

**SPEECH BY THE MEMBER OF  
PARLIAMENT NELSON BALTAZAR (PS)**

Plenary Session, 1 October 2008 (PAOD)

Mister President,

Members of Parliament,

For three days the Assembly of the Portuguese Republic has been hosting the Lisbon Parliamentary Conference organised by the Committee on Public Works, Transport and Communications' Sub-Committee on Road Safety. This has, since the first day, been underwritten and unreservedly supported by our President, Jaime Gama. On his behalf, allow me to salute the AR staff, who have professionally supported us during this conference.

The conference was structured around one of Europe's most difficult challenges – the harmonisation of principles and concepts – in this case a European road safety policy.

Fifty members from the parliaments of 19 European countries joined the debate, and we can include two more countries that sent observers.

Sixteen Portuguese agencies, whose actions in the area we considered important at the national level,

and which are essentially focused on protecting people, accepted the offer to watch the debate.

The Portuguese Ministers of Public Works and Internal Affairs, the European Commissioner for Transport and the Vice-President of the European Parliamentary Committee on Transport also accepted the invitation to set us new challenges.

The conference has been assessed by many journalists and some specialist publications, which I would like to take this opportunity to salute and especially thank for the way that they have joined in the battle against accidents. The actions they have developed to transfer information, and also their informative and investigative journalism, over the years, demand the general recognition and gratitude of those who, like them, are working to save lives.

Last Monday was the longest day in the debate on road safety in the history of the Assembly of the Portuguese Republic. During the three panels that took part in free or specific debates that went beyond the natural group dialogues that take place during organised events of this type, we could feel a willingness to intervene in favour of our fellow citizens.

A good part of these reflections have been uploaded on to our Parliament's website where they can be accessed. Indeed, the participation of citizens and

agencies that decided to give us their opinions and challenges to be discussed before the debate can also be found there.

One of the approaches used by the speakers in the conference debates was focused on the evaluation that would be made by each country of the challenge thrown down by the European Commission – to reduce the consequences of accidents by 50 % between 2000 and 2010.

Another strand of the debate centred on the issue of the harmonisation of principles and concepts. I believe it is possible to conclude that, at this conference, the communications and the speeches, and the debate and exchange of ideas have contributed to our making progress in this direction.

Road accidents and their consequences confirm the worrying conclusions drawn by the United Nations: road accidents are the main cause of death for people under 25 years old. Around 400 000 young people die in road accidents every year.

Some of the reasons given by Europe as causes for 75 % of these deaths are excess speed, driving under the influence of alcohol, psychoactive drugs or medicines, failure to wear seat belts, and not paying heed to traffic lights.

Having discussed these questions, we can say that we arrived at general opinions, and can already start to move towards harmonisation actions in the concept area, specifically by:

- Promoting a strategy that uses a points system, in a way that punishes drivers that violate the law, but also rewards those that manage to use the road system without committing serious offences;
- Introducing teaching how to drive and the rules of behaviour on the roads into the primary and secondary educational systems;
- Increasing controls, especially where driving under the influence of alcohol or psychoactive drugs are concerned;
- Increasing the use of alternative, less-polluting means of transport;
- Making road audits, to be carried out by outside bodies and specialist technicians, compulsory for the different road environments.

Moreover, as far as some of the principles are concerned, we can conclude that of those that were discussed, there is a trend towards harmonized policy in the following cases:

- Lower tolerance of the consumption of alcohol by professional drivers;
- More effective inspection of cargoes transported, routes and working hours;
- Stricter, more uniform regulations governing the profession of long-distance lorry drivers and the goods carried.

We tried to debate the harmonisation of speed limits and the importance at establishing closer criteria. We realised, however, that there are a number of concepts that prevent the principles from being defined - at least, during this stage of the European cohesion consolidation process.

The economic and financial impacts of road accidents were also discussed. Apart from the real human tragedy that is caused by the thousands of road deaths and injuries, every country is directly and indirectly affected by the consequences of things that happen on the highways. Data from the United Nations and the European Observatory on Road Safety show that accidents cost European countries an average of 2 % of their GDP.

It can soon be seen that in spite of the many studies carried out into these questions, the concepts of

losses and costs are not easy to identify or to put a value on.

Let us quote an example that is worth bearing in mind: every euro spent on a chair to safely carry a baby or a child corresponds to 32 euros that the country does not need to spend on the consequences of an accident.

This Conference left all the participants present with a common feeling: it is urgent to press on with the objective of harmonising concepts, rules and inspection procedures.

We could conclude that the investments made since 2000 by all the political players and by all governments have been worthwhile, especially in Portugal, which has already reaped the benefits of the road policies introduced between 2000 and 2007.

Portugal was the second-best country in Europe in terms of reducing the number of deaths on the highways, by around 42 %. In other words: around 400 lives per year, on average, are saved and able to be lived to the full.

It is with the aim of continuing with this work that we felt it necessary to hold this Lisbon Conference on Road Safety,

which has brought many European countries together,

which has shown that countries are willing to come to an understanding about a harmonisation strategy,

which has enabled discussions to be held about some subjects that had previously been considered to be taboo,

but which has, above all,

**Mister President**

**Members of Parliament**

brought honour to the members of the Portuguese Parliament and the Assembly of the Portuguese Republic.