

NEWS RELEASE

LATVIA BECOMES FIFTH FASTEST IMPROVING EU COUNTRY *However it also ranks fifth worst in road death rate*

22 June 2009, Brussels – Latvia and Spain have been recognised with the “2009 Road Safety PIN Award” at the 3rd ETSC⁽¹⁾ Road Safety PIN⁽²⁾ Conference in Brussels today for its sustained successful strategies in reducing road deaths. Since 2001 Latvia has seen a rapid improvement of road safety, with deaths down by 43%, which is the fifth best progress in the EU. However, road mortality remains among the highest in the EU, trailing after Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Greece.

As revealed today by the latest PIN Annual Report⁽³⁾, the best results over the period 2001-2008 have been achieved by the EU countries with a medium level of safety. Luxembourg, France and Portugal, already the top three for their progress up to 2007, keep their leading position with outstanding reductions of 49%, 48% and 47% respectively up to 2008⁽⁴⁾. Spain and Latvia are catching up with reduction of more than 43%. Belgium with 38% resumed in 2008 the good progress it was making early in the decade. Good progress was also made by countries with a longer tradition of road safety such as Germany (-36%), Switzerland (-34%), the Netherlands (-31%) and Sweden (-28%). In Romania and Bulgaria, however, the number of road deaths was higher in 2008 than in 2001. Slovakia and Poland have not made any substantial progress⁽⁵⁾.

Latvia's success was built largely on adoption and effective implementation of its two latest National Road Safety Plans, respectively for 2000-2006 and for 2007-2013, which set the aim to cut road deaths ultimately by 70% by 2013. With 316 people killed in 2008 (compared to 652 in 1999 and to 419 in 2007) the country is on track to reach both its national goal and the 50% EU target in 2010.

One of the most important measures proposed in the 2000-2006 National Road Safety Plan was the introduction of a penalty point system in 2004. Penalty points and fines for major traffic offences such as speeding, drink driving, non use of seat belt or child restraints and non use of helmet, have been tightened in 2005 and 2006. The 2007-2013 Plan aims to increase the number of speed checks and random breath tests, although it does not contain any specific targets.

Despite this impressive success, Latvia remains a country with one of the highest road mortality rates in the EU: 139 people per million population are killed here, almost twice as much as the EU27 average of 79. *“The number of road victims in Latvia is higher than that of suicides and homicides taken together,”* said Aldis Lama, safety expert in the Road Traffic Safety Directorate (CSDD) and a Senior Researcher at the Road Traffic Research, Ltd. *“Compared to other EU countries, pedestrians, especially children and senior citizens, and motorcyclists face a much higher risk in Latvia.”*

The list of road safety priorities for Latvia includes investments into degraded road network infrastructure: treating high risk sites, separating high-speed traffic and pedestrian flows, installing median barriers on dual carriageway roads, moving more traffic away from rural roads to motorways. Four safety cameras installed in July 2008 should grow into a nationwide automated safety camera network. The country's vehicle fleet, 70% of which is at least 10 years old, should also be increasingly replaced with newer and safer models.

“Latvian authorities and road users have demonstrated their firm commitment to enhancing safety,” said ETSC Executive Director Antonio Avenoso. *“It is important that they do not feel complacent now and continue to move closer to the core of EU countries with acceptable road safety levels.”*

You can download the 3rd PIN Annual Report at www.etsc.eu/PIN-publications.php. For more information please contact PIN Programme Manager Graziella Jost, graziella.jost@etsc.eu, mob. +32 (0)4 98 51 65 62 or ETSC Communications Officer Evgueni Pogorelov, evgueni.pogorelov@etsc.eu, tel. +32 (0)2 230.41.06.

Notes to Editors:

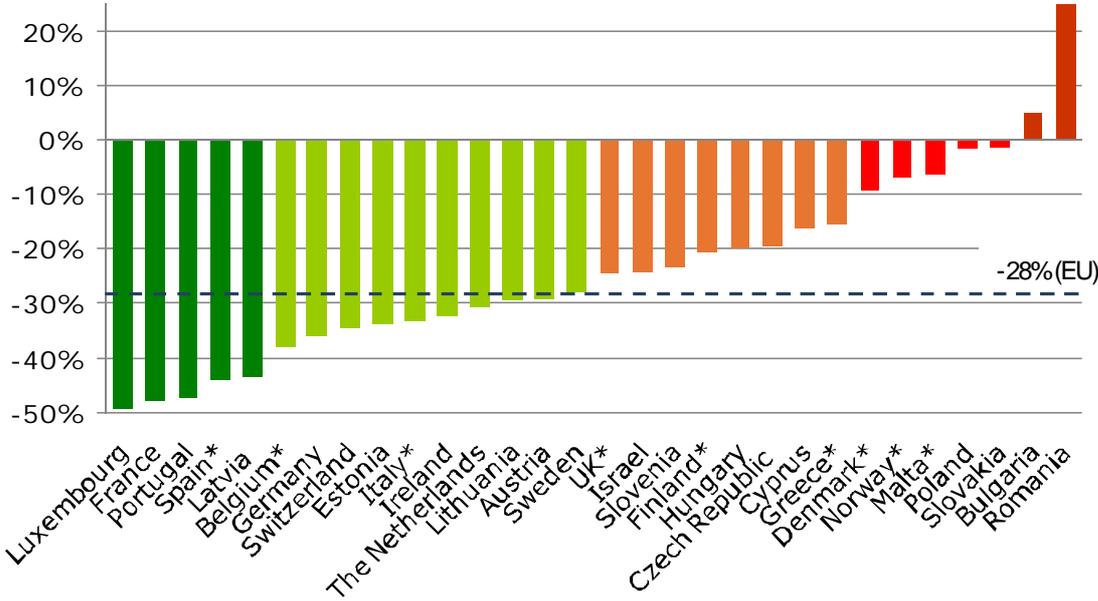
(1) The European Transport Safety Council (ETSC) is a Brussels-based independent non-profit making organisation dedicated to the reduction of the number and severity of transport crashes in Europe. The ETSC seeks to identify and promote research-based measures with a high safety potential. It brings together 42 national and international organisations concerned with transport safety from across Europe. www.etsc.eu

(2) The Road Safety Performance Index (PIN) Programme was launched in June 2006 to compare country road safety performances. It currently includes 30 countries. www.etsc.eu/PIN.

(3) You can download the 3rd PIN Annual Report and the Methodological Note at www.etsc.eu/PIN-publications.php.
 Some 39,000 people were killed in road collisions in 2008 in the EU27, 15,400 less than in 2001 but still far from the 27,000 deaths limit which the EU set for itself in its Road Safety Target for 2010. The average annual reduction since 2001 has been only 4.4% instead of the 7.4% needed. This could delay the EU in reaching the 2010 target until 2017.

(4) In 2007, the first PIN Award was given to Cécile Petit, Interministerial Delegate for Road Safety in France. In 2008, the second PIN Award was given to Mário Lino, Minister of Public Works, Transport and Communications of Portugal. On the 22 June 2009, a joint PIN Award 2009 was given to Justo Zambrana Pineda, State Secretary, Ministry of Interior, Spain and Nils Freivalds, State Secretary, Ministry of Transport, Latvia.

(5) Fig.1 Percentage change in road deaths between 2001 and 2008



* 2008 provisional figures or national estimates based on provisional figures as final figures for 2008 were not yet available at the time of going to print.