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Road Safety in Greece: A Matter of Discussion

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Key points

In our days, despite the fact that European Union has taken important measures to improve road safety in the Member States, Greece remains in the last positions concerning road safety, on the basis of fatal injuries. The activity of European institutions, such as European Commission, is noticeable during the period 2010-18, as measures has been proposed focused on improving infrastructure, national cooperating, increasing awareness and updating regulations. Although, road safety has been repeatedly found on the priorities of the Union's policies, significant problems arise in the implementation of policies in Greece, as traffic education, road legislation and infrastructure, are still far from satisfactory.

There is an urgent need for measures to be taken that will aim at:

- Improving the lives of pedestrians and drivers
- Improving the road environment
- Improving the vehicles
- Improving the post-accident action

This policy brief will analyze Greece's current road safety situation, outline current policy, highlight its weaknesses in Greece and propose new policies.

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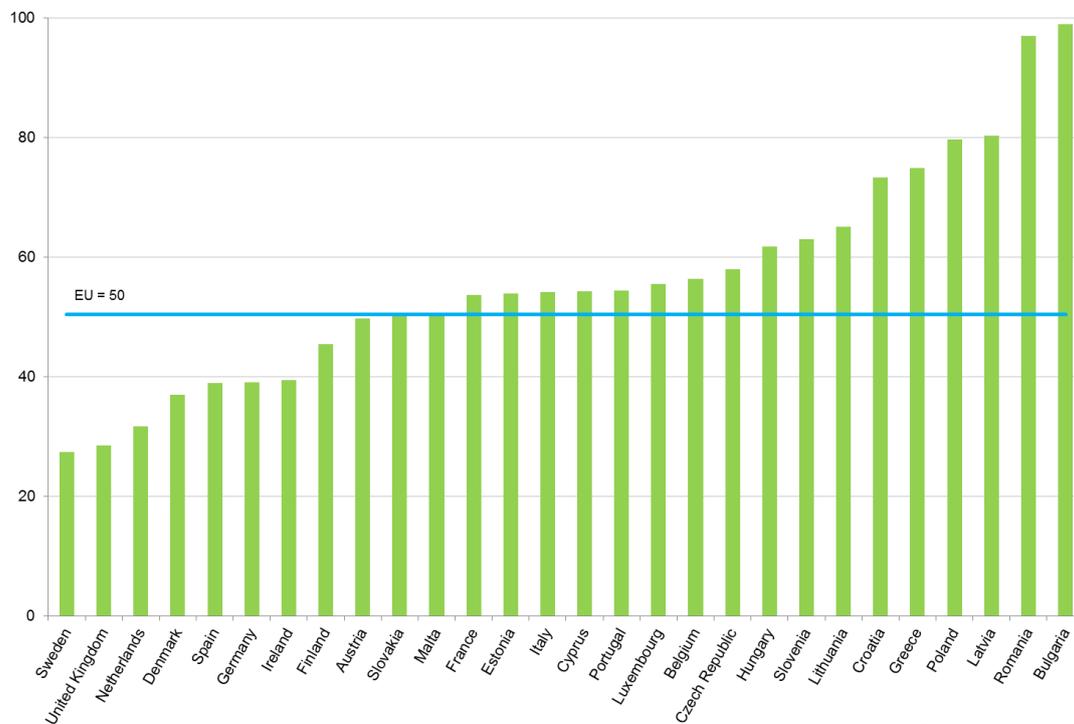


Introduction

THE CURRENT ROAD SAFETY SITUATION

The statistics, which portray the safety of European roads, rank Greece in the first places concerning the accidents on the Greek roads and the number of those that were fatal. A typical illustration of the phenomenon is the fact that in 2016 the average of the number of deaths from accidents in the countries of Europe was fifty per million inhabitants (Figure 1). However, Greece ranks 5th among the European countries, as it exceeded the average.

Figure 1: Road traffic victims per million inhabitants in the EU Member States, 2016



