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Introductory Remarks

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

eSafety High-Level Meeting with Industry

Brussels, 3 February 2005

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to welcome you to this High-Level meeting on eSafety.

As the new Commissioner for Information Society and Media, it gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to address you today. eSafety is a very good example of the contribution of Information and Communications Technologies for improving the quality of life and increasing the welfare of our citizens.

The eSafety Initiative was launched two years ago in April 2002. In these two years we made substantial progress. I would like to highlight just two issues that I consider to be the most important ones and also the most relevant for today's discussions.

(1) In September 2003 the Commission adopted the Communication "Information and Communications Technologies for Safe and Intelligent Vehicles". This communication marked the launch of the eSafety Forum and its working groups. Since then, the Forum has met regularly in High-Level Meetings, like the one today, and in Plenary Sessions. Very significant work has been done in the Working Groups, and I would like to thank all the chairs and the members of these groups for your commitment and contributions.

The support of the Member States is crucial for the success of the eSafety initiative. Therefore the HL meeting we organised on 27 September last year with our 25 Member States was particularly important. This meeting was very successful and today we will report to you its main conclusions.

(2) The other very important issue is eCall, the in-vehicle emergency call. It is the showcase of eSafety, and it has been shown to have huge potential for socio-economic benefits. Recent studies indicate that when fully deployed, it can save 2000 lives per year, reduce the injury severity in 15% of crashes, and save over 20 billion euro annually.

eCall can only be implemented by joint actions of the public and private stakeholders. In August last year the European Commission, ACEA and ERTICO signed the eCall Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The MoU has now over 20 signatures, and my services and the eCall Driving Group

have continued the efforts for finding viable technical and business plans for the European wide deployment of eCall.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we are at a crossroad with the eSafety Initiative. Progress has been made, but eSafety has not yet made it to the mainstream of road or vehicle safety. We have not yet fully exploited the potential offered by advanced ICT and the results of our RTD efforts in improving safety in the two areas in which ICT can help most: that is, in avoiding accidents and mitigating their consequences.

Bringing the benefits of eSafety to all road users in Europe will remain a top priority for the European Commission in the coming years. Increases in demand for mobility and transport services in the enlarged European Union and the demographic changes in the population make the introduction of eSafety even more urgent.

Today we will discuss the proposal for the European-wide introduction of eCall. We must agree upon a viable plan for the roll-out of eCall, with clear actions for all stakeholders. Alternatively, the Commission has to consider other measures for accelerating the take-up of eCall, such as regulation.

We are also bringing to you a proposal enabling us to continue working together on the eSafety initiative. A key objective on the side of the Commission is to inform the Council and the European Parliament of the progress on eSafety. My services together with other Directorates-General in the Commission are working on the 2nd eSafety Communication that reports progress and recommends further actions for all stakeholders. I am committed to presenting it, after adoption by the Commission, to the Council under the Luxembourg Presidency.

Concerning the future directions of the eSafety initiative, I would like to highlight the fact that we have made a substantial investment in Europe into Research and Development in the area of Intelligent Vehicle Safety Systems. Under the IST Priority of the current 6th Framework Programme we have launched a number of important Integrated Projects in this area, and we are currently discussing how to continue this research under the FP7.

This research has resulted in a number of promising eSafety technologies and Systems, and some of them are now close to market introduction. An existing system, the Electronic Stability Programme (ESP), is proving to be effective in reducing accidents and fatalities with rates that vary from 20 to 45%, depending on conditions prior to the hazard. Moreover, thanks to the recent Commission decision on the allocation of the 24 GHz frequency band for automotive short-range radar, anti-collision systems can now be introduced in vehicles in Europe starting from this year.

Many other systems are under development. I believe that it is a great opportunity for the eSafety initiative to take stock of these favourable circumstances and strengthen the efforts to speed up the market implementation, and in particular the pre-crash and accident mitigation technologies and systems. I urge all of you to work together in solving the remaining technological and commercial barriers in introducing these life-saving systems into cars as soon as possible. The society, the citizens and you, the industry, are there to gain.

Another issue that cannot be emphasised enough is the user awareness. We must be able to inform drivers and other road users of the benefits of Intelligent Vehicle Safety Systems, and we need to translate user awareness to user demand. I will personally follow the efforts in this important area of eSafety.

Finally, I would like to assure you that road safety, eSafety and the competitiveness of Europe's automotive, telecommunications, equipment supply and service industries continue to be high on the list of Commission's priorities. With eSafety Europe has taken the lead and gained international recognition; we have to safeguard and maintain this leadership.

I am looking forward with interest to hear your opinions and I thank you for your attention.