responsible for at least 20% of serious traffic injuries and 9 000 road deaths every year in the EU,

Q. whereas it is a known fact that, in the same way as alcohol, the taking of medicines and drugs is the cause of countless accidents,

R. whereas effective action on vehicle safety, and car fronts which are less dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists, should be the priority in the European Union since this is an area of exclusive competence and has the potential to greatly reduce the number of accidents in every Member State,

S. whereas strategic planning for road safety with numerical targets is essential to increase political attention and to provide a focus for effective activity by all those who can take action and whereas the case for setting numerical targets is the same whether it be at EU, national, regional or local level,

T. whereas, although the first and second action programmes have resulted in many useful measures, those taken to date have been mainly ad hoc and not in keeping with the scale and importance of the road safety problem,

1. Affirms that improving safety for all modes of transport, as well as providing the necessary financial resources for this purpose, must be one of the main priorities of transport policy;

2. Regrets that so few of the measures proposed in the second road-safety action programme have been implemented and that the priority list was submitted with very little of the programme left to run;

3. Considers that all the following measures should be considered as priorities in the very little time remaining:

   (a) a legislative proposal making mandatory the four sub-system tests developed in the 22-year EU-funded research and development programme leading to safer car fronts for pedestrians and cyclists should be introduced without any further delay,

   (b) a legislative proposal requiring the fitting of speed limiters on lighter heavy goods vehicles weighing more than 3.5 tonnes,

   (c) further support for the European New Car Assessment Programme (EuroNCAP); calls on the Commission to request EuroNCAP to consider the possibility of

combining standards for pedestrians and car-drivers to give car-buyers, who are both pedestrians and car-users, one overall performance standard; the current EuroNCAP should also be incorporated in a larger testing programme which would take account of further safety aspects, with regard in particular to the safety of vulnerable road users,

(d) support for seat-belt campaigns; requests the Commission to make this support conditional on the campaigns being linked to police enforcement to ensure best value-for-money and changes in behaviour; support for the development of a specification for smart audible seat-belt reminder systems with a view to making these mandatory in the EU,

(e) EU guidelines, based on best practice for low-cost measures, on the designing of less dangerous road verges, as well as on policies to inform the public and eliminate high-risk accident spots ("black spots"), and calls on the Commission to extend this list to include urban safety management (and in particular measures to create a safe environment for vulnerable road users), speed reduction and safety audits in the current programme,

(f) support for the further development of the EU road accident database, the development of a computerised EU road-safety information system (including a map of "black spots") and further research into road-crash injuries, vehicle standards and telematics;

4. Believes that an EU recommendation on blood alcohol limits is not the appropriate response to the need to reduce the considerable differences between the Member States in this field and takes this opportunity to reconfirm Parliament's support for the existing proposal for a maximum common limit of 0.5 parts per thousand; calls on the Member States to enforce compliance of the blood alcohol limits more strictly and reconfirms the need for provisions for the standardisation of apparatus for testing alcohol levels; considers that research and development of alcohol interlock devices should also be promoted;

5. Emphasises the need for the Commission to take a decision on the mandatory fitting of daytime running lights to motorcycles and cars;

6. Believes that no single death on the European roads can be justified and that therefore the long-term objective must be that no European citizens should be killed or seriously injured in the road transport system; notes that the risk of being killed and injured is much higher in the road transport system than in other transport modes, and considers therefore that the new action programme must ensure the same level of safety in road transport as in other transport modes; believes that work should start as soon as possible on a longer-term new road-safety action programme for the years 2002-2010 with clearly defined goals;

7. Emphasises that the Commission, in accordance with the abovementioned resolution adopted by Parliament on 11 March 1998, should, for the next road-safety programme 2002-2010, set a common aspirational fatality reduction target which is challenging but achievable and which takes into account existing national targets to 2010 and the added value of measures to be taken at EU level; considers that, in case there is a revision of

Member States' targets and programmes, such an EU target could be revised mid-term during the programme; believes that this target should be adjusted at the time of the enlargement of the Union;