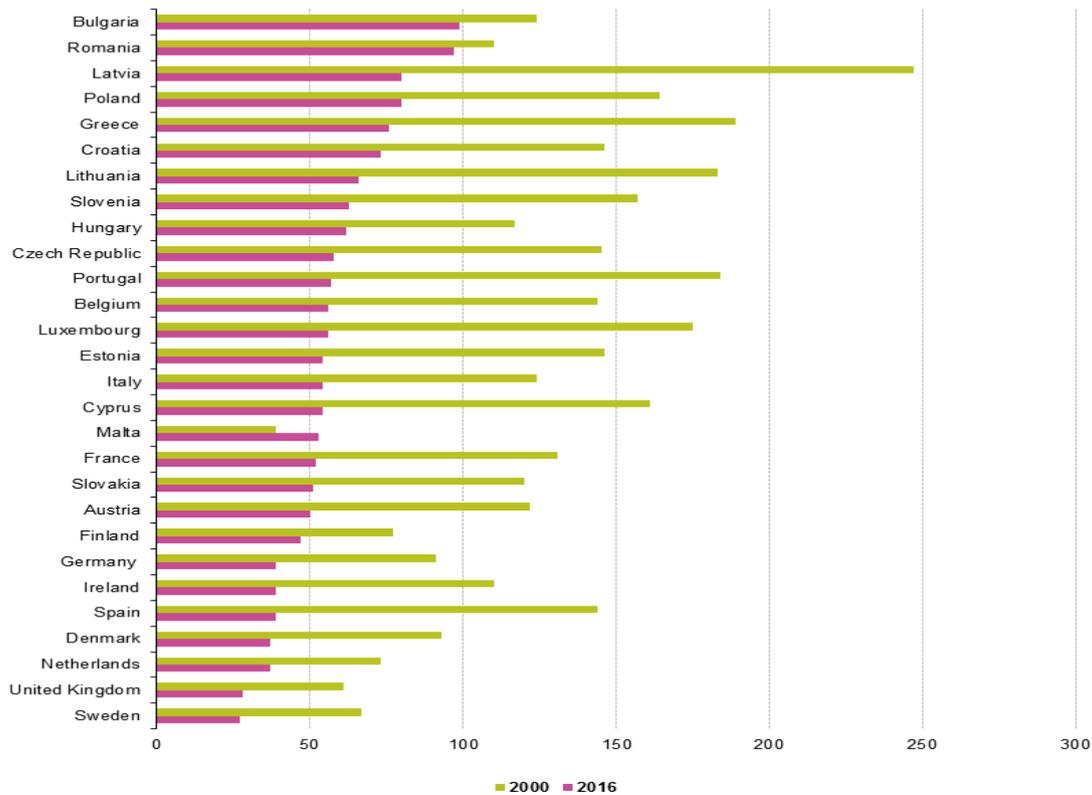
Source: Eurostat

Despite its high rates, Greece has managed to dramatically reduce mortality rates in its national roads from 2010 to 2017, through the implementation of European and National measures. Statistics show a 41% reduction due to the imposition measures taken by the Commission, the other European institutions and the government on improving infrastructure, road education and vehicle safety. In addition, from 2000 to 2010 there was a fall of 34%, while from 2010 to 2016 there was a fall of 38%. This reduction, though important, does not change Greece's position in the ranking of the countries of the European Union, which proves the country's low return on road safety (Figure 2).



Figure 2

Number of persons killed in road traffic accidents per million inhabitants, 2000 and 2016



Source: Eurostat

More specifically, according to the Greek police, in 2016, 805 people were killed in road accidents, 855 were seriously injured, and 12,798 were slightly injured. In 2017, numbers were apparently reduced, with 730 deaths, 704 serious injuries and 12,070 slight injuries. The numbers remain significantly high (Figure 3).

Greek roads are a point of reference for many deaths per year due to a variety of causes. First of all, most deaths have occurred due to crashes, followed by death by vehicle deflection. Pedestrian injuries and collisions follow, while capsizing of the vehicles settle in the last position (Figure 4).

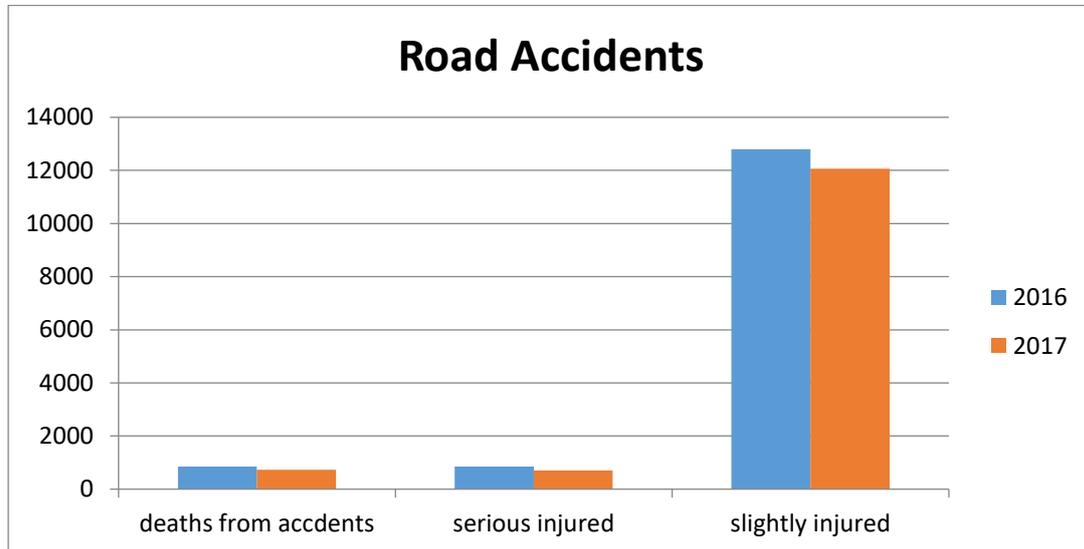
Mortality in Greek roads is mainly driven by the distraction of drivers, the high speed they are developing and the responsibility of pedestrians defying the rules. Also, other causes are the violation of priority and red light (Figure 5).

