

**Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the issue 'Towards a European Road Safety Area: strategic guidelines for road safety up to 2020' (opinion at the request of the European Parliament)**

(2011/C 48/06)

Rapporteur: **Mr RANOCCHIARI**

On 2 June 2010 the European Parliament decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) on the issue

*'Towards a European Road Safety Area: strategic guidelines for road safety up to 2020.'*

The Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 6 September 2010.

At its 465th plenary session, held on 15 and 16 September (meeting of 15 September), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 128 votes to 4 with 2 abstentions.

## 1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 The EESC reiterates that the objective of the 3rd European Road Safety Action Plan – to halve the number of road deaths over the period 2001-2010 – was very ambitious. In fact according to official data from 2008 the reduction on road fatalities for the EU-27, as compared to the 2001 figures, was 28.4 %. However, recent Commission figures showed a surprising progress which could lead to a final result in 2010 of an over 40 % reduction in road fatalities.

1.2 The reasons why the 50 % reduction in fatalities will not be reached lie in a combination of the following factors:

1.2.1 The Community level has responsibility only for the action plan and implementation guidelines, while implementation of all measures under the action plan is left to the various levels in the Member States;

1.2.2 Implementation and enforcement of road safety measures differs from country to country;

1.2.3 There is no uniform interpretation of statistical road safety data across the EU countries;

1.2.4 Over the last decade, a strong emphasis has been put on enforcement rather than on education and training for all road users.

1.2.5 Interim targets were not assigned to the Member States; neither was special attention paid to the different risk rates among the Member States, requiring a tailored road map for each country.

1.3 With regard to 'passive and active safety' measures, the EESC concludes that there has been a substantial improvement over the last decade, especially due to the introduction by the industry of a wide range of technical safety innovations in passenger cars and heavy duty vehicles. In future, safety standards could be set at a higher level; measures should also be taken in light of the recent introduction on the market of very cheap passenger cars that only just meet the safety standards.

1.3.1 Worse still is the situation regarding low-cost mopeds and motorcycles, principally imported from South East Asia, which often fail to comply with European type approval requirements. This is paramount, considering that PTW (powered two-wheelers) riders are 18-20 times more likely than car drivers to be seriously injured on the road, while more and more commuters are opting for PTW due to traffic congestion in cities.

1.4 Looking at the progress made over the last decade on improving the safety of the road infrastructure, the EESC concludes that much more could have been achieved. The most important step forward was the Council Directive on safety in tunnels, which had a very positive impact Europe-wide. On the contrary, no significant improvements were made in relation to rural roads and secondary networks, where more than 50 % of road fatalities occur.

1.5 The EESC recommends that if the 4th European Road Safety Action Plan (RSAP) up to 2020 is to perform better, the following aspects should be taken into account:

1.5.1 in view of the shared responsibility between the EU and Member States, strong political leadership is needed;

1.5.2 harmonised, detailed road safety statistical data for the EU-27 is needed;

1.5.3 targets should be set as regards severely injured road users, with a common definition of serious injuries;

1.5.4 a more stringent Community policy with regard to harmonisation and regulation of road safety measures, combined with assistance to Member States is needed to ensure that Member States implement road safety measures both better and faster, including implementation of the Pan-European eCall system on a mandatory basis if the voluntary approach does not work;

1.5.5 more attention should be paid to differentiated education and training for all road users, especially younger and elderly road users, as well as other vulnerable road users such as riders of powered two-wheelers, cyclists and pedestrians;

1.5.6 all employers (and especially private-sector employers) managing automotive fleets should be involved in current or future projects in areas such as promoting good practices to reduce commuting collisions, encouraging their staff to switch to public transport and developing fleet safety policies. The expected ISO 39001 for road safety at work will be an important tool to this end;

1.5.7 EU legislation is required for the vulnerable categories of road users. For example: for powered two wheelers (PTW) new type approval is necessary, including mandatory ABS or CBS over 150 cc, AHO (automatic head lights on), and the introduction of roadworthiness tests and second-stage training into the revision of the driving license directive;

