

interview

Miguel María Muñoz Medina

Chairman of Fundación MAPFRE's Road Safety Institute

In recent years, the debate on road safety has been taking shape in Spanish society. Government aims to reduce the accident rate by 50% by 2010, in line with European Union proposals, have lead to a steady trickle of measures intended to make the public aware of its responsibility when driving. Measures to educate and penalize are intermingled, such as toughening up the Criminal Code and points on the licence. The Spanish Parliament, as the people's representative, has demonstrated its concern and is working to improve the situation through a Non-Permanent Committee for Road Safety and the Prevention of Traffic Accidents. A campaign by Fundación MAPFRE's Road Safety Institute will shortly address itself to the corporate area.

The situation continues to be unacceptable, although it has improved



- Miguel María Muñoz Medina was born in Madrid in 1944 and is married with one son. He graduated in Law at Madrid's Universidad Complutense and has a doctorate "cum laude" from the Granada University. He has a master's degree in Community Law from the Diplomatic School.
- He began his working career in MAPFRE, in 1965. After a brief spell practising law, and after sitting an examination, in 1969 he joined the Advanced Corps of State Traffic Technicians as an official. On 2 September 1988 he was appointed Director General of Traffic, a post he held until March 1996. At that time he rejoined MAPFRE as Assistant General Manager of MAPFRE Mutualidad, General Manager of MAREs and Vice-President of the Executive Committee of the Automobile Operating Unit. In that same year he was appointed patron of Fundación MAPFRE and Chairman of the MAPFRE Road Safety Institute.
- In January 2008 he was elected Chairman of the Spanish Highway Association for a second term. At present, he is retired from MAPFRE by virtue of the statutory age limit for executives, however he continues to be active as a member of Fundación MAPFRE's Executive Committee and as Chairman of its Road Safety Institute.
- His academic career has been extensive, with highlights as Associate Professor at the National Institute for Public Administration and as a University Professor and Head of Department at the Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca. He has numerous publications to his name, both books and articles. Among his latest books are "The Green Book of Road Safety", Madrid, 2006, and "Road Safety, a Shared Responsibility", Madrid, 2007.
- Among the decorations awarded him are the Grand Cross of the Order of Civil Merit; the Gold Medal for Merit in Road Safety; the Silver Medal with Palm Leaves for Insurance Merit; the Civil Guard Silver Cross for Merit; the Cross for Police Merit with Red Insignia; the Cross for Road Merit of the Order of the 50th Anniversary (Venezuela) and the Knight's Cross for Merit of the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of Saint George. The list of mentions and distinctions of a civil and business nature is lengthy. A notable example is the "Man of the Year" prize awarded by the International Road Federation (IRF) in 1998.



interview

What are the objectives of MAPFRE's Road Safety Institute?

They boil down to one: to contribute to accident reduction. Logically, leadership of this field falls to the public bodies. Our actions are intended to raise awareness and educate. This may consist of educating children directly, spreading awareness in companies and tailoring programmes for young people. We neither impose fines nor repair roads, however we can contribute to knowledge of the regulations. As an example, we are currently developing a programme to improve immigrants' knowledge of traffic regulations. We do what we can to educate, communicate and carry out studies which we make available to the competent authorities on matters relating to infrastructure

among other actions. We then use our studies as a means to exercise public opinion, so that action is taken.

After making substantial progress recently, what is the current state of Spanish Road Safety?

I refuse to classify it as satisfactory when there are 3,200 fatalities annually, which is our approximate figure, including deaths in urban areas calculated 30 days after the event, however there are grounds for hope. This is the second time in Spain's history that in a five-year period accidents fall by 40%. The previous occasion was between 1990 and 1994. The situation continues to be dreadful and unacceptable, although it has improved, however it is still equally unacceptable in the United Kingdom or Sweden where

they have halved the fatalities per million inhabitants that we do.

Spain committed itself to reduce accidents within the framework of an agreement with the European Union.

This agreement is aimed at reducing the accident rate and traffic accident deaths by 50% by 2010. However it seems to me that it is not guaranteed, because the exact percentage of the reduction achieved through each measure adopted is unknown. It is not very rigorous to set a concrete percentage, although there is one positive aspect: politicians are more committed to the campaign.

On this matter, I remind you that in your latest book you state that this



interview

campaign will continue “while there is a single death”.