8. Believes that the next road-safety programme for the years 2002-2010 should clearly define the main priorities and employ a systematic approach to the problem of road safety and use all strategies: accident prevention, injury prevention and post-impact care; considers that the programme should identify not only measures which fall within the exclusive competence of the EU, but also those which will add value to what can be achieved by individual Member States; further requests the Commission to submit every three years an evaluation report on the extent to which the main goals have been achieved;

9. Calls on the Commission to take up the question of working conditions for professional drivers, and to address in the new programme issues such as cumulative driving fatigue, working time, alcohol and drugs; believes that current legislation on driving time and rest periods is not sufficient to guarantee drivers acceptable working hours; points out that monitoring and application of the law must also be improved and harmonised within the EU;

10. Believes that harmonisation should be pursued with a view to promoting rules governing the building and operation of tunnels and to make existing tunnels safe in order to protect road users, not least by means of information campaigns and warning systems to enable help to be provided quickly and by means of tighter regulations on the classification of dangerous substances moving through tunnels;

11. Believes that the Member States and the applicant countries should set up national road-safety programmes with strategies for achieving their objectives; considers that the Commission should coordinate, report and publish the achievements of the Member States every year;

12. Believes that the next road-safety programme should address the main road-safety issues common to all Member States which comprise: excess and inappropriate speed, excess alcohol or any other substances that may impair driving ability, the high accident risk of young, novice drivers, education from an early age in road-user behaviour, training, non-use of protective equipment such as seat belts and crash helmets, too many untreated high-risk accident spots, insufficient crash protection provided by vehicles and infrastructure;

13. Takes the view that, in addition to developing and improving infrastructure and vehicle safety, the safety-conscious behaviour of road-users, particularly driving behaviour, must be improved; therefore proposes that measures and campaigns should be stepped up at all levels in this regard; proposes that such measures should target those groups which are particularly prone to accidents on the roads;

14. Believes that, among the measures taken to reduce the effects of accidents, top priority at Community level should be given to the promotion of the use of helmets by motorcyclists, as is already done for the use of seat belts and child restraint systems; believes therefore that the information and promotion campaign aimed at young motorcyclists in Europe should be accompanied by a recommendation to the Member

States that national laws should make the wearing of helmets compulsory for motorcyclists regardless of their age and the type of vehicle involved;

15. Considers that an EU road-safety policy must also include rescue, care and rehabilitation measures and guidelines to improve medical assistance to victims and provide better assistance in legal and social issues to victims and their families;

16. Considers that non-compliance with speed limits is such a widespread problem that stricter action is called for in order to improve road safety; asks the Commission to examine what kind of controls and substantial sanctions would lead to significantly better compliance with speed limits; believes that, based on this analysis, the Commission should make concrete recommendations to Member States as part of the new action programme;

17. Emphasises that experience and skill make for safer drivers; further notes that there are 10 000 EU deaths in the 15-24 year-old age group and invites the Commission, in its forthcoming proposal on driving licences, to emphasize the need for high quality education throughout the Union and to consider a scheme involving stepwise education and increased demands on novice drivers with new licences;

18. Recalls its previous resolutions in which it called for the EU to require a mandatory safety audit and safety impact assessment on all EU-funded transport infrastructure;

19. Supports the Commission's recommendation to encourage Member States and regional and local authorities to calculate and monitor expenditure on road-safety measures, in order to compare it with savings from avoided fatalities, and also to increase their investment in this field; furthermore, believes that the EU should set an example with its transport safety budget line;

20. Invites those Member States which are party to the Schengen Convention to complete the work already initiated aimed at drawing up a cooperation agreement on proceedings for road-traffic offences and the enforcement of penalties imposed in respect thereof;

21. Believes that road-safety policy must be seen in the context of the overall policy on sustainable mobility, implying more integrated use of all transport modes and promotion of more environmentally friendly modes of transport, such as rail, inland waterways, short sea shipping and combined transport, as well as the promotion of public passenger transport, in order to reduce the impact of road transport; takes the view that it is also necessary to consider environmental aspects in the EU road-safety policy debate, assessing the effects of noise and air pollution generated by road traffic on public health and the urban environment, and adapting road-safety policy to these findings;

22. Invites the car manufacturers to design vehicles with safety equipment as standard;

23. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the governments of the Member States.