1.5.8 with respect to infrastructure development, the EESC advises that the new action plan should include the target of raising the safety level of the trans-European road network and at least 25 % of the non-Trans European Road Network to the state of the TREN;

1.5.9 the action plan should contain ambitious but realistic aims, proposing not only a global target for reducing the overall number of deaths but also specific targets for severely injured people and vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists and PTW riders. As regards the global target, the EESC points out that the risk rate varies significantly across the EU and thus strongly suggests that differentiated fatality reduction targets be set for 2020, based on 2010 figures from the Member States;

1.5.10 in order to ensure that the goals defined in the action plan will be reached, the EESC believes that yearly monitoring by the EU is necessary. To this end, the EESC suggests setting up a dedicated European road safety agency to monitor and follow up the implementation of the action plan in coordination with appointed Member State road safety representatives.

1.6 Last but not least, the EU must establish a strong and permanent connection with 'the decade of action for road safety' proclaimed by the United Nations, and should endeavour to become the global leader in road safety.

## 2. Introduction

2.1 On 28 April 2010, Brian Simpson, chairman of the European Parliament's Committee on Transport and Tourism (TRAN), wrote a letter to the President of the European Economic and Social Committee, Mario Sepi, in which he requested an exploratory opinion on road safety from the EESC, under Rule 124 of Parliament's Rules of Procedure.

2.2 In his letter, Mr Simpson referred to the new Commission Work Programme for 2010, published on 31 March 2010, which includes a proposal to develop a new road safety package, aimed at creating a 'European road safety area'.

2.3 He asked the EESC to address a number of basic questions regarding the past decade: how effective EU-level policies had been in terms of changing the behaviour of road users and improving vehicle passive safety and the road infrastructure; how well these policies had been implemented by Member States and, finally, what would be required to create a genuine 'road safety area' across the 27 Member States.

2.4 In 2001, the Commission published the Transport White Paper, followed in 2003 by the action plan, both based on the objective of halving the number of road deaths by the year 2010.

2.5 The latest available data from 2008 shows a 36.8 % reduction in road fatalities in the EU-15 area and a 28.4 % reduction for the EU-27, as compared to the 2001 figures. This is a considerable reduction, but unfortunately not reaching the Commission's 50 % target. Very recently, the Commission published figures for the year 2009 and forecasts for the year 2010 which are not far from the original target, bringing the total reduction by 2010 at more than 40 %.

2.5.1 If these important results are achieved, the EESC believes that it will be thanks to the coming into force of recent road safety legislation and to the improvements in vehicle safety, more than to a change in road users' behaviour, where a lot of work remains to be done.

2.6 In order to know which measures should be included in a new strategy, it is essential to understand which policies and initiatives have been effective over the past decade, and which have not.

2.7 The Commission's action plan for the last decade focused on three key dimensions:

- changes in individual behaviour, such as the use of safety belts, child restraints, mobile phones and eliminating drink driving;
- support for industry initiatives to develop and market safer vehicles;
- measures to improve infrastructure, for example through the improved design of roads and tunnels and the harmonisation of advanced emergency aid systems across Member States.

2.8 The European Commission held public consultations between April and July 2009 aimed at engaging European citizens and government stakeholders at national, regional and local levels, as well as business and professional sectors, in identifying the key road safety problems to be addressed by the road safety action plan for the period 2011-2020 and the priority actions which could be taken to address the unacceptable and costly levels of road death and serious injury across the EU.

2.9 The EESC agrees with the Committee on Transport and Tourism that before adopting a new road safety action plan (RSAP), an assessment of the efficacy of past policies, the Commission's 2001 Transport White Paper and the 2003 action plan, should be carried out.

2.10 This assessment can be done, inter alia, by making use of recent information and of views expressed in EESC opinions in recent years on this subject. These opinions make clear that the EESC considers the improvement of road safety to be one of the key issues in transport policy, which deserves to be at the top of the Member States' agendas even in a time of economic constraints.