Frequently, when we talk about lack of road safety, we forget that we are not speaking only of statistics, but also of human and social suffering. There is also the financial cost, although this is secondary. When insurance compensates, in its reparatory role, there is something that is irreparable: damage to morale. Here's something to ponder: I believe that the view in Spain is beginning to change, because if there are approximately 120,000 accidents with casualties annually, what we cannot allow is that lack of road safety represents a problem in 120,000 individual cases, but rather a social problem of the first magnitude. It is beginning to be accepted that this is something that concerns us all and consequently there is a mounting call for joint social responsibility for road safety. In our Institute, all our programmes are governed by this idea: joint responsibility. It is more than a mere slogan. The sooner we are aware of the problem, the sooner we can take action to resolve it or at least reduce it.

From a political perspective, members of parliament have taken some initiatives, such as setting up a Parliamentary Committee on Road Safety. Is this useful?

The Committee began working in the previous parliament and was very effective, thanks especially to the dedication of its ex-Chairman, Jordi Llané. The present Committee is chaired by Emilio Olabarria, who is also taking the task very seriously. A couple of years ago, when we delivered the Green Book on Road Safety to Congress, one of the requests we made was that the



Committee become permanent, which would give it more authority.

Does the Committee make proposals or carry them out?

The Road Safety Committee has no legislative authority and draft laws relating to it are processed by the corresponding Committee which is normally that of the Home Office – a radical reform of the Road Safety Law is currently under consideration. It does, however, have the power to make legislative proposals which are also similarly processed in the parliamentary Committee (Home Office, to continue with the current example). There is no doubt that were it to enjoy full legislative authority its actions would be more effective. I don't want this to be

interpreted as minimizing its importance, because it has been, and remains, tremendously significant. Points on the driving licence is a case in point. The legislation that reformed the Road Safety Law was handled in the Home Office Committee, however the advantage that the Committee on Road Safety has is that it is easier, albeit through non-binding agreements, to establish a basis for consensus. The Congress Committee really incentivizes and promotes initiatives.

Is there usually agreement between politicians of different persuasions?

In this case, yes. In the previous parliament there was wholehearted agreement about the law of points on the licence developed by the Committee



interview



Specialist prosecution for Road Safety

What's your opinion on the role of specialist prosecution for Road Safety offences? Does it make people aware that laws are broken behind the wheel and this may result in death?

The purpose of specialist prosecution for Road Safety offences is not to make the public aware, but rather to attract the prosecutors' attention so that they may act accordingly. The last meeting of prosecutors had quite an impact, because they were reminded to proceed not only against drivers, but also against local administrations, officials and contractors who fail in their obligations of road maintenance and design. Specialist prosecutions are

pushing the area prosecutors to be more active.

Is its function more to penalize rather than educate?

In the case of the prosecutor, yes. I think there's a false debate. Every sanction whether it's administrative or criminal has a mainly educational purpose. In Criminal Law the idea of prevention and social rehabilitation is predominant. By that I mean the sanction is not only to punish the transgressor, but is intended to set an example so that others do not act in the same way. Once completed, the next step is the social rehabilitation of the individual.

on Road Safety, although subsequently, as already mentioned, it was processed by the Home Office Committee. It was also present initially in a draft agreement, although the parliamentary processing then became more complicated and the consensus broke down. It seems now as though there is a desire to re-establish it, however processing the Road Safety Law is a hugely complex undertaking, because it is so wide-ranging.

As Chairman of Fundación MAPFRE's Road Safety Institute, what is your role vis-à-vis this Committee of the Chamber of Deputies?

I have been summoned on several occasions as a person whose opinion they wish to hear; the last time was on

17 December last. In the current parliament the Committee is going to place special emphasis on Road Safety within the corporate environment. It's easy to explain by giving an example. The first time we visited a car plant, we saw many notices on risk prevention in the workplace, but not a single one on Road Safety; traffic accidents, whether in-itinere or en route to work, make up 50% of the fatalities in accidents at work. In spite of this, companies do not perceive it as a risk to be avoided. As a result, the Executive Committee of Fundación MAPFRE's Road Safety Institute decided to bring Road Safety into the working environment, to companies and industrial estates, and this will be the principal focus of its activity in 2009.

What will it consist of?

We plan to draw up a wide-ranging programme. The core action will be centred on Internet training and information, which, however, will be presented as a series of incentives. It goes beyond an e-learning programme and represents the initiation of a forum for exchanging views and having discussions with companies, business associations and trade unions. It will have a database of regulations applicable to all.

Does the Congress Committee see the need for this initiative and does it seek legislative support?

If a private initiative is backed by a

interview

Congress Committee it tends to progress well. In fact, this year, I want the first presentation to be made to the

Committee. To some degree, it will be set in motion by the peoples' representatives. All they can do to

promote it will benefit the society they represent. We aim to do a series of local presentations, which will be

Road Safety campaign in the European and American workplace

Is this an exclusive initiative of Fundación MAPFRE or does it involve the whole insurance sector?

