

Safety

# School of thought

*“The life cycles of our highways are positively glacial compared to cars and cell phones”*





**LUCY CONE reports from Innsbruck as ASECAP look to promote the idea of 'working together for safer roads' with a conference held in a most unusual venue**



**The vast snow covered mountain ranges of the Tirol provided the backdrop for the ASECAP Road Safety event that was held on 2 March near Innsbruck.**

The venue, a small environmentally orientated Austrian private school ('PORG') located next to the stunning St. Karlskirch, was relevantly positioned a few hundred metres from the A12 Inntal Autobahn, a typical Austrian motorway carrying a large proportion of heavy goods vehicles that cuts through the valleys of the Tirol.

Attendees included over 60 experts from many of the full members of ASECAP, stake holders such as representatives of the Tirolean and Italian traffic police and guest speakers included Annie Canel (European Commission) and Reinhardt Rack (European Parliament). An interesting touch was the involvement of members of the school and the local church, providing a reminder of how environmental concerns cannot be separated from traffic management and transport policy.

**Common or garden**

The question of the day was: 'Is there a common understanding on European Road Safety?' and the discussion, moderated by Kallistratos Dionelis, Secretary General of ASECAP, was opened by two representatives of the European institutions.

Reinhardt Rack, a member of TRAN (European Parliament Committee on Transport and Tourism), explained the well known difficulties European decision making; finding that 'awkward' balance and the crossovers of the legislative areas of transport, environment, health and welfare and consumer protection.

Improving road safety requires a better use of infrastructure, technology and an inclusion of the inevitable 'human element'. A special emphasis is to be placed on cross-border cooperation concerning issues such as law enforcement, a concept that subsequently became central to this event.

Annie Canel, a member of DG TREN (EC Directorate-General of Energy and Transport), provided an insight into the successes and difficulties associated with the ambitious Road Safety Action Plan (2003) that aims to halve the number of fatalities on European roads by 2010. Although the general Europe-wide trend demonstrates a reduction in road fatalities, disparities between member states are still significant. Road safety is a responsibility that should be shared between all stakeholders, to strive for an integrated approach in terms of campaigns, enforcement and education.

Alain Estiot, Managing Director of TollCollect provided an interesting analysis of the evolution of fatalities



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in Germany. In a country where 50 per cent of the motorways have no speed limit, it is essential that all road users are adequately educated on road safety issues and regulations. Furthermore, it has become necessary to change the attitude of road users in Germany through road safety campaigns on TV, radio and in newspapers. Mr. Estiot asked whether technology is the way forward in making our roads safer, or whether 'simplicity' is the answer.

### Cause for alarm

ASFINAG (Autobahnen- und Schnellstrassen- Finanzierungs- Aktiengesellschaft) CFO Klaus Schierhackl focused on the improvements in road safety in Austria. However, he also highlighted alarming statistics, for example, that 10 per cent of road users do not use restraint systems for their children.

Around 40 per cent of fatalities on Austrian roads are non-Austrian nationals, providing further evidence that a more integrated approach to European road safety is necessary. Again, the point was made that road safety is the responsibility of all stakeholders involved, the European Community, national authorities, concessionaires and toll operators and of course, the road users themselves.

Maurizio Rotondo introduced ASECAP's educational road safety leaflet, titled Safety, the First Priority of the European Tollerated Motorways. The publication provides an illustrated overview of the elements that make motorways safer than any other type of road, including design and construction, maintenance, monitoring and operation.

Markus Widmann of the Traffic Department of the Tyrolean Police and Paolo Cestra representing the Operational Division of the Italian Road Police provided insights into both national and cross-border cooperative operations, mentioning examples such as joint patrols, lorry inspections and traffic information systems. Later in the event the audience was given the opportunity to inspect the vehicles used and discuss their application with representatives of the Austrian and Italian road police.

The discussion took a new direction when Mr. Dionelis emphasized the importance of distinguishing between the unpredictable and the predictable. After all, what we can predict, we can attempt to prevent. Perhaps then, whether there is a common European understanding of data collection, of interpretation of data and of which data is considered reliable, may be intrinsically linked to whether there can be a common understanding of European road safety.

Other questions were raised, such as who decides that data is reliable and where does this reliable data come from? Can CARE, the new European Road Safety Observatory mentioned by Annie Canel, provide more reliable data than the other 27 or so observatories in Europe?

ASECAP succeeded in organizing an innovative and unusual event, where stakeholders and a large audience of experts interacted to provide an insightful and intelligent discussion on European road safety. Whether or not those lessons are ever learned remains to be seen.

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