

ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC

COMMISSION OF PUBLIC WORKS, TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Subcommission for Road Safety

II – INTERPARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON ROAD SAFETY

A EUROPEAN POLICY FOR ROAD SAFETY:

Harmonisation of Concepts and Principles

First of all, I would like to hail the illustrious participants in this Forum. I am very honoured with the chance I have had to take part in the II Interparliamentary Conference on Road Safety. One cannot doubt the relevance of the theme, as road safety is one of the main concerns within the scope of national security issues, not only in the Portuguese society but also in the wider context of the European Union.

Concerning the situation in Portugal, some concrete data show the importance of this issue. In 1974, Portugal had only about 80 km of motorways. Nowadays there are more than 3,000 km. In addition, while at the start of the 1970s there were only about 500 thousand

cars in the country, now we have more than 5 million. The road traffic has increased tremendously, thereby increasing people's freedom to get around, and shortening the distance between the countryside and the coast, and also between the smallest of hamlets and the large metropolises, while also acting as a factor for development and for the elimination of social skewness.

However, at the same time, this development has also become a factor of added risk. Indeed, in the middle of the 1980s there were more than 2,600 deaths recorded on the Portuguese road network, a figure which is higher than the number of fatal casualties in any one of the thirteen years of the war which raged in Africa on three separate fronts. This scenario fully justified the reference to a "Civil War" on Portuguese roads.

The discussion of preventive measures and road safety demands, more and more, the participation of a wide universe of international, national, regional and local organisations, both public and private. The States face common problems in relation to road safety, including speeding, dangerous driving, excessive consumption of alcohol, the use of drugs, and the non-use of seat belts and other safety devices. However, first and foremost, there is a need to create a road safety mentality, a culture marked by responsibility and defensive driving habits among drivers, but this depends on awareness building in children within the school, driving tuition, and preventive campaigns on the media.

On a European scale, the development of a common programme for action towards road safety, involving the use of new technologies for safety, improvement in infrastructure, the improvement of the safety mechanisms in the vehicles, and the stepping up of inspections

appear as instruments which are essential so that we can bring down the number of casualties from road accidents in the several Member States. In a Europe that has become a common space for liberty, security and justice, there is a need for standards - legal, institutional and of behaviour - that are common, or at least compatible, in relation to road traffic.

In Portugal, we plan to achieve, in an integrated fashion, a significant increase in the quality of road safety. The Government has set ambitious targets, including that of, by the end of 2009, bringing down the rate of road deaths to a half of that recorded at the start of the decade. This objective is well within our reach, having already been achieved in 2006 (850 deaths). This trend got established in 2007 when once again we succeeded in having less than one thousand deaths on the roads (854), also showing lower numbers of minor and serious injuries than in the previous year. Even though some progress has been made in controlling the casualty rate, we still feel that every fatal victim and every person seriously injured is still a case of enormous suffering, both personal and also of the family unit or group, and we must not be oblivious of this fact.

To further improve road safety, we have recently implemented a change in the structure of Public Administration, seeking to add greater value to institutions dealing with traffic, accident prevention and road safety. Thus, there has been the setting up of the *Instituto da Mobilidade e dos Transportes Terrestres* (Mobility and Land Transport Institute) and the *Instituto das Infra-estruturas Rodoviárias* (Road Infrastructure Institute). The *Autoridade Nacional de Protecção Civil* (National Authority for Civil Protection) and the

Instituto Nacional de Emergência Médica (National Medical Emergency Institute) were given new important responsibilities. The institution *Estradas de Portugal* (Roads of Portugal) had its Statutes revamped. So that all these institutions can muster a joint action plan and join forces around a common programme, so that value may be given to the inspection strategies and the means associated to them, and so that the programmatic and legislative instruments may become more dynamic and accomplishing, a new institution, the *Autoridade Nacional de Segurança Rodoviária* (National Authority on Road Safety), was also set up.

This new institution has taken on the commitment to carry out three extremely relevant tasks:

1. The drawing up of a National Road Safety Strategy for a time period up to 2015;
2. The rethinking of the traffic violation process;
3. The launch of a National Network for Speed Control.

The National Road Safety Strategy, whose implementation shall surely bring down the casualty rates on our roads and make our roads safer places, seeks to place Portugal within the 10 members of the EU with the lowest road casualty rates. Here, we must also mention with great pride the fact that we have been granted an award by the European Union for 2007 (Pin Award), because, together with France, Portugal has been the member of the European Union to have shown the greatest decline in road casualties. This strategy, which now seeks to further improve our

levels of prevention and safety, has set the following targets, to be achieved by 2015:

1. To reduce the total number of fatal victims, including pedestrians and drivers of automotive and two-wheeled vehicles, by up 32 %;
2. To reduce the number of deaths among vehicle drivers, inside the cities, by 49 %;
3. To bring the proportion of dead drivers with blood alcohol over the limit down to a level of 25 %;
4. To cause a 10 % reduction in the average speed recorded on our Motorway Network;
5. To increase the use of seat belts to 95 % in the front seats, and the correct use of retaining systems for children to 75 %.

