

# **Thematic Conference on Road Safety, Sofia**

**2 October 2018**

## **Speech of Matthew Baldwin, European Road Safety Coordinator**

Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends and colleagues from the road safety community from across Europe,

Thank you for inviting me, on behalf of the European Commission, to be with you today for this very important conference. I fully endorse the title of this conference because we do indeed need to work together, every day, to make our roads safer.

I could stop there! But there are more things I want to say.

It is a particularly important day for me as I am honoured to announce that today; European Commissioner for Transport Violeta Bulc has appointed me to serve as her European Coordinator for Road Safety and related aspects of sustainable mobility.

This in turn reflects the major priority which the Commissioner Bulc has placed on road safety since day one of her mandate. For Commissioner Bulc, road safety is a moral challenge. Even though she is immensely proud of what Europe has achieved on her watch, each and every death is one too many. And although she is driving us to better policy solutions, she never lets us forget that the problem is a human one. Each road death leaves a family and friends bereaved. Each road death contains its own particular story of pain and misery.

For me, I am proud as my connections with road safety go back a long way. Deep in the mists of time, indeed when most people in this room were not yet born, my first ever job on leaving university was with the UK's Parliamentary

Advisory Council for Transport Safety, led by Jeanne Breen. PACTS was - and is - a very effective legislative pressure group on key safety measures. Indeed, while I was there, the UK Parliament passed the first compulsory front seat belt law. Now, 33 years on, it is an honour to be entrusted with this important task of road safety coordinator and to have the chance to contribute to this extraordinary challenge.

I want to talk about both the European dimension and indeed the Bulgarian dimension in a moment, but let me begin with some cold, hard global numbers.

The first terrible thing about these global numbers is just how big they are. The estimated annual global death figure from road crashes is 1.3 million. Around 200,000 in India. Quarter of a million in China. Another quarter of a million in Africa. 35,000 in the US. 27,000 in Russia. 25,000 here in the EU. The figures pile up like deaths in an epidemic. And of course, road deaths ARE an epidemic, one now recognised as such by the WHO and since 2015 a key target in the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We have indeed agreed to try to eliminate road deaths by 2050 under Vision Zero. I'll say more about targets in a moment.

But in the meantime, the slaughter goes on. By 2030, on current trends, another 1.3 million global road deaths, this gives us another 14 million by 2030. By 2030, it will be the 5<sup>th</sup> largest cause of death, up there with cancer, heart disease. And that it is on current trends... but we can also expect car numbers to grow by more than 1 billion by 2050. I don't think I need to spell out for this audience what that could mean.

The second terrible thing is that these are estimates. The total reported deaths come in at only around half that figure. In Africa, it is estimated that around  $\frac{3}{4}$  of road deaths are not reported. Less than half in India. When the most basic profound piece of data is not collected, it is equally clear vital information about the causes of deaths is also going to be missing, making it much harder for

public authorities to start to tackle those causes. Getting the data from fatal crashes is vital so that we can begin, together, to learn, and begin, together, to act.

Road crashes cause 99% of all transport deaths. We have a long way to go to catch up with the extraordinary safety levels now reached in the aviation industry. Sometimes, I wonder if it is worse to die in a plane than under a truck. Would it be acceptable for 5000 planes, each carrying more than 200 passengers, to crash, each and every year, onto the surface of this planet?

Of course not.

So the question becomes: why is it politically acceptable for the same number – 1.3 million – to die on the roads? I don't have an answer to that.

What do we know about the deaths in Europe?

46% of them in cars. 17% on powered two wheelers, 21% pedestrians, 8% cyclists – deaths for these vulnerable road users are not coming down as much as they should, and deserve a special focus. Fatalities are decreasing a lot among children, but actually increasing for the elderly.

They cost somewhere between 1% and 3% of EU GDP, based on the latest research.

76% male (disproportionately young men for whom road crashes are the largest source of mortality – like Spanish flu in 1918). Roughly 8% occur on our motorways, 55% on rural roads, and 37% in urban areas. 20% of deaths occur at junctions. 40% of deaths occur when people are commuting to and from work: they don't show up at work, and don't return home in the evening.

In total, once again, around 25,000.

Perhaps the most extraordinary statistic so far is that this is the best in the world! 98% of road deaths occur outside the EU, 90% in low and middle income countries. We are a success – but only in the strange world of road safety is 25,000 deaths a year a success.

What is the trend?

