

Road Safety under the Czech Chairmanship of the Presidency of the EU

This Memorandum briefly outlines ETSC's priorities for the Czech Presidency of the EU and presents our recommendations on key EU policy dossiers

ETSC(1) welcomes the news that road safety will be one of the priorities under land transport during the Czech Presidency of the EU. Strong leadership is needed to bring about renewed efforts ahead of 2010. The EU is likely to miss its target of halving road deaths between 2001 and 2010. Yet, some of the first results from countries show a reduction in deaths for the first half of 2008 (Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany and Spain). So perhaps there is a chance for cautious optimism for a recovery from the disastrous 2007 results which saw hardly any reduction compared to 2006 and many increases. This recovery needs to be sustained by a concerted effort of all stakeholders.

With European Parliamentary elections in June and preparations for the change in the European Commission College in the autumn, the Czech Republic has a difficult tenure when the eye may stray away from keeping important road safety dossiers on the agenda due to these EU institutional changes. However this is an excellent time for getting minds focused on post 2010 and discussing what shape European road safety policy should take in the next decade.

Besides an effort in advancing towards the 2010 target, 2009 will also be the year when the EU will start thinking about a new target and a new strategy for its 4th Road Safety Action Programme (RSAP) to tackle the challenges of saving lives on Europe's roads beyond 2010. The Czech Presidency may also inherit the challenging job of finding an agreement on the important cross border enforcement legislation which may be carried over into 2009.

Road Safety in the Czech Republic

The National Road Safety Strategy which was set in 2004 is aiming to "have no more than 650 deaths on Czech roads in 2010". Following an exceptional 17% drop in road deaths in 2006 the Czech Republic saw a 15% rise in 2007. Between 2001 and 2007 it has only made little progress in reducing deaths on its roads. The number of road deaths has dropped by 8% far below the average in the EU of a 21% drop but better than the other EU Member States where the average reduction is only 2%. The country has witnessed a yo-yo effect of increase and decrease due to the road safety measures brought into force in mid-2006. These include the introduction of year round daytime running lights and penalty point system. Their immediate effect has worn out mostly due to insufficiencies in the enforcement of the new legislation. The Czech Republic saw the worst development in PTW safety in the past decade, with a 5% annual increase in deaths. As the problem of PTW riders is becoming increasingly serious this should also be an area of focus for concerted EU action.

Following the rise in deaths in 2007 the road safety stakeholders including the government moved into action. A re-evaluation of the new Road Traffic Act was made, particularly the effects of the penalty point system (introduced in July 2006). The Road Safety Strategy was revised and updated. The analyses and the new proposals of the expert committees led to a wide and ongoing public discussion in the media. This alongside the target orientated road safety campaigns have helped to increase the awareness of the road safety problem in the Czech Republic. A strengthening of enforcement with the focus on recidivist and professional drivers has also been declared by the new Head of the Traffic Police. This will be supported by important investment in the modernisation of its equipment. All these features have undoubtedly contributed to the significant decrease of road collisions and their tragic consequences. Notably, there has been a 14% reduction in deaths during 2008 so far compared with the same time period in 2007. This positive trend is likely to continue.

Strong involvement of regional and local authorities in road safety is of vital importance especially as they are delegated to deliver certain road safety measures such as manage road infrastructure. The importance of road safety work at regional and local level will be the focus of ETSC's PIN Talk –jointly organised by ETSC, the Ministry of Transport and the Czech Transport Research Centre (CDV) in March 2009 and will form part of the official programme of the Czech EU Presidency.

Cross border enforcement of traffic law in the field of road safety

If the French Presidency does not manage to reach an agreement on this important dossier the Czech Republic must push ahead with it as a matter of priority. ETSC welcomed the new legislative proposal that will allow EU drivers to be identified and thus prosecuted for offences committed in a Member State other than the one where their vehicle is registered. The Directive is needed for in an increasingly mobile, integrated and enlarged EU, where non-resident drivers make up an ever increasing part of the traffic flow. If road traffic violations are committed EU citizens are entitled to fair and equal treatment in whichever country they are travelling. Also with the growth of automated speed camera systems it will be particularly important to ensure a system which enables countries to follow up speeding offences across borders. Current co-operation agreements exist in the form of bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements. However they are often not able to deal with the increasingly complex cross-border problems posed by traffic offenders. Moreover 350 separate agreements would be needed if every Member State were to set up an agreement with every other.

The proposal should be extended to include an EU wide reference framework for convergence of enforcement best practices in the areas of speeding, drink driving and seat belt use. The Directive should encourage all EU Member States to consider improving their quality of enforcement. Moreover this legislative instrument belongs under the first pillar of the EU's transport policy as it will clearly contribute to the EU's road safety policy and reaching the EU's target of halving deaths on the EU's roads by 2010. A third pillar instrument would have to be agreed under unanimity in the European Council and would not have the participation of the European Parliament. Furthermore the Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs

are very unlikely to prioritise a dossier dealing with road safety on their heavy agenda. Ministers and Member State officials must try to find a solution which all Member States support under the first pillar of the Treaty.