Concerning the reform of the traffic violation process, I would like to add that this change shall enable this whole process to be centralised in only one institution, the ANSR, thereby reducing the number of acts committed and also giving the system greater efficiency and effectiveness. Indeed, the possibility of the President of the National Authority on Road Safety delegating his or her responsibilities to all superior technicians for application of sanctions, together with his or her own authority to apply the withdrawal of driving licences from those drivers who have committed three very serious traffic violations, or a total of five traffic violations adding together the serious and very serious categories, are mechanisms that are sure to impart greater simplicity and swiftness to the traffic violation process.

This reform is part of a new line of thought which started back in 1993 when a new Highway Code was enacted, replacing penal infractions which had to be analysed by the Courts (felonies and misdemeanours). The intervention of the administrative authorities has made the application of sanctions more feasible, independent of the right to appeal to the Courts. In the latest version, moves were made towards the centralisation of competences in the hands of the ANSR. Nevertheless, this centralisation did not occur at the expense of the proximity of the common person. The Civil Governments have taken on the responsibility of letting people know how the process is doing, arranging for the safekeeping of documents, and ensuring that witnesses are duly heard. We have made this centralisation to get rid of red tape and also to grant more transparency, without any sacrifice of closeness.

Finally, within the scope of the development of a new National Network for Speed Control, we envisage that the limitation of speed shall lead to a decline in serious casualties and also help towards the attainment of the national targets within the scope of the Kyoto Protocol. We well know that excess speed is not the only cause of accidents, but at the same time we cannot ignore that it is, indeed, one of the main risk factors, albeit often associated to other factors such as dangerous driving and alcohol abuse. The fact is that road accidents are complex phenomena which often have multiple causes. Even so, speeding is one of the most common (joint) causes of road accidents.

We are well aware that the definition of a line to follow and an action plan is difficult and demanding, and thus the policies for accident prevention and road safety, carried out within a vast universe of

ministries and services, are dependent on the set priorities and the activities of local and regional authorities, and also involve dozens of non-governmental organisations, which have been taking on a more and more important role. Well aware of the path we now need to trail, we have decided to launch, in 2008, the Estados Gerais para a Prevenção e Segurança Rodoviárias (General States for Prevention and Road Safety). In several different actions throughout the country, we have succeeded in obtaining the participation of all, to discuss the following issues:

1. Policies for infrastructure, for citizenship training for both common people and drivers, and the role of vehicles within the safety issue;
2. The importance of checking and repression;
3. Strengthening of assistance and emergency services;
4. The roles of the insurance brokers and the Courts;
5. The role of social communication, to encourage the observance of best practices.

Aware of these objectives, we also stress the execution of communication and awareness-building campaigns on television and also on national, regional and local radio, through the National Authority on Road Safety or the Civil Governments, in collaboration with the associations concerned with road accident prevention, vehemently exhorting everyone to observe good practices for driving and road safety.

From my own past experiences, I well know the importance of these campaigns. In 2001, for example, I was associated with a campaign that showed young people who had become paraplegic or quadriplegic as a result of accidents. This was a really painful shock campaign, but which had the merit of warning other young people about the risk they were running, of putting their lives or integrity on the line for the sake of a moment of distraction or foolhardiness.

In similar fashion, there has also been promotion of the visibility of police authorities, the application of new technologies for inspection and also inspection actions guided to avoid behaviour of risk and serious accidents, and favouring the culture of defensive driving. In relation to inspection, we should mention the dedicated, constant and proficient way in which the GNR and the PSP have run campaigns to make it clear to any driver that they could be called upon at any moment. The idea that one can commit a traffic violation without the risk of any corresponding sanctions is very negative, and can only be countered by increasing the frequency of inspection.

At the local level, we shall also mention the decisive role that the Civil Governors have played in the deployment of actions towards awareness building and also in the co-ordination of the different agents responsible for road safety. In 2007, we set up district councils for road co-ordination, run precisely by the Civil Governors who, through combined efforts with local authorities, have taken on an important part of the successes achieved.

In short, the road safety policies we have adopted have taken on the guidelines set by the European policies for this field, and have selected, like Europe as a whole, methodologies and objectives that

enable us to see the reduction of road casualties as a responsibility of each and every one of us, an exercise of citizenship. I feel sure that the development of co-operation between the Member States and the resulting legislative harmonisation are decisive steps to effectively bring down the road casualty rate in countries in the European Union, for the improvement of Government policies, and for the involvement of the common European citizen in this challenge.

In Portugal, we have taken on the commitment to continue to make every effort to improve road safety. This year, up to 28 September, the number of deaths and minor and serious injuries has continued to decline, when compared with the same period of 2007. Thus, we have recorded 8.3 % fewer deaths and 18.4 % fewer serious injuries, while the number of minor injuries declined by 7.4 %. However, we must be ambitious. Although it is very difficult, I believe that it is still within our grasp to bring down the number of road deaths to less than 500 per year by 2012. The Government policies of road safety are policies that have had high yield, and I am sure that, if we all make an effort, we are sure to achieve this ambitious goal, for the benefit of all the people and the community at large.

Lisbon, 29 September 2008

The Internal Administration Minister

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