Europe has indeed done *relatively* well in recent decades – we have reduced deaths by more than half since 2000. But since 2010, despite our target to reduce deaths in this decade by half again by 2020, we have only come down by around 20%. This stagnation in the rate of decline means that we have a frankly insurmountable challenge ahead of us to get there by 2020. We will keep pushing right to the end as every death avoided is worth having, and I am delighted to say that EU Ministers have unanimously agreed to go for a new 50% reduction target for the next decade, i.e., from 2020.

Moreover, we are for the first time setting a target to reduce by half the number of seriously injured, currently at 135,000 a year.

The other key point in the data, of course, is the wide divergence just within the European Union. The average annual number of deaths per million in the EU is around 50. Some Member States – Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, the UK are doing much better than that – around 25-30 per million. Others are improving rapidly such as Greece, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, and Belgium.

Here in Bulgaria, as you know, and I was honoured to have the chance to discuss this with the Minister yesterday, things have been very difficult, and you are now only the 27<sup>th</sup> best performer in the EU, at around annual 96 deaths per million.

Not least for this reason alone, I am pleased to be launching my new role as European Road Safety Coordinator, here in Bulgaria, where we know there are

serious road safety problems, but where it is very clear to me – from this conference, from my discussions with Ministers over the last day or so, how aware you are of the problems, how determined you are to tackle them, and to work with us to find solutions.

So how do we make progress? A lot of work, of course, has gone into assessing HOW to bring down fatalities, in a systematic way. I think there is broad consensus that a number of factors are essential.

Road safety is an emotional and emotive subject, and the terrible statistics and the human stories that lie behind them affect us all. But our approach to road safety needs to be scientific, i.e., evidence based, and founded on internationally recognised good practice safety management principles, collectively known as the Safe System.

This rather bland sounding concept is crucial, has been widely implemented internationally and last May, the Commission committed itself to implementing it in the EU. Bland it may be – who could possibly be against a thing called the Safe System? – But it is in fact a revolutionary approach of profound importance.

The Safe System says: people make mistakes, on the roads as anywhere else, and will continue to do so because that is human nature. On the roads, this leads to crashes. We also know that the human body has only a limited tolerance to crash impact forces, after which death and serious injury occur. So the goal is to ensure that accidents don't kill us. We need an inclusive systemic approach to accommodate human error.

We know that deaths and serious injuries are not the inevitable price we need to pay for our mobility. But we need safer roads, safer vehicles (and not just for the occupants but for other vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists),

we need safe travel speeds, better use of protective equipment and improved post-crash care.

We must focus relentlessly on results, particularly in terms of final outcomes (i.e., deaths and serious injuries). This is what we will be judged on, indeed what I expect to be judged on in taking on this coordinator role. Even if it is quite possible that we may see deaths increase, for example, if more people acquire cars including here in Bulgaria, or drive them longer distances. And we may see negative trends in secondary targets, such as seat belt use, once we start to do a better job of systematically monitoring across the EU.

If we are truly focused on results, we must have targets. Some believe that targets are dangerous – if we fail, do we reduce the credibility of the goal? Do we punish our politicians for their bravery in committing to them? And is it realistic really to talk about eliminating road deaths, as set out in Vision Zero by 2050?

Yes, there are risks. Going hard after even credible targets does not guarantee good results. There will be setbacks along the way. But targets are essential if we are keep minds focused on the problem, draw in investment and other public resources, and provide a yardstick to measure our progress, which is why data collection is so important. The new EU targets for 2030, agreed just last year under the Maltese Presidency, will be crucial if we are to succeed.

And yes, we can and must shoot for VisionZero by 2050. Remember that road safety is an epidemic. Other sources of epidemic levels of death such as cholera and smallpox have been progressively eliminated from the EU, and there is no reason why, if we choose to commit to this as a society, we cannot also eliminate road deaths.

But we will only do so if we tackle this as a collectively shared endeavour. From all levels of government to industry, from NGOs to individual citizens, we

all share responsibility to make roads safer. And indeed, my approach as coordinator will be to work with all parts of the road safety community. With Member States. With the European Parliament. With cities and regions. With NGOs, such as the great European Transport Safety Council. With industry of all shapes and sizes, for example, in pushing for voluntary commitments to vehicle safety features that go beyond just the minimum requirements.

This is really what I mean by political will and cooperation.

And that is where education, awareness raising, and of course enforcement also come in, and here let me pay tribute to the work of the European Road Safety Charter, noting with pleasure that it has also been taken up in Bulgaria, and we will in a minute hear from Vassiliki herself on this.

