



# Traffic and Roadway Safety Education and Campaigning

## Cyprus Northern Part

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Roadway Safety Media Workshop Final  
Report



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## ROAD SAFETY MEDIA WORKSHOP FINAL REPORT

Moderator : C. Tamer Altunay  
Venue : Merit Hotel, Nicosia  
Date : 10 March 2011  
Time : 9:30 - 12:30

### Why Did We Organise A Media Workshop?

As explained in the Communication Strategy, a look at the media atmosphere show that traffic accidents take a large part in written and visual press in Cyprus' Northern part. However, the news coverage is mostly focused on the tragic results with no mention of the accident causes or leaving any mention of the causes in the background. Considering the leading role and the power of the press on the public opinion, it is obvious that this attitude in news coverage does not serve the traffic and road safety issue. By training and raising the awareness of media workers on this issue, and showing them the sources, this attitude can be changed.

### What we targeted

The objective with the media workshop was to; raise sensitivity in written and visual media on the solutions to the road safety issue, bring up elements that will incentivise positive behaviour in the public and to open healthier communication channels between reporters and stakeholders.

### What was our method?

We decided on a meeting format which would encourage participation. This would ensure the committee representative and the press workers to define their respective expectations from each other. We also wanted to use this opportunity to draw attention to the work and effort that is currently undertaken in Cyprus' Northern part regarding roadway safety.

### How was the participation profile?

The reporters who participated in the Media Workshop were chosen both from reporters who have been working for a long time in this profession and reporters new to the profession. However, the majority were reporters who were new in this profession. Considering the represented media organisations and their circulation and ratings, we believe the participation level was satisfying.

### What we talked about, what we said?

The meeting started off with everyone presenting themselves and telling how long they have been in the reporting profession.

This was followed with a short film depicting how traffic accidents are depicted in the news. The film was used as an illustration of how the coverage of traffic related news were given,

how headings were given, and how in the Northern part of Cyprus, the reporting attitude on traffic accidents where predominantly focuses on consequences rather than accident causes. After the film, we asked the reporters to describe the problems they encountered during their reporting processes.

This was followed with the Committee representative, Mr. Mehmet Avci, sharing his views on the media's news approach.

The next session of the meeting the roadway safety projects run in Northern part of Cyprus, financed by the European Union were presented. This session was moderated by our side, with Mr. Mehmet Avci providing the detailed information about the various projects.

The Media Workshop was closed with our presentation to the reporters about what has been and what will be done in the framework of the Roadway Safety Education and Campaigning Project. This was also an opportunity to relate to the media workers on how they could take advantage of our resources and materials to be used in their news.

#### Reporters Tell Their Side Of The Story

Reporters have no difficulty in following the hospitalisation process nor the legal processes when someone is severely injured in a traffic accident.

However, reporters main complaint is not being able to get adequate information about the accident causes. According to them, one reason is because "The legal process is about to start and so the police are cautious about giving information". Another reason they show is the police's obstructive attitude, quoting: "On our arrival at some accident sites, we are told not to write about this accident, saying "because this is that person" or " we won't be reporting it".

The deficiency of information collection at the moment of accident, means accident causes cannot be passed on to the public. One reporter explained the situation as follows:

"We are unable to get information at the moment of the accident as well. You do your research at the accident site, where a friend of the driver says some alcohol had been consumed. The police tells us "Don't write that, we will let you know through the press officer". If the driver has indeed been drinking reporting this would add dimension to the news. Because it's all in the hands of the police, when you call the pres officer, most of what you get are standardised statements and clichés".

Sometimes some of the news can also be obstructed by some influential people. One of the reporters told us this specific case:

"One day I caught someone on camera; he was talking on the mobile phone while driving. He drove up to me and said ' How dare you shoot me, I'm a referee, I was getting some information on the phone'. Next thing I knew, he called the channel and my shooting was not broadcast."

Another reporter gave this example:

“There was a motorcycle accident the evening on the Nicosia-Kyrenia highway. It was around 9-10 in the evening, the newspaper was about to be printed, I was trying to get information from the police but couldn’t. If left to the next day, it would be too late. I was trying to find out the ages of the kids, it was 16-17 years. Then I would make a heading of “No drivers licence!” The press has to print it. The families need to be investigated. Why do the families give kids this age motorcycles? This is a small community, everyone knows everyone. We ought not to be worrying about ‘this is difficult for the family, let’s not print this etc.’, but instead do our duty of informing of the public.

The reporters explained of how they reach technical analysis and evaluations after accidents:

“The police extract from their own report and only release limited information with the media. Only when in fatal accident is the press informed about how many years this person is convicted to. If it is a minor accident, this will be judged in lower courts and no one will find out anything. Even worse is that the media also loses interest in these cases.”

Reporters are sensitive on the roadway safety issue. They are also interested in the legal processes after the accidents. But they do have some criticism towards the processes of the legal system. This was one incident they witnessed:

“There are big deficiencies in the legal system after the accidents. On one incident at Çatalköy (Agios Epiktitos), there were a total of 9 violations; the driver had no licence, the periodic vehicle inspection was missing, the vehicle was not insured, the vehicle was not owned by the driver, the driver had been driving crazily, endangering pedestrians and caused a fatality. At the end of the day, he gets convicted of 9 different violations and gets one year in jail. After 6 months the punishment is reduced and this person is about to get released next month. This was a fatal accident and the person who caused this went to jail like a holiday.”

Another issue criticised by the reporters was the lack of public inspection. This was the example given:

“I saw this accident recently; the driver’s one arm was missing. But the car was not marked with a disabled sign”

The president of the Traffic Accidents Prevention Association, Mr Mehmet Avcı, underlined that some expressions used by the reporters to explain the accident causes can be misinterpreted by the public, saying::

“Using a statement like ‘The driver lost steering control’ actually means ‘poor driver’. Like it’s not the driver’s fault, he/she just lost control. This gives the wrong message and victimises the driver. I don’t think this is the right way to write a heading. If a person hasn’t been able to take a road bend, then it is because he/she didn’t have control over the vehicle. A driver is supposed to be able to take a road bend. So what it really means is that the driver has not done his/her duty. The expression should be ‘wasn’t able to take the road bend’. It is not the vehicle which is faulty, it is the driver.”

Mr. Avcı stated that he was aware of the difficulties in the reporters working conditions, and that they may not be able to collect information about the accident causes due to time pressure. However, this should not detain them from following up on the story the following days and gave the following example:

“At new year, a tanker accident on the Famagusta road was reported in the media. The news stated the driver lost steering control, the vehicle turned over and the driver was reported dead. Two days later, the police and I found out that the driver had been drinking. So in fact, the driver of the tanker had been drinking during working hours and was driving under influence.”

### Conclusion

The results of this workshop will show itself in a long time period. However the results that may be projected today are as follows:

With the information given by Mr. Mehmet Avcı, reporters have gained some advantages in reaching news and data sources.

On the other hand, as the Committee representative, Mr. Avcı collected and listened to reporters' complaints and suggestions, and will therefore be able transfer these to the relevant organisations/institutions.

Reporters were informed in detail about projects financed by the European Union in the Northern Part of Cyprus, and know how to follow these projects in future.

They were also made aware that they can use the material produced by the Traffic and Roadways Safety Education and Campaigning Project as a resource for their news. Every material produced in the frame of the Traffic and Roadway Safety Education and Campaigning project is an important source to be used by the media in transferring information to the public. The brochures, training events, posters and billboards are important tools to relate positive and behaviour-changing messages to the public. This way, reporters will be able to amplify the content of their news stories with the materials that we have produced.