

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the ‘Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Towards a European road safety area - policy orientations on road safety 2011-20’

COM(2010) 389 final

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Rapporteur: **Mr SIMONS**

On 20 July 2010, the Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, on the

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Towards a European road safety area: policy orientations on road safety 2011-2020

COM(2010) 389 final.

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 1 March 2011.

At its 470th plenary session, held on 15 and 16 March 2011 (meeting of 16 March), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 158 votes to two with four abstentions.

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 The Committee considers reducing the number of road fatalities to be very important for society and endorses the Commission’s ambitious goal of reducing the figure to half of 2010 levels during the period 2011 to 2020.

— availability of standardised and detailed statistical data;

1.2 The Committee points to the desirability of introducing differentiated reduction targets for the Member States, since risks vary between countries.

— formulation of targets for seriously injured road users and a definition of ‘serious injury’;

— more rigorous Community policy as regards harmonising and adopting road safety measures;

1.3 In the Committee’s view, a special European road safety agency, or umbrella monitoring and oversight centre, should be set up to oversee the programme. This body would include road safety experts appointed by the Member States.

— more focus on targeted education, e.g. of vulnerable road users such as young people, the elderly and people with disabilities, and drivers of powered two-wheelers, cyclists and pedestrians;

1.4 This agency or umbrella monitoring and oversight centre would be responsible for ensuring annual monitoring to guarantee that the targets fixed in the programme are reached.

— involving all employers with their own car fleet in implementing best practice;

1.5 The Committee highlights the following conditions that must be met if the Commission’s objective of cutting the number of road fatalities by half is to be met:

— introducing new Community legislation for vulnerable road-user groups;

— strong political leadership;

— improving levels of safety in the trans-European road network and bringing at least 25 % of the rest of the road network to TEN-T levels;

- providing special training for police, ambulance, fire-fighting, civil protection and towing services staff - i.e. anyone who provides accident and breakdown assistance - to ensure that these people's skills are maintained at a high level and that vehicles are used professionally and to improve administrative procedures;
- ensuring the rapid expansion of safe and secured parking places for professional drivers;
- relating contracts to the professional skills of the driver rather than to performance (EESC recommendation).

1.6 With respect to the human factor in road traffic, the Committee agrees with the Commission that continuous education, training and enforcement are essential to achieving the objectives, but the Committee is particularly concerned about vulnerable groups in this context.

1.7 As far as enforcement is concerned, the Committee notes again that this must be understood to include cross-border enforcement.

1.8 The Committee advocates introduction of the following measures:

- extending the legislation on drivers' journey times and working hours to include commercial vehicles under 3.5 tonnes;
- fitting of speed limiters in light commercial vehicles;
- installing alcohol interlock devices in HGVs, light commercial vehicles and private cars in the case of convictions for drink-driving and tools for detecting drug use;
- introducing active and passive safety measures for powered two-wheelers;
- drawing up by each Member State of 'black spot' maps and yearly updating of these maps;
- extending the eCall system to other vehicles, e.g. motorised two-wheelers;
- translating the strategic policy guidelines into a detailed action programme.

2. Introduction

2.1 With the publication of this communication, the Commission is fleshing out its vision of how road safety should develop during the period 2011-2020.

2.2 Through the policy orientations contained in the communication, the Commission intends to develop a general governance framework and challenging objectives to guide national and local strategies, so that the actions described can be implemented at the most appropriate level and by the most appropriate means as efficiently as possible.

2.3 The Commission considers that the following actions should be undertaken as a priority:

- establishment of a structured and coherent cooperation framework which draws on best practices across the Member States, as a necessary condition to implement effectively the road safety policy orientations 2011-2020;
- developing and providing for a strategy for injuries and first aid to address the urgent and growing need to reduce the number of road injuries;
- addressing the issue of improving the safety of vulnerable road users, in particular motorcyclists, whose accident statistics are particularly worrying.

2.4 The Commission states that the proposed policy orientations take into account the results of the third road safety action programme (2001-2010), which showed that, regrettably, the ambitious objective of halving the number of fatalities will not be achieved. Nevertheless, steady progress has been made, in particular over the last couple of years.

2.5 To achieve the objective of creating a common road safety area, the Commission proposes to maintain the target of halving the overall number of road deaths in the European Union during the period 2011-2020, based on the number of fatalities in 2010.

2.6 In relation to progress made during the third action programme (a 35-40 % reduction in the number of fatalities), the Commission sees halving the number of fatalities over the next ten years as substantially more ambitious, given that the objectives of the third action programme were not met.

2.7 The Commission is seeking to reach the objective for 2020 by continuing to focus intensively on the following seven targets:

- improving education and training of road users;
- strengthening the enforcement of road rules;

- making road infrastructure safer;
- ensuring that vehicles on the road are safer;
- promoting the use of modern technology to increase road safety;
- improving emergency and post-injuries services;
- protecting vulnerable road-users.

2.8 The Commission has linked specific actions to each of the above targets, with the aim of achieving the desired reduction in the number of road deaths. These actions will be discussed in the general and specific comments sections of this opinion.