2.11 In the meantime, something important is happening world-wide. After the first global ministerial conference on

road safety held in Moscow in November 2009 ('Time for action') the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the period 2011-2020 as the 'decade of action for road safety' with the goal of stabilising and then reducing the level of road traffic fatalities around the world, nowadays a true epidemic, with more than one million people killed and some 20 million seriously injured each year, ninety percent of them in low and middle-income countries. In global terms, the economic consequences of this sort of 'pandemic' have been estimated between 1 % and 3 % of the various countries' GDP. In Europe the cost to society represented some 130 billion euro in 2009.

2.12 In connection with the above, the EESC believes that taking advantage of the 'momentum', the EU has the possibility through the new RSAP to become the global leader in road safety and should not miss this chance.

### 3. General remarks

3.1 The EESC must point out that to assess the efficacy of past policies in the area of road safety, it is vital to have available documented quantitative and qualitative road safety statistical data from the EU-27 countries that can be compared. Today every Member State provides basic road safety figures to the EU, but for several Member States the quality and depth of the information provided are still deficient and do not allow for differentiation between road users, road categories, weather circumstances and injury severity.

3.2 Bearing in mind that the last thirty years have seen a tripling of traffic on EU roads, the EESC welcomes the considerable progress made by the EU towards halving the number of road fatalities by 2010. While this was already an ambitious goal in a Europe of 15 Member States, as the EESC pointed out in its opinion Transport Safety 2003-2010, adopted on 10 December 2003, it would be even more difficult to achieve in an enlarged Europe.

3.3 The EESC points out that, while the EU set a very ambitious reduction target for road fatalities, it did not set such a target as regards severely injured road users. Between 2001 and 2008, the number of severely injured road users decreased by only 18 % in the EU-27. So, in order to achieve a drastic reduction here, the Commission's new action plan will need to include measures to this end, and these will have to be applied by the Member States, as soon as a common definition of severe and minor injuries is agreed upon.

3.4 With respect to the question of how effective policies at EU level have been in changing the behaviour of road users over the past decade, one has to bear in mind that only the action plan and guidelines for implementation are decided upon at Community level, while the implementation of all measures under the action plan are left to the different levels in the Member States, in accordance with the subsidiarity principle.

3.5 If all Member States applied the measures summed up in the action plan along the same lines, they would encounter fewer problems; however, unfortunately experience has shown that this is not the case, because large disparities in road safety levels persist among EU Member States. Implementing and enforcing measures in the field of road safety differ from country to country and there is, in the view of the EESC, no doubt that a more stringent Community policy would have more effective results.

3.6 That is why the EESC stresses the importance of developing and implementing a more ambitious programme of harmonisation and regulation combined with assistance to Member States to ensure that they implement road safety measures both better and faster. To this end, setting up a European road safety agency could be the answer.

3.6.1 In fact, a safety agency exists for every other mode of transport except roads. The road agency should be a light executive body permanently assisted by road safety representatives appointed by the Member States.

3.6.2 In the EESC's view the agency, taking advantage of existing bodies such as the ERSO (European Road Safety Observatory), should conduct the executive work in the field of road safety in a more efficient way. For example, it could check the 'black spot' map from year to year, labelling unsafe roads and communicating the results to EU road users as already requested in a previous EESC opinion<sup>(1)</sup>. The agency could also serve as a support for national and local road safety groups, by encouraging and disseminating best practices across the EU.

3.6.3 In addition, the agency could ensure that road safety is integrated into other relevant EU policies, such as education, health and the environment and prepare a road map setting out priorities in the short and medium term, thereby remedying one of the principal weaknesses of the previous plan.

3.7 Considering changes in road user behaviour over the past decade, one has to conclude that more than half of the fatalities are directly imputable to behavioural factors such as

not adhering to speed limits, young and novice drivers and drink driving. In the EESC's view, education, enforcement and training are all equally important and influence each other, but ultimately, education is the 'win-win' solution.

