

Viviane Reding

Member of the European Commission responsible for Information
Society and Media

Keynote Speech
Launch of the ChooseESC! campaign

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Rome (Aprilia), 8 May 2007

Presidents, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to see many people engaged in the ChooseESC! Campaign here today. I am also very honoured to be accompanied this morning by distinguished personalities from the organisations which have done so much to promote road safety in Europe, USA and globally, namely EuroNCAP, NHTSA, FIA, FIA Foundation and ACEA. A special thank also to Bridgestone for inviting us to this excellent location, and to the three eSafetyAware Working Groups for their preparation, which have made this event possible.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Electronic Stability Control, ESC, saves lives.

Numerous studies conducted recently by the industry and by independent research organisations have shown that ESC, together with the seat belt, is one of the most effective safety system available for cars today. These studies have proven beyond any doubt that cars which are fitted with ESC are involved in significantly fewer accidents. In normal conditions, ESC can reduce accidents by more than 20 percent, and in wet or icy conditions the benefits are even greater: around 30 - 40 percent, not only on passenger cars, but also commercial and heavy-duty vehicles.

And even more convincingly, the impact of ESC can be seen in the national accident statistics. In countries where the market penetration is high, the accident rates go down.

It is therefore totally right that ESC has been called “the most efficient safety technology after the seat belt”. Thousands of lives could be saved, immeasurable human suffering could be avoided by equipping cars with ESC. The technology is available today: it is a concrete practise as you can see outside in the test cars and demonstrations. So what exactly is the problem?

The problem we face in Europe is the low penetration rate in the many differentiated markets of our 27 Member States. And the problem is two-fold:

- The low penetration in the existing vehicle fleet, which, because there is no after sales market, can only be increased by increasing the rate of fleet renewal;
- But we are also losing time on saving lives because today a large percentage of new vehicles do not have ESC.

The goal and the ambition of the European Commission is not a secret: it is to achieve a 100% take up of ESC in the all new vehicles by 2012. This goal is spelled out in

the comprehensive strategy on the regulatory framework for the automotive industry which was adopted last year as a response to the report of the CARS 21 High-Level Group.

Our first concern is of course safety, but we have another concern, which is the competitiveness of European automotive industry, representing a substantial part of the European economy not to mention the 12 million jobs.

This is a very highly regulated sector, facing fierce competition on global markets, and a perpetually rising demand to reduce emissions, especially CO₂, as well as to make vehicles safer. This is not easy.

This is why we should streamline the automotive regulatory environment and establish on consistent international rules.

How to proceed? In a first stage, the European Commission is supporting raising awareness through the Choose ESC campaign; at the same time, pushing forward on international level. Over the next two years we follow closely to see if this approach delivers results.

In 2009, we will be ready, if it is necessary, to propose ESC as mandatory in a progressive way, starting with heavy-duty vehicles and followed by passenger cars and light-duty vehicles.

I do hope we can achieve everything on a voluntary basis: our safety goals, take-up of ESC in Europe, competitiveness of the EU automotive industry and keeping cars affordable. This is the approach that underpins my Intelligent Car Initiative, launched in February 2006, built on three lines of action: Consensus building amongst stakeholders in the eSafety Forum; support for Research and Development on Intelligent Vehicle Safety Systems under the EU's Framework programmes; and User Awareness actions, such as Choose ESC.

Since the launch of the initiative, we have made great progress in all three areas.

User Awareness is the missing link between the technical and economic readiness of the automotive industry in equipping cars with ESC, and its increased market penetration.

I believe that by increasing the awareness of drivers on ESC and its benefits, we can positively influence its market demand and societal acceptance.

The evidence is there: we recently concluded a comprehensive Eurobarometer study that shows - once

drivers understand how ESC works and its potential for avoiding accidents - that over 80% of drivers want ESC fitted in their next car. We will only make progress if we explain and show that ESC is available and if drivers are aware.

I hope that User Awareness campaigns can increase user demand, making it worthwhile for the automotive industry to equip vehicles with ESC, without the need for regulation. This is why I fully support the ChooseESC! campaign. ESC needs to be available not only on expensive but also on lower range cars. I believe that the target of this campaign is exactly right: we need to reach the consumers at the moment when they have to make a choice on their next car. And we need to do it now!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Electronic Stability Control is important, but we also need to consider further measures to improve road safety in Europe.

In the recent mid-term review of Europe's Transport Policy we took stock of our transport policies. In spite of the extremely fast growth in both goods and passenger transport in the European Union, the Road fatalities have

declined by 24% since 2001. This is remarkable but not enough.

However, with around 38.000 deaths and 1.6 million injured in 2006, we are still far from the target of less than 25.000 fatalities. And I must remind you that 25.000 is only an intermediate target.

The lesson is: in order to achieve the road safety goals, we need to take concerted actions to further improve vehicle design including technologies for accident avoidance, road infrastructure, and driver behaviour. The target can be met only by joint effort involving governments at all levels, automotive industry, motorway operators and the road users themselves. Furthermore, the Mid-Term review stresses the importance of new technologies in solving the road safety problem.

As I have explained, such a co-operation and RTD activity is already underway under the Intelligent Car Initiative. While on the User Awareness we are focusing on existing technologies, the other two lines of action are addressing the next challenges:

- The eSafety Forum plays an increasingly important role in building consensus amongst stakeholders in Europe. Five Working Groups have already delivered now, the Forum is taking up new areas

such as Security, and increasingly crucial Clean and Efficient Mobility.

- The R&D projects go to accident avoidance technologies. I would like to invite you all to a demonstration event organised by the Integrated Project PREVENT in Versailles, France on 18 September this year. And we have already commenced work on the next grand challenge, namely the Co-operative systems which hold the promise of substantial improvements in both safety and efficiency of transport.
- We have also made great progress in the pan-European in-vehicle emergency call, eCall. I would like to remind you that this is another life-saving. Now 10 countries have signed and in June, 5 other countries should sign up. I believe that eCall will be launched in 2010 as planned.

All this progress will be reported in my first Annual Report on the Intelligent Car initiative later this year. This communication will also contain recommendations on further measures directed to the Member States as well as industry.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me go back to today's event, the launch of the ChooseESC! Campaign.

Time is short. Each new car that is sold without ESC is a lost opportunity to save lives and reduce suffering.

This campaign is also a test case. Over the next two years, Commissioners Verheugen, Barrot and I will be closely monitoring its evolution to see if this soft approach works, and to see if regulatory measures are needed.

Our joint task is to make ChooseESC! Campaign a full success. You are committed to make our goal not a dream but reality. I am looking forward to continue the good co-operation on road safety with all stakeholders, and I would like to end by thanking you all again for your commitment to road safety.

Thank you for your attention.