4th RSAP and beyond 2010

The Czech Presidency should consider as its second high priority looking to the future and setting in motion preparations for the new 4th Road Safety Action Programme. It should also fully support the European Commission's planned wide ranging stakeholder consultation in 2009. ETSC has recently launched its: "Blueprint for the EU's 4th Road Safety Action Programme 2010-2020" and hopes it will make a valuable contribution to the debate. ETSC proposes a shared target of 40% reduction of deaths with a further target to reduce injuries with lasting effects in each Member State by 20%. ETSC recommends the EU to adopt a target of 60% reduction between 2010 and 2020 of child deaths. Alongside these targets a vision is also needed to inspire and motivate all players to work together. ETSC also proposes a vision: "Road Safety as a right and responsibility for all" whereby simultaneous mobility and safety should be a fundamental right of EU citizens.

The 4th Road Safety Action Programme should focus its top activities upon the main behavioural causes of death and injuries with lasting effect: (speeding, drink driving and lack of seat belt and child safety restraint use) as well as badly designed infrastructure and vehicles. Alongside this the Programme should tackle new emerging trends such as the increasing numbers of motorcyclists among those killed or injured on the roads. It should work to reap the rewards of reducing speeds and the resulting reductions in road deaths and injuries with lasting effects, as well as in emissions of carbon dioxide. The Action Programme needs also to present policy solutions to take on the demographic challenge of an ageing society.

A new institutional setup with the aim of linking responsibility for implementing the Action Programme and for reaching the 2020 targets is also needed. This includes ETSC's proposal that every EU Presidency holder both individually and in their troika formation should make an effort to focus attention on road safety and ensure a regular meeting of Transport Ministers to concentrate on this topic. ETSC looks forward to the planned informal Transport Council on this topic.

Vehicle Safety Regulation

The Czech Presidency should also work to progress the Regulation, published in May 2008, which will improve vehicle safety. The introduction of mandatory vehicle safety technologies, especially Electronic Stability Control (ESC), will contribute to reducing the deaths on Europe's roads. However ETSC regrets that the proposal which addresses road safety does not focus on reducing the factors that currently present the greatest risk to road safety, namely speed, alcohol and the non-use of seat belts. The technologies chosen which include ESC, Advance Emergency Braking and Lane Departure Warning are not those that would bring about maximum casualty reductions. The Czech Presidency should work to progress development of these technologies with a higher life saving potential and insert references to them in the new proposal. Finally, ETSC is concerned about the implications of passing on regulatory powers to the UN as included in the EC proposal. If for reasons of "Better Regulation" this nevertheless is adopted ETSC would like to see changes to the UNECE system. The process should be made much more open and transparent to NGOs. Moreover this should include more consultation of independent safety experts who are not affiliated to industry or to the interests of particular Member States. These changes would ensure that safety is at the forefront of the UNECE process.

Pedestrian Protection Regulation

Under the Slovene Presidency the European Parliament adopted at first reading on 18 June 2008 its position concerning the proposal for a Regulation on the type-approval of vehicles with respect to the protection of

pedestrian and other vulnerable road users (Report by Francesco Ferrari – ALDE, Italy). This proposed regulation would replace two texts currently in force: Directive 2003/102/EC on the protection of pedestrians in the event of a collision with a motor vehicle, and Directive 2005/66/EC which established the technical recommendations for frontal protection systems on motor vehicles.

Significant improvements to the text of the initial proposal tabled by the European Commission were made by the Parliament. In particular these include the adoption of a stricter scheduled for new vehicle constructions and the highlighting of the importance of passive safety requirements. This assures that there should be no trade-off between passive safety equipments and the introduction of active safety measures such as Brake assists system.

However, it is regrettable that in relation to other important aspects the safety of vulnerable road users has been weakened compared to what is guaranteed by the Directive 2003/102/EC currently into force. The retention of the bonnet leading edge upper leg-form test only for monitoring purposes in fact undermines the conclusions of the 2004 feasibility report carried out by the EC contractor (TRL) which recommended mandatory protection in this area as provided in the text of the Directive 2003/102/EC. Furthermore, lowering the impact speed for the head-form to bonnet top from 40 to 35km/h and changing from 15 to 19 degrees the provision for the lower leg-form to bumper test is leading to a significant reduction in the protection of pedestrian according to ETSC's experts. The compromise text as adopted by the Parliament is now expected to receive its formal final adoption within the Council.

Notes to editors:

(1) The European Transport Safety Council (ETSC) is a Brussels-based non-profit making organisation dedicated to the reduction of transport crashes and casualties in Europe. ETSC seeks to identify and promote effective measures on the basis of international scientific research and best practice. The Council brings together 39 international and national organisations concerned with transport safety from across Europe.

For more information contact:

ETSC Policy Director Ellen Townsend at ellen.townsend@etsc.be , +32 (0)2 230 41 06

European Transport Safety Council
Av des Celtes 20 - B-1040 Brussels
Tel. + 32 (0) 2 230 4106 - Fax. + 32 (0) 2 230 4215
Internet: www.etsc.eu