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FUTURE ROLE OF THE WORKING PARTY ON ROAD TRAFFIC SAFETY

Communication from Belgium

At its fifty-fourth session (26-28 March 2008), the Working Party on Road Traffic Safety (WP.1) opened discussions on its future role, in particular on the best way to contribute globally to improving road safety and knowledge sharing.

Following that first exchange of views, the secretariat prepared a paper containing an analysis of the situation and a list of possible steps to be taken by WP.1 to move forward and contribute to global road safety. The paper was subsequently amended to take account of the strategic directions and recommendations indicated by WP.1.

This document contains, with minimal editing by the secretariat, the point of view of Belgium on the future role of WP.1, as put forward in document ECE/TRANS/WP.1/2008/5/Rev.1, which was considered by the Working Party at its fifty-seventh session.

1. There is no question that the achievements of WP.1 - the conventions, agreements, protocols and recommendations - should be given greater prominence. Two important ways to do this include the use of translations and a better presentation of the recommendations (RE.1 and RE.2), for example, by illustrating them with photographs.
2. The development of a new instrument containing scientifically based best practices for road safety - an idea put forward by Italy, the Netherlands, and the United States of America, and supported by the Fédération internationale de l'automobile (FIA) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland - could no doubt be useful. There remains the question, however, of whether WP.1, working with the World Health Organization (WHO), is the best body to draft such a list of best practices and whether other bodies are or may be better suited to the task. In order to avoid a duplication of work, it would be desirable to verify whether other bodies, such as the International Transport Forum, the United Nations Road Safety Collaboration (UNRSC), the European Road Safety Observatory (ERSO), or the European Transport Safety Council (ETSC), would not be more appropriate and whether they have already taken any measures in this regard.
3. The majority of the members of WP.1 are experts on traffic regulations; they have a more limited knowledge of scientific research techniques. WP.1 is therefore perhaps not the ideal body to draw up a list of scientifically based best practices. The role that WP.1 can play in such a scenario seems to be limited to providing expertise on traffic regulations (the conventions), if so requested.
4. Before new instruments are drawn up, the numerous existing instruments should be better enforced and kept up to date. The most important task of WP.1 is probably to ensure that, in as many countries as possible, the most important traffic rules are identical and that the same road signs are used. At present, that task has been put to one side, as, in an increasingly globalized world, the focus is on ensuring that road users are alert and on identifying potential road safety hazards. The fact that different road signs are used in different countries is a common source of annoyance. The Inland Transport Committee is responsible for encouraging the countries that have ratified the conventions to comply with them. For the Convention on Road Traffic and the Convention on Road Signs and Signals, WP.1 is best placed to help the Inland Transport Committee in that sense.
5. If the answers to the questionnaire on how the different countries have incorporated the conventions in their domestic legislation indicate that several countries are not enforcing certain provisions of the conventions, then WP.1 should hold a discussion and the conventions should perhaps be amended. If the Inland Transport Committee is able, through the activities of WP.1, to achieve greater uniformity, first on the roads covered by the European Union and then in the other countries of the United Nations, that will be an enormous achievement and a contribution to road safety that is not to be underestimated.
6. Apart from monitoring compliance with the conventions, it is also essential to keep them up to date. Obviously, any (legal) text published today may tomorrow become obsolete and require amendments. That is why WP.1 should regularly analyse other legislative initiatives

that may relate to the conventions (for example, European Union directives or the European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR)) and changes in society or technology affecting road safety, and should try to be proactive. This can help ensure that the conventions correspond more closely with the actual situation, and are thus more useful tools.

7. It will already be difficult enough for WP.1, which meets for only six or seven days a year, to carry out these two fundamental tasks.
