

28th August 2012

Minister of the Interior Päivi Räsänen
Ministry of the Interior
Kirkkokatu 12 Helsinki
PO Box 26
FI-00023 Government
Finland

Re: Police Reform and Consequences for Road Safety

Dear Minister Räsänen,

I am writing to you on behalf of the European Transport Safety Council (ETSC) to ask you to maintain the National Traffic Police and allow them to continue to make their important contribution to road safety work in Finland. The EU has a target to reduce road deaths by a further 50% by 2020 with moving 'close to zero fatalities in road transport' as its long term 2050 target. In 2010 it launched a 'Road Safety Policy Orientations 2011-2020' which included action in the field of traffic law enforcement as one of their important cornerstones. It is crucial for Finland and other Member States to continue its active Police work as part of a holistic approach to improving road safety across the EU.

This is especially so as in 2011 we witnessed a slowdown in the reduction trend of road deaths in the EU. In 2011 there were 30,200 deaths representing only a 2% overall reduction in comparison to 2010. Moreover, some countries with a long standing record in reducing their road traffic deaths have seen dramatic increases in comparison to 2010. Finland saw a 7% increase in its road deaths and achieved a lower than average reduction of road traffic deaths of 33% for the 2001-2011 period. This is a real cause for concern and should urgently be translated into a call for concerted action by yourselves. Politicians must place road safety high up on the agenda and maintain the work of a dedicated National Traffic Police. Shifting traffic police tasks to local police may lead to less resources, less enforcement of the priority areas of speed, alcohol/drugs and non seat belt use and a dilution of high profile traffic enforcement.

In terms of budgetary implications, putting a monetary value on prevention of loss of human life and limb can be debated on ethical grounds. However, doing so makes it possible to assess objectively the costs and the benefits of road safety measures and to make the maximum use of generally limited resources. As the Police Reform is being considered due to financial savings, it's also important to look at the possible consequences for road safety and the associated costs. According to ETSC's most recent calculations, the monetary value of the human losses avoided by preventing one road fatality is worth 1.84 million euro. Thus in Finland too, the value to society of improving road safety should be taken into account in the policy and budgetary planning processes, and the moral as well as financial imperative of reducing road risk should be respected.

Action in the area of traffic law enforcement is a fundamental part of road safety. Enforcement is a means to prevent collisions from happening by way of persuading drivers to comply with the safety rules. It is based on giving drivers the feeling that they run too

high a risk of being caught when breaking the rules. Conversely we also have observations from some Member States, that if there is the feeling amongst the public that enforcement is lessening, this has also seen to have an increase of risk taking by drivers. Effective enforcement leads to a rapid reduction in deaths and injuries. Moreover, sustained intensive enforcement that is well explained and publicised also has a long-lasting effect on driver behaviour. Research estimates that no less than half of the deaths could be avoided if traffic laws were obeyed. Traffic law enforcement is a key part of achieving that compliance.

The European Commission's "Road Safety Policy Orientations 2011-2020" called for increased co-ordination and sharing of best practices in the field of enforcement, building on the EC Recommendation of 2004 on enforcement of traffic law. The European Commission has also proposed the setting of national enforcement plans, building on the EC's Enforcement Recommendation. We have also recently seen the adoption of the Cross Border Enforcement Directive. The Directive covers the main offences causing death and serious injury in the EU: speeding, drink driving, non use of seat belts, drug driving and mobile phone use whilst driving. According to ETSC's Road Safety PIN Programme, Finland, with 429 road side breath tests per 1000 population, is one of the countries with the highest levels of drink driving breath tests in the EU. This is a crucial measure in fighting drink driving and these levels must be kept up. However speed enforcement needs to be increased as numbers of speed tickets are not as high as the leaders. Furthermore Finland has been a role model for other neighbouring countries in the area of traffic law enforcement. There has been a high level of best practice exchange with Police forces. If the National Traffic Police is abolished in Finland this may have a worrying spill over effect in other Member States and send a wrong signal.

Enforcement is an important concern for European citizens: a Eurobarometer survey showed that the majority of those polled favour action on drink driving, speeding and increased enforcement. Moreover Vice President Kallas of the European Commission in July sent a letter to all Member States on the topic. The Vice-President wrote to all Member States to *"ask for information about national road safety enforcement plans for 2012"*, asking *"to be reassured that even in tough economic times this important work, which is so central to road safety, is not being scaled back"*. ETSC supports the call from the European Commissioner and asks for the Finnish Traffic Police and the excellent work it has done on traffic law enforcement and saving lives on Finland's roads to be maintained.

Yours sincerely,



Antonio Avenoso
ETSC Executive Director

Cc Minister of Transport Merja Kyllönen
Minister of Finance Jutta Urpilainen

ETSC is a Brussels-based independent non-profit making organisation dedicated to reducing the numbers of deaths and injuries in transport in Europe. The ETSC seeks to identify and promote research-based measures with a high safety potential. It brings together 45 national and international organisations concerned with transport safety from across Europe. www.etsc.eu.

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