It is an initiative of our Fundación. And so it should be to ensure independence, however the benefits are open to all. We will make the material available to any company or insurer who wishes to use it.

For how long will the campaign last and what aims do you hope to achieve?

We want the business world to be aware that Road Safety concerns everyone with whom it works. The accident rate on journeys to work accounts for 50%, but it is not the only figure. In the service sector it varies, but between 75% and 90% of accidents at work are traffic-related, because it is unusual for an office activity to be inherently dangerous. There are also many accidents en route to work. The campaign's big challenge is for all companies to recognize that it is a common problem and include it in their safety programmes.

After setting the campaign in motion, when will it be transferred to the Latin American countries where MAPFRE is present? What

is the situation in those countries as regards road safety?

The campaign is going to be there from the outset. The business perception of traffic accidents as accidents at work has the same connotations as in Spain. The campaign was conceived for operation via the Internet and it has no time limit. We will work continually to expand and improve the website. In future, at least, it will remain on the web. It is necessary that it be for an indefinite period because companies are dynamic and rotate their personnel. We are looking to concentrate on a number of areas, of which this is one.

Latin America is the recipient of all this, which reminds me that we have to be extremely careful with the language so that it is compatible with the Spanish that is spoken on the other side of the Atlantic. Usually even more refined than that spoken here. We want to extend this experience based on the fact that the content is the same.

In which Latin American countries is there a more developed awareness of Road Safety?

The world is evolving at a tremendous pace. In Argentina, for example, which

has a highly federal structure, and where there is no central register of drivers or vehicles, the National Agency on Road Safety has nevertheless just been set up. It is an indication of how things are changing. In Madrid on 23rd and 24th February 2009 the first Latin American Meeting on Road Safety was held. Our most notable Road Safety presence is in Argentina, Mexico, Venezuela and Brazil. All countries where there are MAPFRE companies, however, are joining in progressively.

Do the insurance companies with headquarters in the US, which compete with MAPFRE in these markets, have any interest in this matter?

Not that I know of. However I say that with some caution. Whereas we attempt to work in a reasonable coordinated manner, but also independently of government in Spain, in Latin America things are different. We are obliged to rely heavily on governments, inter alia, because when in the past we have presented some types of material, we have been told that it is the first time that it has been done in the country. It has happened to me in at least four countries. That is my personal experience, at any rate.



interview

accompanied by technical discussions where we shall meet representatives of business associations, trade unions and leading companies. The goal is to increase awareness. The campaign will have two types of target: firstly the workers and then the corporate governing bodies. We will get collaboration from accident insurance mutuals and preventive bodies.

How are the Road Safety campaigns divided up? Which have been carried out to date?

We are active in four large sectors: children, young persons, adults and older people. The Parliamentary Committee has had a less systematic approach, and so its interest in corporate Road Safety surprised me. It has been portrayed to them as the serious problem that it really is. There are some 250,000 children working on the educational programmes with our material, and this is an important figure. Furthermore, amongst the groups we have, and the material in use, there are at least 12,000 families

involved. Older people as drivers have other difficulties. Apart from being knocked down, to which they are subjected, they have a different view of their driving potential. They are sensible people, however, and when they begin to feel uncomfortable behind the wheel, there is a high incidence of giving up driving. Their main problem is as pedestrians, because of difficulties of perception, sight and hearing. With regard to adults, this year we are concentrating our efforts on the corporate world. There are also some programmes under way for young people, which tend to be recurring.

Do you know of institutes or foundations that do similar work to yours? Are they related to insurance companies?

In Europe there is International Road Safety (PRI), which is the private association with the most members. It is supported principally by insurance companies. In most European countries it is the insurance companies that are behind road safety, however there are

schemes of all types. The Spanish representative in PRI is the Directorate General of Traffic. ■



Summary of a Road Safety campaign in the workplace

- ▶ Throughout the world, 1.5 million people die annually in traffic accidents.
- ▶ More than 50 million people are injured.
- ▶ It is the second cause of death in persons under 30.
- ▶ There are two types of traffic accident that are viewed as work-related:
 - ▶ Accidents "in itinere" or en route to work
 - ▶ Accidents during a work-related trip
- ▶ The seriousness of the injuries and the deaths from this type of accident is higher than the average for the remainder of work-related accidents.
- ▶ It is estimated that one out of every two deaths in work-related accidents is caused by a road accident.
- ▶ The increment in sectors such as services means that this type of accident is increasing sharply.