Transport policy: proposals and action programme for 2010. White Paper

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PURPOSE : To present a European road safety action programme CONTENT : The Commission report points out that there are 375 million road users in the European Union, of which 200 million are driving licence holders. The grim reality is that, per annum, there are on average 1 300 000 accidents, causing 40 000 deaths and 1 700 0000 injuries on the roads. The direct and indirect cost of these tragedies has been estimated at EUR 160 billion or 2% of GNP. Although there has been an improvement in overall road safety (for example the number of road deaths has halved in the past thirty years) the situation still suggests far too many accidents are happening unnecessarily - moreover they could be prevented. The Commission Communication proposes that if the EU acts decisively and tackles this problem in a more uniform manner then many, many accidents could be prevented resulting in lower accident statistics. The objective of this Communication therefore is to suggest ways in which to halve the number of road deaths in the EU by 2010. The Commission acknowledges that, to date, Member States have been reluctant to take on a more communautaire approach to tackling road safety - as seen by the on-going question of harmonisation of blood alcohol limits. This has been under discussion for twelve years now. One of the major policy initiatives discussed in this Communication includes the standardisation of rules on checks and road traffic offences. These factors alone cause the most road deaths in the EU. Other proposals include closer examination of particularly hazardous places on the roads and a review of the Directive on driving licences. Similarly, under the research Framework Programmes the Commission proposes developing new safety technologies thereby adding value to the work already being undertaken in the Member States. The proposed action programme aims to: - Encourage road users to improve their behaviour; - Make vehicles safer; - Improve road infrastructure; - Draft technical guidelines to improve best practices; - Collect and analyse data on accidents and physical injuries, and lastly, - Ensure that everyone in authority, with decision-making powers or acting in an economic, social or representative function will give a solemn undertaking that they will subscribe to a "European Road Safety Charter". The commitment will then be publicised and their compliance monitored.