

ChooseESC! Symposium
Brussels, Autoworld, 1 July, 2008
Speech of Zita Gurmai MEP

Dear Colleges, Dear Guests,

It's a great pleasure for me, as the rapporteur of the Intelligent Car Communication to share my thoughts with you here, today. I'm so happy to see some familiar faces, faces of people with whom we have been working together closely on eSafety issues while I prepared my report on Intelligent Cars for the European Parliament. I'm sure that we will achieve our aims with such great colleges as Commissioner Reding, Hermann Meyer, Ivan Hodac, David Ward - thank you for the opportunity of being here with you.

We all recognize that mobility of goods and individual mobility are indispensable for the well-functioning and sustainable European economy and our everyday lives. Number of cars per 1000 capita grew from 232 in 1975 to 460 in 2002. In the last 20 years, the average distance covered by road vehicles has grown to its triple and in the very last decade the volume of road truckage has grown with 35%. We depend on the traffic each day more and more. But for almost every development, there is a price to pay.

Among Europe's estimated 300 million car drivers, more than 42 thousand die each year on the roads. These 1.4 million accidents account for an expense of approximately 200 million EUR, 2% of Europe's GDP. Aside this important financial loss, I think that the high number of these senseless road fatalities is intolerable. I assume that we agree on the fact that as responsible European decision-makers, we have to set our top priority the preservation of human lives. This is clearly represented in the White Paper on European Transport Policy, in which the European Commission has set the goal of reducing road accident fatalities by 50% by 2010 in comparison to the 2001 level.

According to the Commission, skidding is the principle cause of at least 40% of these fatal car accidents. However, I have to say that we are particularly lucky here in Europe. Why is that? We have the necessary technologic solution to avoid skidding. I'm sure that we all know what I'm talking about: about the Electronic Stability Control. After careful calculation, this means that ESC technology could save 4,000 lives and prevent 100,000 serious accidents every year.

Regarding these numbers, one would assume that we have ESC in every possible vehicle in Europe. But up till now, ESC is only found in roughly 20% of the vehicles that circulate on European roads. Of course, there are serious differences between the penetration rate of ESC in European countries. For instance, 96% of new cars sold in Sweden are equipped with ESC while this number is only 42% in Italy and 46% in France. (I'm talking about new cars because ESC is not generally available for after-market installation.)

This situation is not like this by chance. For example, in Sweden, in 2003, the purchase rate on new cars with ESC was only 15%. The Swedish road safety administration issued a strong ESC recommendation and in September 2004, 16 months later, the purchase rate was 58%. A stronger ESC recommendation was then given and in December 2004, the purchase rate on new cars had reached 69% and by 2007 it grew to 96%

This example clearly shows that clear information, publicity and recommendations on the ESC contribute to increase the penetration which is our common goal. This is why I would like to thank Choose ESC! for your enthusiasm, devotion and hard work. For myself, I try to contribute to this information campaign, via my report on Intelligent Cars in the European Parliament or via awareness-raising events, just like the one we had together on 15 January

2008 in the European Parliament in Strasbourg. Of course, you can count on me for future events.

Let me highlight one problem regarding information on ESC. I think that we should concentrate our efforts on car dealers because according to a recent survey by FIA Foundation, showroom sales staff rarely recommended ESC as a safety system and fail to promote the technology. This problem can be related to many reasons but in any case, car dealers should be trained and encouraged to talk about safety devices, especially ESC, and to show to the clients why they need this feature in their new vehicle instead of promoting comfort and entertainment devices.

I'm glad that the European Commission also recognizes the necessity of the ESC in every vehicle and I am grateful to Commissioner Reding because she supports the 100% penetration of this device. Thank you, Commissioner. I strongly welcome the Proposal for a Regulation Concerning type-approval requirements for the general safety of motor vehicles issued last May. I am convinced that this regulation by making the ESC mandatory on all new vehicles from 2014 is a great step towards the reduction of the number of road fatalities in Europe.

We usually refer to the ESC like the most important car safety device since the seat belt and we developed this technology here, in the European Union. However, since then, we have fallen behind the US on use of Electronic Stability Control: The United States mandated ESC for all passenger vehicles under 10,000 pounds (4536 kg), phasing in the regulation starting with 55% of 2009 models, 75% of 2010 models, 95% of 2011 models, and 100% of 2012 models. We needed this regulation so badly in Europe and we can always complain that it is not ambitious enough but I am sure that every step counts and this is a good starting point.

Also, setting common mandatory requirements would prevent the fragmentation of the penetration of ESC in Europe! We have to consider another important aspect of the regulation. It is a fact that on vehicles such as heavy trucks and tourist coaches, where the benefit of Electronic Stability Control Systems may be even greater than for cars, there is often not the market incentive to fit Electronic Stability Control Systems voluntarily, since, unlike the case with cars, the purchasers are not normally the beneficiaries.

The same survey that I mentioned before shows that the price of the ESC system differs between countries and brands. The same technology for the same car can cost more than 3 times e.g. in the Netherlands than in Italy. This life-saving device should be sold everywhere at the lowest possible price so that it can reach the largest possible audience. It should be affordable for everyone, for every European citizen.

I agree with Sebastien Loeb who estimated that young or inexperienced drivers were for sure those who might find themselves in situations where they get surprised about the reaction of their car in case of sudden emergency movements and here ESC can make a crucial difference. This is why when talking about ESC and intelligent safety systems, I often think about my two sons. Of course my bigger family (and the relatives of all of us) are concerned here because even experienced drivers might find themselves in situations that they have difficulties to handle and ESC can be here the solution. So we all need it, therefore let's make it happen!

Thank you for your attention.