

Opening Speech IRU – conference 1 December 2010

Vice-President of the European Commission,

Chairman of the Committee on Transport and Tourism,

President of the International Road Union,

Secretary General of the International Road Union,

Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When the idea for a joint IRU-EU road transport conference was put to me 18 months ago, I immediately agreed.

I agreed for several reasons.

Firstly, the road transport sector has a vital role to play in commercial transport.

Road freight transport represents a staggering 73% of the inland freight transport market, while international road freight transport accounts for one third of total road freight transport in the EU.

Secondly, the road transport sector is very important in terms of employment. The number of employees in the road haulage industry in the EU-27 increased by 300,000 in the first half of this decade.

The sector itself makes a huge contribution to the European economy. It generates a turnover worth around 1.6 % of the total European GDP.

Despite the sector's remarkable success, there is nonetheless growing urgency for the whole transport sector to lessen its negative impact on the environment.

CO₂ emissions from transport have increased significantly since 1990. This contrasts with other major sectors of the economy - such as energy and manufacturing - which have reduced their emissions in this period.

In 2006 the emissions from the transport sector accounted for 23% of total CO₂ emissions in the EU. Road transport represents a massive two thirds of CO₂ emissions from transport.

These statistics make for sombre listening. Solving the environmental problems of road transport will require innovative and sustainable solutions, solutions at every level of the transport chain.

Despite this, great improvements have been made in the energy efficiency of road freight transport. The overall pollution has been significantly reduced due to the progressive introduction of the Euro standards, which pushed for the renovation of fleets. The sector has therefore clearly recognised the need to reduce pollution, and is well on the road to change.

As President of the Transport Council, I recognise the need for a clear and coherent European policy that pushes for ecological improvements, while taking into account the needs of businesses and industry professionals.

In addition, road safety is another issue of key importance here. Accidents involving commercial vehicles are still far too common on European roads. To remedy this problem, authorities, enforcers and industry professionals alike, need to work together to reduce the number of accidents in a sustainable way.

The concept of co-modality needs to become a fully-functioning reality, by pursuing the optimal combination of all transport modes in the supply chain; we can offer the best solution for the sector's future and prevent the road transport sector becoming a victim of its own success.

For all of these reasons, I am convinced that an event such as this one today will raise awareness of the need for a European transport policy that is committed to providing the best conditions for an open market for professional road transport

services, with fair competition and new developments to stimulate the market.

I am pleased to see that so many people have been able to come today. I wish you all a pleasant and fruitful day of discussions.

Thank you for your attention.