Lastly, with regard to the types of vehicles involved in road accidents, the Greek police, with figures from 2016, first classify passenger cars. Motorcycles and trucks are



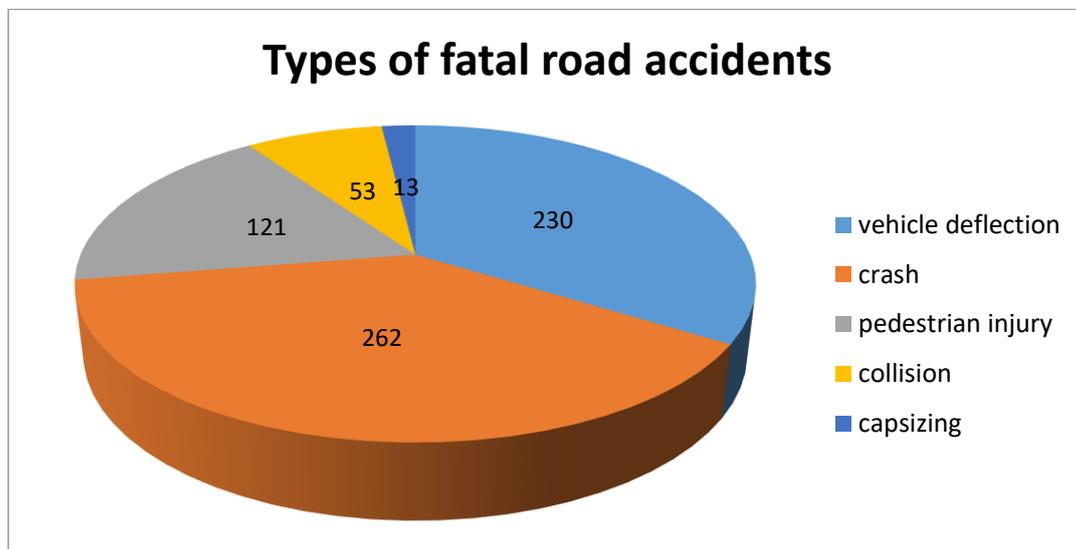
following, while motor bikes and buses are in the last places.