3.8 The EESC points out that one of the three key dimensions of the Commission's action plan for the last decade was 'changes to individual behaviour'. Given the increase in the number of vehicles on the road during the last decade, policy in this area should be intensified.

3.9 One must also bear in mind that some vulnerable categories of road users such as motorcyclists, cyclists and pedestrians are still disproportionately at risk. Increased traffic education, if combined with a comprehensive framework regulation on type approval for PTW and second stage training for PTW riders, is advised by the EESC as a measure to influence the behaviour of these categories of road users.

3.10 Furthermore, it is important to realise that the population of the EU is ageing and that road safety policy should focus on specific measures, such as Intelligent Transport Systems, adapted vehicles and infrastructure, awareness raising and education.

3.11 For the next decade the EESC advises that policy be focused on differentiated education, training and testing of all road users, especially the 'at-risk' groups - younger and elderly people - and vulnerable categories of road users, like motorcyclists, pedestrians and cyclists.

3.12 Policy at EU level should be set out in a road safety action plan containing clear and strict recommendations and guidelines for implementation by the Member States. There should also be feedback of well defined statistical information to the Commission on a yearly basis, so that it is possible to react quickly. At the same time the Commission should urge the Member States to implement existing and future legislation in the field of road safety as quickly as possible.

#### 4. Specific remarks

4.1 The big challenge for a successful road safety policy is cooperation between authorities at EU and national and local levels. While progress on technical issues can be achieved by the adoption and implementation of EU legislation, progress in changing road user behaviour can only be achieved at national level. Because of this, strict EU guidelines and yearly feedback from the Member States to the Commission seems crucial.

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 80, 30.3.2004, p. 77-80.

4.2 Looking at the efficacy of EU-level policy on changing the behaviour of road users over the last decade, the EESC would have to conclude that, for subsidiarity reasons combined with the lack of monitoring possibilities, EU policy was not fully successful. Training and continuous education are the main means of influencing behaviour in a positive way, especially the behaviour of younger drivers and elderly road users. Member States have introduced these means in different and sometimes inadequate ways.

4.3 The EESC is convinced that, with respect to these types of behaviour, the focus of policy over the next decade should be on the field of training and education for all categories of road users in all Member States. For example, the introduction of a minimum amount of mandatory traffic education in schools and – on a voluntary basis – encouraging people to deepen this knowledge steadily.

4.4 Member States should develop regular, targeted campaigns to raise awareness and influence road users' behaviour, addressing road users on safety-related subjects, including mutual respect, protective equipment, speed and issues related to alcohol and drugs, together with a parallel focus on enforcement.

4.5 Special attention should be paid in the new action plan to the varying road safety risk rates across the European countries. In 2008, the risk rate of high-risk countries was up to four times that of low-risk countries. For countries whose risk rate is clearly above the EU average a higher reduction target for fatalities and severely injured road users should be the goal, setting differentiated fatality reduction targets for 2020, based on 2010 figures.

4.6 There has been a substantial improvement in 'passive and active safety' over the last decade, especially with the introduction by the industry of a wide range of technical safety measures in passenger cars and heavy duty vehicles. R&D projects financed within the EU framework programmes could drive further improvements in ITS technologies.

4.7 Because of the economic crisis, a new and increasingly dangerous phenomenon has emerged: the introduction on the market of very cheap passenger cars that only just meet the minimum safety standards. To guarantee and improve safety, the safety level of the existing fleet could be raised, by retrofitting cars with the new safety devices, wherever possible. Periodic checks and yearly inspections are necessary. Worse still is the situation of the PTW sector, where market surveillance and periodic inspections are essential<sup>(2)</sup>. The EESC believes that the EU must react by setting the safety standards at a higher level.

4.8 In connection with the above, new EU type-approval legislation is necessary for PTWs, including mandatory ABS or BCS over 150 cc, and the introduction of roadworthiness tests and second-stage training for powered two-wheelers into the revision of the driving licence directive. Moreover, the EU should support awareness campaigns in order to secure compliance with key safety rules.