2.9 As regards how the objectives are to be achieved, the Commission is thinking less in terms of introducing new legislation than of stepping up monitoring of the EU road safety *acquis*, creating a framework for cooperation between the Member States and the Commission, and providing for Community instruments for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of road safety policy.

3. General comments

3.1 The Committee considers reducing the number of road fatalities to be a matter of substantial importance for society. This is made clear from the opinions it has adopted over the years on the subject ⁽¹⁾. Moreover, during the previous action period there was actually a significant fall in the number of road fatalities. So it may be appropriate that the Commission has again set an ambitious objective, namely to reduce the number of road deaths during the period 2011-2020 by half compared with 2010 levels.

3.2 By replacing 'policy guidelines' with 'policy orientations', the Commission wishes to mark a shift in philosophy, indicating that the emphasis for the next ten years will be not so much on producing proposals for new legislation as on developing and applying the following three principles: shared responsibility, integration of road safety into other policy areas and achieving the same level of road safety in all EU countries.

⁽¹⁾ EESC opinions on *Road Safety 2003-2010*, OJ C 80, 30.3.2004, p. 77; *Road infrastructure safety management*, OJ C 168, 20.7.2007, p. 71; *Facilitating cross-border enforcement in the field of road safety*, OJ C 77, 31.3.2009, p. 70; and *Strategic guidelines for road safety up to 2020*, OJ C 48, 15.2.2011, p. 27.

3.3 The EESC recognises that this signals a shift in philosophy in the Commission, as the legislative framework is largely complete, but the Commission's plan alone, namely the development of a general governance framework and setting of ambitious goals to guide national and local strategies, is not sufficient. In the Committee's view, as well as completing the legislation that is still lacking ⁽²⁾, progress should be monitored regularly (annually) and effectively.

3.3.1 The EESC also thinks that it would be a good idea to translate the policy guidelines into a detailed action programme providing for timetables, monitoring instruments and an interim review.

3.4 The EESC believes that the best way of doing this is by gathering data in consultation with the representatives appointed by the Member States for road safety and by monitoring implementation of the Fourth Road Safety Action Programme ⁽³⁾, bearing in mind the points raised by the Committee in its opinion addressed to the European Parliament that was actually drawn up before publication of the Commission communication under discussion. The EESC does not mind whether this happens through a European road safety agency or a European monitoring and oversight centre, which already exists in embryonic form in the Commission. The EESC makes the following recommendations for ensuring that the 2011-2020 programme is effective.

3.4.1 Strong political leadership should be ensured given that responsibility will be shared between the EU and Member States.

3.4.2 There should be an even greater level of harmonisation and detail in road safety statistics across all EU Member States.

3.4.3 Targets must be set for the number of severely injured road users, with a common definition of serious injury.

3.4.4 A more stringent Community policy is recommended with regard to harmonisation and regulation of road safety measures, so that the Member States can implement those measures better and faster.

3.4.5 There should be more focus on differentiated education and training for all road users, especially younger and elderly road users, as well as drivers of powered two-wheelers, cyclists and pedestrians.

⁽²⁾ For a list of measures needed, see point 4.8 of the EESC opinion on *Strategic guidelines for road safety up to 2020*, OJ C 48, 15.2.2011, p. 27.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 48, 15.2.2011, p. 27, point 1.5 ff.

3.4.6 Involvement of all employers with their own car fleet in projects relating to reducing commuting collisions by developing fleet safety policies and encouraging staff to make greater use of public transport.

3.4.7 Developing EU legislation for vulnerable categories of road user, e.g. new type approval for powered two-wheelers, ABS for powered two-wheelers of over 150 cc, mandatory automatic headlights on, and introducing roadworthiness tests and second-stage training as part of the revision of the driving licence directive.

3.4.8 Raising safety levels on the trans-European road network and bringing at least 25 % of the non-TEN-T network to TEN-T levels should, in the Committee's view, be included as a target in the new programme.

3.4.9 As far as the programme's general objective of halving the number of road fatalities is concerned, the Committee notes that risks vary widely between Member States and therefore believes that it would be preferable to introduced differentiated reduction targets.

3.5 The Committee understands that, in view of the differences in road casualty risks between the Member States, measures may vary between Member States. Member States in which there has been a substantial reduction in road traffic victims should focus mainly on the 'human factor': training, including continuing training, and enforcement should be the top priorities. On the other hand, Member States where there has not been a substantial reduction in road traffic victims should also focus on the 'hard' elements of road safety policy, such as improving infrastructure and vehicle safety requirements in addition to education, training and enforcement.

3.6 The Committee agrees with the Commission's view that it is ultimately the behaviour of road users that determines the effectiveness of road safety policy and that for this reason continuing education, training and enforcement are of critical importance.

3.7 Particular attention must be paid to vulnerable road users: young novice drivers and older people who are unaware of changes in road traffic rules because they have not received continuing training.

