



1st IRU/EU Presidency Road Transport Conference & Ministerial Meeting
“Efficient, Safe and Sustainable Road Transport for the Future”
Brussels, Belgium, 1 December 2010
Opening Session

Janusz Lacny, President, International Road Transport Union (IRU)

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for the International Road Transport Union (IRU), and for me as IRU President, to speak at this Opening Session of the 1st IRU-EU Presidency Road Transport Conference and Ministerial Meeting.

I am certain that this event will increase the required cooperation between the road transport industry represented by the IRU and the European Union Member States and the EU Institutions. Indeed, the foreseen dialogue between the public and the private sectors is also the best way to obtain fruitful results.

It is obvious that it is only through cooperation and a true public-private partnership that we will be able to have efficient, safe and sustainable road transport for the future. In other words, better rather than more transport to ensure the required mobility.

As this is the first joint conference of this type, allow me to sincerely thank the Government of the Kingdom of Belgium, and to personally thank His Excellency Etienne Schouppe, State Secretary for Mobility, for having taken this initiative and for his invaluable support when co-organising this historic Conference and Ministerial Meeting.

My special thanks go also to his department and to the Belgian Permanent Representation to the EU which provided invaluable input to this joint event. Organising jointly the first event of this kind with the Belgian EU Presidency here in the EU capital is a mark of appreciation of the existing cooperation with the various EU bodies and is also the recognition of the importance that the IRU attaches to the European Union's decisions as a major legislator and opinion maker.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The IRU, created just over 60 years ago in 1948 and currently representing the road transport industry through its 180 taxi, bus, coach and truck Members in 74 countries, including all 27 EU states, has long recognised not only the challenges but moreover the opportunities created by global trade developments and their consequences for the road transport sector.

The road transport sector is often – and especially in the EU, one should add – perceived as a nuisance that should be limited or even banned from existence. However, road transport is the only transport mode which complements all others and which is always available everywhere and to everyone. It is also the only mode able to improve the distribution of wealth and to unite people. It is because of this vital role in the success of everyone that any penalty on road transport is an even greater penalty on the economy and society as a whole.

As these realities are not always understood or appreciated by all, the IRU and its EU Members see an urgent need for a new approach in the cooperation between the EU legislators and the road transport industry.

Indeed, the creation of stronger ties and effective cooperation between the IRU and its Member Associations and the EU decision-makers is the only solution to ensure that we actually achieve more efficient, safe and sustainable road transport.

In fact, to obtain better transport rather than more transport, allow me to mention some changes which need to be implemented.

We should be moving away from the forced modal shift policy which is still in place in various EU programmes when a new transport policy has to be decided for the next decade. In fact, all historical evidence demonstrates that such a policy cannot work as it does not take account of economic realities!

We should equally move away from blindly raising taxes, charges and excise duties and remove unnecessary bureaucratic procedures which all increase the cost of road transport to the detriment of the EU economy, EU competitiveness in a globalised economy, and EU citizens who will suffer from higher prices for products, and even worse, unemployment. Indeed, taking into account that 85% of road transport is carried out over distances of less than 150 km, any arbitrary increase in the cost of road transport automatically becomes an incentive for the delocalisation of production outside the EU with dramatic consequences for employment.

Moreover, increasing the cost of road transport will not have any positive effect on the environment. The reason for this is mainly that these additional charges completely lack any clear earmarking of the collected revenues to be used to cope with the issue directly at source – as is the case in the current revision of the Eurovignette directive.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this time of economic crisis with more and more EU Member States finding themselves in financial trouble, it is imperative that we within the industry seek new business opportunities and that we, jointly with EU governments, seek new ways to cooperate to promote and further facilitate road transport to allow it to drive and sustain economic recovery – in the EU and beyond!

Alone we can do nothing! But by “working together for a better future”, we can overcome the present economic crisis and financial difficulties in the various EU Member States and realise all of our common economic, social and environmental objectives.

Help us to help you!

Thank you for your attention.

* * * * *