

Opening of the 6th Fit to Drive Congress in Barcelona

Welcome Address by Dr. Klaus Brüggemann

Your Excellencies, Parliamentarians, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the name of the Association of TÜVs, I would like to welcome you most warmly to the 6th International *Fit to Drive* Congress here in Barcelona. We are very happy indeed to have visitors from all parts of the world at our event, and this excellent response shows that the themes of traffic safety, fitness to drive and road traffic education are of real global importance. The Fit to Drive Congress has now become one of the most important international platforms for psychologists, medical practitioners, attorneys, high-ranking civil servants and leading engineers, providing new impetus in the area of traffic policy, initiating necessary debates and allowing a wide-ranging exchange of experience.

I would particularly like to thank our Spanish partners and Catalanian hosts for providing this magnificent modern setting for our two-day Congress in the Agbar Tower.

This exchange of experience between road traffic experts is now taking place for the sixth time. Following the first event in Berlin in 2006, the Congress was held in Vienna, and then in Prague and Tallinn and last year in The Hague. For the Association of TÜVs and for all those participating in the Congress, commitment and the determination to achieve greater safety in road traffic are the most important aims. The EU set the target with the European Road Safety Charter in Dublin in 2004: according to this, the number of those killed in traffic accidents should be reduced to zero by the year 2050. Vision Zero is not merely a figment of the imagination, but an immense incentive, so that we make every possible effort to reduce the number of road deaths and injuries in Europe and everywhere else in the world. This means that we must continually improve the methods used in teaching road traffic safety and in driving instruction, that we must continue to improve vehicle technology and build yet more safe roads, and that the most advanced driver assistance systems must become standard equipment for new vehicles. In addition, practical implementation and maintenance of road traffic safety requires that, at least within the EU, the different national traffic regulations and penalties are harmonized, and that agreed sanctions are consistently applied. This is precisely what the Action Plan of the European Commission intends.

A glance at the statistics also confirms the need for this Action Plan. For example, the number of traffic deaths in Germany rose again in 2011 for the first time in 20 years. Last year, exactly 4,002 people were killed on German roads. This means that the number of deaths rose by 354, which

is almost 10 per cent. In Sweden, the number of road deaths rose by as much as 18 per cent last year. A rise in the number of road victims was also recorded in other EU Member States, such as Poland and Belgium, where considerable progress in the area of road safety is still necessary. This means that the rate of reduction in road deaths in Europe has slowed down considerably. The Estonian EU Traffic Commissioner Siim Kallas is therefore quite rightly demanding that much greater efforts towards road safety should be made both nationally and throughout Europe.

Even in times of economic difficulty, safety on the roads should not be neglected. And it should really not be necessary to mention that road accidents, injuries and deaths cost the economy an estimated 130 billion Euro each year.

We have a long and difficult path to follow in order to achieve Vision Zero by the year 2050. Even the interim target of halving the original number of road deaths in Europe from 54,000 to 27,000 in 2020 requires further efforts from traffic educators, driving instructors, vehicle manufacturers, and legislators, as well as changes to the administration and justice systems. The Fit to Drive Congress wishes to reveal ways and means of reaching this interim target, whilst still keeping the Vision Zero target firmly in sight.

In the improvement of road traffic safety, the focus is on people, technology, infrastructure and legal regulations – and these are also at the centre of the Fit to Drive Congress. The many lectures and talks to be given during the Congress will present the latest findings from road traffic studies and will also explore interaction between people and technology. The discussions that follow are concerned with new approaches to the teaching of road traffic safety, risk assessment from the medical and psychological points of view, drink- and drug-driving, rehabilitation and therapy, preventive measures and safety systems, and much more. The spotlight will be on individual fitness to drive and the safety interests of society.

When we think about problematic driving behaviour, we generally still think about driving under the influence of alcohol. Alcohol on the roads is a problem which has to be considered by psychologists and other scientists, and also by the judiciary and the EU Commission, in order to create a unified legal framework throughout the EU.

However, there are many more aspects to inappropriate driving behaviour than that of alcohol alone. For example, a study by the Emnid Institute has examined the respect

shown by German drivers towards road traffic rules. The researchers asked a good 1,000 vehicle owners about the traffic rules they sometimes do not obey. In the survey, 70 per cent of those questioned stated that they sometimes do not keep to the speed limit, whilst 43 per cent sometimes ignore “No Parking” and “No Waiting” signs. Almost one quarter occasionally ignore the fact that a traffic light is just turning red, and a similar number use their mobile phones when driving. A fifth of drivers ignore the obligation to drive as far to the right as possible on motorways. The problem is that many drivers consider it normal to commit these traffic offences and simply do not recognize the danger that they present to other road users. As these offences are not always punished, the learning effect that can follow punishment does not occur.

Traffic education and accident avoidance are inseparably linked. However, voluntary further training as a minimum requirement, and preferably also psychological measures for problematic drivers, are by no means the rule. The problem is officially recognised, but despite this, in most countries those in authority act as if people only really learn if they cause harm to themselves or others. Many accidents, including those with fatal consequences, could be avoided if problematic road users had to undergo retraining with regard to their road skills and knowledge. When achievement of Vision Zero is discussed in more detail, this debate will certainly have to be held, and it will be necessary to hold firm against the resistance that will certainly arise.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the aim of our Congress is to support the EU in its road safety policy. Barcelona, as a city that celebrates the modern alongside the traditional, could become a watchword for traffic safety, as it is for modern architecture. Already at the beginning of the 20th century, Antoni Gaudi was an early practitioner of an extremely individual and modern style, following on from art nouveau. His Sagrada Familia basilica is famous throughout the world – and the location for our Congress, the Agbar Tower, was inspired by Gaudi, the famous Catalanian, although the creator of this pinnacle of the engineer’s art was in fact Jean Nouvel, a French architect. Those of you who were here yesterday evening were able to admire the sea of colours created by the LED lighting on the building. And this astonishing glass tower provides us with a beacon by both day and night, visible from far away, giving a signal and acting as a guide.

I am certain that our Congress can act in a similar way, giving an important signal that can lead to greater safety in road traffic. And so I would now like to open the 6th *Fit to Drive* Congress. I am sure that all of us, both presenters and guests, will enjoy some fascinating discussions. Let us be inspired by the forward-looking solutions found here in modern Barcelona.

Thank you!