The Declaration of Valletta from last March, confirms our intention to implement the Safe System approach, to Vision Zero, to our interim targets for 2030.

Let me say a brief word about funding, because that is an important lever at the EU's disposal to support road safety initiatives, and this is also something I have been discussing with the Bulgarian government. We will encourage the use of EU financial support from European structural and investment funds for road safety upgrades of infrastructure. And here I urge Member States to make full use of the Connecting Europe Facility or CEF, and in particular the current open call. Slovakia has made huge strides towards safer infrastructure by upgrading just 300km of motorway with safety barriers and so on. But I remind Bulgaria and other countries that the deadline for applications is 24 October!

Safety performance indicators sounds technical and are technical, but they will be very important in the years to come. Taking the different elements of the Safe System, such as use of seat belts, that we know will reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries, we are working very closely with the Member States to

measure progress in a range of different areas, such as vehicles, emergency care, speed, and quality of the road infrastructure. This is important but detailed work as we will need to establish a common measurement methodology, an agreed baseline, and – as far as possible – quantify how we link the indicators to outcome targets. Sweden has had great success with this approach at the national level and we are determined to apply it at the European level.

In pursuing the new road safety strategy, we do want to work differently with Member States - stepping up our cooperation to establish best practices, and partnerships including financial support, to help meet the targets.

But we are not afraid to legislate further when that is justified. Let me quickly give a couple of examples of that.

One area where the EU has led very effectively has been through vehicle safety standards: to ensure we have the latest safety features on board. Again, this is a joint effort - our industry has been at the forefront of developing technologies enabling the introduction of increasingly affordable vehicle safety systems. We've studied the latest ideas, impact assessed them carefully, and we've now put forward a package of 16 new features - for all vehicle categories and models. But this is not tinkering - applied across the whole EU fleet, we calculate that these measures will save more than 7000 lives, and reduce serious injuries by nearly 40,000, over the 2020-30 period.

We can also do this by revising our EU legislation on infrastructure safety management. First, by extending the scope beyond our safest roads, Europe's TEN-T network, to the other primary roads, where a much higher percentage of severe accidents are taking place. Second, by introducing new common procedures for mapping the risks of accidents across the whole network, enabling a comparison of safety levels across Europe, and improving the

targeting of our limited funds. And last but not least, requiring that vulnerable road users – pedestrians and cyclists – are taken more systematically into account in road planning.

Once again – look at the lives that can be saved – more than 3000 over the decade, and more than 20 000 serious injuries.

I am running out of time, but I want to say a word about the future. It is well established that humans will continue to make mistakes that cause accidents and the Safe System will play an important role therefore in reducing mortality.

But without full automation in the coming decades, it is true that getting to VisionZero will be very difficult. So we need to bring those connected and automated systems on stream, probably initially on motorways and also in urban contexts. It's an exciting prospect, and does indeed promise a brave new world, a new form of mobility.

But let's not forget the challenge this also represents, just in terms of road safety. Infrastructure performance requirements will change, i.e for road signs. We will have a long period in which different levels of automated cars will have to coexist with cars fully under human control. And once again, the evidence is that cyclists and pedestrians may be particularly vulnerable in our towns and cities. So I want to use my new role also to work on some of these new and important challenges coming up in the field of sustainable mobility, and to work with urban authorities on the next generation of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans. The scope for working through CIVITAS, with whom I spent time in Umea last week, and the Intelligent Transport Systems community, whom I saw in Copenhagen, is very exciting indeed.

In closing, I should stress that I will be the European coordinator for road safety. I want to be a useful resource for all Member States, to work in partnership with very effective road safety advocates such as the European Transport Safety

Council, and I will do everything in my power to help bring down that 25,000 figure: initially, focusing on reducing it by half by 2030.

But we will equally not forget the global context, and the global epidemic that road safety represents. We need to take our responsibilities to help try to deliver road safety across the globe, insofar as we can – by working in UNECE to deliver better vehicle safety standards worldwide, but of course more broadly, with the ITF, with the World Bank, with global pressure groups such as Global NCAP and the FIA, under the tireless Jean Todt. By sharing what has worked for us, in terms of best practices, both in the neighbourhood, where many good things are already happening, and further afield, such as in Africa, where President Juncker last month made the point that we have to move from being a global payer to becoming a global player.

In short, there is a lot of work to be done, and I look forward to working with you!

Many thanks for your attention.