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The Kremlin, Moscow

## Opening Remarks at a Session of the State Council Presidium "On the Situation with the Traffic Safety and Measures to Perfect Governmental Administration in the Field of Traffic Safety"

PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN: Dear colleagues,

Today we will be discussing a problem that was signalled in the Annual Presidential Address and that everyone recognises as a very serious issue: the safety situation on Russia's roads.

I think that it is justified that we should discuss this issue at this level, with the heads of the Russian regions, because it is only through coordinating the efforts of the different ministries and agencies and the regional leaders that we will be able to have any real impact on the negative situation we have at the moment in the area of road safety.

To give you some tragic figures – you already know them, but I will just refresh your memories – more than 200,000 traffic accidents were registered over the last year in Russia, causing the deaths of almost 35,000 people and injuring 250,000 people.

Many of the victims of these accidents are children and young people, people under 40. It is the most active working-age group who are losing their lives and their health in these accidents. These are irreplaceable losses for us and for our country's future. This is undermining our society's potential and attacking its demographic reserves.

Material damage resulting from road accidents over the last four years comes to more than 2 percent of GDP. This is an astronomical figure and is equivalent to hundreds of billions of roubles that the country, the economy and Russian families are losing.

The level of road safety depends on a whole number of different factors. The number of accidents is only partly linked to the overall increase in the number of cars on the roads. There is a link, of course, but it is only a partial one. Looking at the figures we see that the number of vehicles on the roads increased by 9.2 percent from 1997-2004, but the number of traffic accidents rose by more than 30 percent over this same period.

Analysis shows that the overwhelming majority of traffic accidents are caused by drivers and pedestrians deliberately breaking the road rules. We face the problem of a very poor road safety culture that goes hand in hand with irresponsibility and legal nihilism.

It is clear that simply toughening the punishments and increasing the fines is not enough to fix the situation.

I think that the first step we need to take is to toughen the standards for drivers' training. Getting a driver's licence today is a mass-scale commercial enterprise. The driving exam is often no more a mere formality: just pay the money and take your licence.

It is equally important to launch serious road safety information and promotion measures. What we are talking about here is developing and promoting a culture of self-discipline, respect for the law and consideration for the rights of others. And, of course, there should be no tolerance in our society for boorish behaviour, reckless driving and daredevilry on our roads, nor for driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

The media and educational establishments, including the pre-school education system, should all be involved in this information work. We also need to make more use of the possibilities offered by public social advertising.

Russia began seeing a boom in the amount of private transport later than other European countries and its road infrastructure is already proving insufficient for the current volume of traffic. The volume of traffic on the roads is only set to grow in the coming years and specialists estimate that by the 2020 the traffic burden on the roads will be ten times higher than what they were designed to handle. There is an undoubted need therefore, for serious long-term investment in road construction and upgrading.

But at the same time there are also issues that we need to and can resolve right now. In particular, Russian towns and villages have a very poorly developed system of pedestrian crossings, and essential road signs are often absent. The traffic police also come in for some justified criticism for the standard of their work in managing road traffic.

Of course, all of this also requires money, but considerably less money than what is needed to fund road construction. As I already said, we do not need to spend large amounts of budget money to start having a positive impact on the road safety situation. We need to develop a clear system of powers and responsibilities for the authorities and the relevant agencies in the matter of effective planning, traffic management and control of the situation on the roads.

Of course, lower accident rates should be the main criteria for evaluating the work of the road services and the traffic police.

The next set of issues is toughening up the technical requirements for vehicles' passive and active safety systems, be it for Russian-made or imported vehicles. In this regard we need to ensure we have a balanced technical policy so as not to destabilise the automobile market.

I must mention another issue too, that of the first aid provided to road accident victims. The high fatality rates on our roads are due to a considerable extent to the fact that first aid is often late in coming. As you know, we are allocating considerable funds for buying ambulances and equipping them with the necessary equipment and communications systems as part of our national projects programme. We also need to think today about creating a modern system of medical aviation and rapid transport of accident victims to places where they can receive qualified medical help. Drivers, police, Emergency Situations Ministry personnel and employees of the other services first to arrive at the accident scene should all know how to provide first aid.

Overall, improving road safety should become an independent area of state policy. Unfortunately, as we have to recognise, there is a real need for us to concentrate our attention on this area.

We need to create suitable management and coordination mechanisms in this area and to clearly delimit the respective responsibilities of the different levels of state power and the different agencies. It is also important to reinforce the legislation in the road and transport sector and to fill in the gaps that remain.

As I am aware, a working group has prepared a detailed analysis of the different factors that affect road safety and has drawn up a whole series of proposals. I would like to thank everyone who took part in this work and I now give the floor to Alexander Leonidovich Chernogorov.

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