Figure 3



Source: Hellenic police

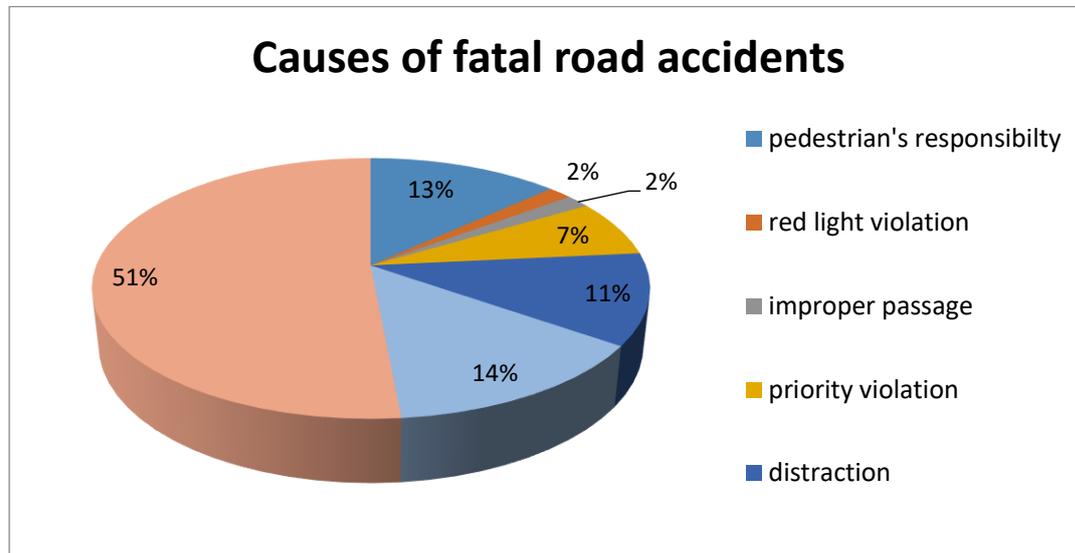
Figure 4



Source: Hellenic police



Figure 5



Source: Hellenic police

Current policies and what does not work for Greece

The European Union and the Greek authorities have tried, with their policy, to increase safety on Greek roads. That measures are often put into practice, however they have difficulties in establishing themselves in the Greek culture. To begin with, European Commission, as part of the "Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" has underlined the importance of taking measures in order to reduce road accidents (Valletta Declaration). The goals include:

- improving the road infrastructure of each country to be achieved through their cooperation
- road education to prevent dangerous acts from drivers
- cooperation of the European institutions with the countries

Every country is committed:

- to strive to reduce the number of fatal accidents by half
- to seek the cooperation of all the institutions of the country dealing with road safety
- to include cycling in their infrastructure projects
- to decrease permissible speed limits in areas of high risk
- to decreasing rescue time
- to conduct inquiries to clarify the causes of the problem
- to reduce by half the number of serious injuries in EU



- to develop measures for victims of accidents, with the aim of rehabilitation and healing
- to increase funding for road safety programs
- to improve education and culture on road safety issues
- to improve vehicle's safety

By adopting the European Union measures, Greece has a strategic plan from 2011 to 2020 to reduce accidents. These objectives are mainly aimed at vehicle safety and infrastructure improvement. The financial crisis of recent years has limited the implementation of road safety measures, but in the last 4 years there has been significant progress.

Within these frameworks, new laws have been put in place to promote controls and, in general, mobility and safety in Greek roads. Greece is gradually following the European legislation to improve the vehicles, in order to meet the safety requirements. Additionally, efforts have been made to reformulate the road code, in order to reduce the permissible speed limits on the Greek road network. At the same time, Greek drivers reduce their speed limit by their own, a fact that shows improvement in their road behavior. Furthermore, the authorities have mobilized and have set up many information campaigns, road training centers and others, while at the same time many Non-Governmental Organizations and the Road Safety institution Panos Mylonas put efforts to increase road safety awareness. Also, despite the fact that due to the unfavorable economic situation in Greece, the government cannot allocate large amounts of money from its road network, from 2014 a great improvement of the road network has been achieved as many kilometers have been rebuilt.

Despite the fact that many goals and measures have been put in place, Greece has not set up a solid road safety policy, as well as funding for road safety is very limited. The reason why European policies cannot find a fertile ground in Greece is both economic and behavioral. The limited economic development of the Greeks, combined with the lack of funding from the European institutions are enough for the low performance of the country in this sector. Greek's road behavior plays a major role in poor road safety. Speeding is one of the main causes of road accidents in Greece. Also drink and drug driving dramatically increase the probability of a road accident, since in Greece the controls are few and scarce. Lastly, the limited use of seat belts and usage of phone are two important causes of road accidents.



Recommendations

The need to formulate a policy exclusively for Greece is imperative, as not all European policies adopted can go hand in hand with Greece's capabilities. Some recommendations that can be adapted in Greek society are:

Improvement of drivers and pedestrians

- improving the examination system of applicant drivers
- improving the educational system of applicant drivers
- citizens' information campaigns
- traffic education for adults and children
- sensitization of citizens

Improvement of roads

- improving road surfaces
- improving road lighting
- improving road signal
- improving road rules
- improving security barriers
- detection of hazardous areas of the road

Improvement of vehicle

- providing incentives to acquire security equipment
- sensor systems for avoiding collision
- upgrading of annual vehicle checks
- improving security into the vehicle

Post- accident confrontation improvement

- upgrading of emergency units
- ensuring mandatory and immediate treatment in hospitals
- training judges on road accidents
- recruit expert in road accidents
- more frequent vehicle insurance checks



Improvement of police presence

- improving the system of Immediate intervention
- upgrading detection equipment
- use of electronic means of detecting infringements
- recruitment of police and traffic police officials

These measures, if integrated into a policy, can dramatically improve the performance of Greece in the field of road safety. These measures are proposed on the basis of the established European measures but have been shaped by the strengths and weaknesses of Greece.



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Statistics are taken by 'Eurostat', 'Hellenic Police and 'Hellenic Statistical Authority