4.9 The design of roads and roadsides plays an important role in accidents. Surveys in this area show that road infrastructure plays a role in about 30 % of accidents. So there is a lot to gain here. It has emerged that the main obstacles to increased safety are not only linked to financial constraints, but also to a general lack of awareness. Statistics show that rural roads are often the most dangerous. EU funding (TERN, structural funds) should be conditional on the delivery of safe roads. In any case it is essential that design, construction and maintenance of road infrastructure should also take account of PTW safety.

4.10 The EESC concludes that the most effective effort to make infrastructure safer over the past decade was one of the proposals of the 3rd Road Safety Action Programme: the Directive on safety in tunnels (2004/54/EC). The introduction of this Directive had a strong impact Europe-wide.

4.11 For the next decade the EESC recommends that, with respect to infrastructure development, the action plan should include the target of raising the safety level of the trans-European road network and at least 25 % of the non-Trans-European Road Network to the state of the TREN. A decision of the Council on an amended Directive on infrastructure safety management, containing binding technical annexes and a wider scope (also for non-TREN roads) and the acceptance of European guidelines for safe urban road infrastructure would also contribute considerably to road safety. In the short term the EU must promote the early adoption by all the Member States of the four measures of its infrastructure directive: road safety impact assessment, road safety audit, network safety management and safety inspection.

4.12 In view of the shared responsibility, the EESC is convinced that strong political leadership is a pre-requisite for creating a genuine 'road safety area' across the 27 Member States. Decision-makers at EU level, but also at national and regional level in the Member States, need to be convinced of the importance of working together to implement short and long-term legislative changes, accompanied by massive information campaigns. Making use of the expertise of key private players on road safety in Europe will create support and be cost effective.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ C 354, 28.12.2010, p. 30.

4.13 Regarding the private sector, considering that work-related trips and commuting represent a major source of risks, one important step in the right direction can be taken by the employers managing company fleets. In fact, measures to reduce road fatalities should cover all kinds of driving for work, beyond the road freight transport sector.

4.13.1 Employers in the private and public sector should promote good practices to reduce commuting collisions by encouraging their staff to switch to public transport, when possible, developing fleet safety guidelines and monitoring fleet safety performance. A good example in this field is the PRAISE<sup>(3)</sup> project co-funded by the European Commission, with the aim of advancing work related road safety management and providing the relevant know-how to employers. This matter could also be of interest to the European Agency for Safety and Health at work (EU-OSHA).

4.13.2 In the same perspective, a new ISO International standard 39001 for road safety at work is now under development and can be expected at the end of 2011. The European Commission should invite all the signatories of the Road safety charter to be certified ISO 39001 as soon as possible.

4.14 Other conditions for a 'road safety area' are: more and comparable statistical information on the Member States, feedback of information from the Member States to the Commission on a yearly basis, the setting up of a monitoring and follow up system at EU-level through a European road safety agency, proper and fast implementation of EU legislation by all Member States, more focus on training and ongoing education and special attention on younger and elderly road users.

4.15 The EESC suggests an action plan containing ambitious but realistic aims. For political reasons, as in the past, the target for the next decade should be a global one. In terms of the reduction in the number of fatalities, the EESC will not interfere in the discussion by suggesting an actual percentage, but strongly recommends that specific targets also be set for reductions in severe injuries and in the number of more vulnerable road users, such as pedestrians, cyclists and PTW riders involved in road accidents and injuries.

4.16 In addition, possibly through the Road Safety Agency, the EU should set not only the long term goal but also interim targets, initiating a technical assistance programme to support the Member States that are performing less well in developing a national strategy to reduce casualties.

Brussels, 15 September 2010.

*The President*  
*of the European Economic and Social Committee*  
Mario SEPI

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<sup>(3)</sup> PRAISE: preventing road accidents and injuries for the safety of employees. ([www.etsc.eu/PRAISE.php](http://www.etsc.eu/PRAISE.php)).