3.8 The Committee also thinks that each Member State should organise regular information campaigns in order to

combat drink-driving. The enforcement campaign, including cross-border enforcement, must also be stepped up.

4. Specific comments

4.1 The EESC recommends that a common definition of serious and minor injuries be established as soon as possible, to be used as the basis for a common target for reducing the number of road injuries, so that these data can be included in the 2011-2020 programme.

4.2 The EESC supports the Commission's proposal to improve education and training of road users by framing a common educational and training road safety strategy.

4.3 Driving instruction should also cover assistance and response in road accident situations.

4.4 The EESC points in particular to the importance of 'continuing education', bearing in mind that traffic rules can change over time.

4.5 This applies to ordinary road users, but especially to police, ambulance, fire-fighting, civil protection and towing services staff - i.e. anyone who provides accident and breakdown assistance, when their special skills are called upon. The Committee attaches great importance to special training and continuing education for these people, in both vocational and administrative areas, so that the quality of the services they provide is even further enhanced.

4.6 The EESC approves of stepping up efforts to enforce road traffic rules, including cross-border enforcement. In its opinion on *Facilitating cross-border enforcement in the field of road safety* ⁽⁴⁾ the EESC explicitly stated that without cross-border enforcement of road traffic rules it would be impossible to achieve the target set in the Commission's third road safety action programme. The EESC stands unreservedly by the conclusions it drew in the above-mentioned opinion.

4.7 The EESC endorses the Commission's proposal to complement the mandatory fitting of speed limiters in HGVs with speed limiters for light commercial vehicles, given that the number of light commercial vehicles on the roads is steadily increasing, especially in the courier sector, where prompt delivery is important and where vehicles often therefore drive very fast. Journey times and working hours must also be adapted to meet the rules for transport of goods by HGVs that exceed the maximum total weight of 3.5 tonnes.

⁽⁴⁾ EESC opinion on *Facilitating cross-border enforcement in the field of road safety*, OJ C 77, 31.3.2009, p. 70.

4.8 Since drink-driving is still a major factor in road accidents, the Committee recommends that alcohol interlock devices be fitted in HGVs, light commercial vehicles and private cars where the driver has been convicted of drinking and driving.

4.9 Powered two-wheelers are a particular concern. Drivers of these vehicles are 18 to 20 times more at risk of suffering a serious injury on the road than car drivers. The Committee urges the Commission to submit proposals as soon as possible on improving the active and passive safety of powered two-wheelers.

4.10 Since most fatal accidents occur in urban areas and on minor and country roads, the Commission proposes that EU funding should be allocated for infrastructure projects that are compliant with the road safety and tunnel safety Directives. The EESC agrees with this and believes that a European road safety agency could play a key role in assessing which minor or rural roads are eligible for co-financing.

4.11 In previous opinions, the Committee has called for:

- inclusion in the programme of a requirement that each Member State should submit a map of accident 'black spots', updated annually, to the competent European body;
- with respect to safety in the context of road transport in 2020, 'harmonised checks and fines, genuine single market integration, enhanced efficiency not least through modular systems where appropriate, [...] and studies on cruising speeds and better tyres'.

The EESC reiterates the importance of these points.

4.12 The EESC advocates more rapid introduction of advanced technologies in vehicles and urges that all Member States extend the eCall system to other types of vehicle, such as motorised two-wheelers.

4.13 The EESC endorses the Commission's efforts to draw up a strategy for action on road injuries in conjunction with the Member States and other public and private stakeholders.

4.14 As the EESC has noted in previous opinions on the subject ⁽⁵⁾, the programme must prioritise the protection of vulnerable road users. In the EESC's view, this category should include drivers of powered two-wheelers, pedestrians and cyclists, young people, the elderly population, whose number is increasing, and people with disabilities.

4.14.1 In accordance with a previous opinion ⁽⁶⁾, the EESC calls for rapid expansion of safe and secured parking places for professional drivers for reasons of road safety, road freight crime and health and safety of truck drivers. The EESC also calls for contracts to be related to the professional skills of the driver rather than to performance.

4.15 The Committee highlights the dangers faced by HGV drivers at a number of border crossings. In some cases, especially at the external borders of the EU, it is common for drivers to have to remain inside or right next to the vehicle during an x-ray inspection. It goes without saying that this obligation poses a significant risk to the drivers concerned. The answer would be to allow drivers to leave their vehicles and remain at a safe distance during the inspection. The EESC calls on the Member States specifically to address this issue and find a solution to the problem at the upcoming meeting in Geneva of the UN's Working Party I on Road Traffic Safety.

Brussels, 16 March 2011.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Staffan NILSSON

⁽⁵⁾ EESC opinions on *Strategic guidelines for road safety up to 2020*, OJ C 48, 15.2.2011, p. 27 and *Facilitating cross-border enforcement in the field of road safety*, OJ C 77, 31.3.2009, p. 70.

⁽⁶⁾ Point 1.1 in the EESC opinion on *Road safety- professional drivers*, OJ C 175, 27.7.2007, p. 88.