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Motorcycles: How Long Will We Still Be Mourning Victims Unjustly?

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Key points

Especially road accidents, in which motorcycles are involved, are one of the most common causes of death and permanent disability of their riders. It is an international phenomenon, but it differentiates its appearance rates taking into account the flexibility of the relevant legal framework, road conditions and the education and responsibility of citizens of each country.

This policy brief focuses on the actual dimension of the specific problem of motorcycle accidents, as it exists in Greece. Moreover, it utilizes and cites the official statistics published on the issue, which demonstrate the need of an immediate solution and it presents concrete proposals to improve the situation. Specifically, the main recommendations it suggests are;

- removal of license plates and driver's license and increase of the existing fines even in case of infringements that are considered to have minor importance by the motorcyclists.
- ex officio criminal prosecutions and/or imprisonment.
- public projections of real-time motorcycle accident shots for awareness.

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Introduction

The traffic of motorcycles of every cubic capacity and category is constantly growing, especially during the economic crisis. Particularly in cities, these means of transportation offer a solution to the problem of the increasing congestion, parking and higher travel costs of cars. Users can be either motorcycle hobbyists or young people and professionals who use them exclusively for their daily journeys.

As motorcycles balance on two wheels, they are much less stable than cars. Moreover, they are less visible on the road due to their smaller volume, and they leave their riders uncovered at any impact. Therefore, they offer much less protection to their riders than cars offer to their passengers.

Motorcycles are involved in a disproportionately high percentage of serious and / or fatal accidents, most of which occur in cities and are due to human error. At the EU level, fatal motorcycle accidents account for 15% of all fatalities. Road accidents cause great suffering to the victims and their families and irreparable demographic and economic problems to the state. Many of the injuries, very often in the head, end up in lifelong disabilities or disrupt seriously the lives of the victims and their families, while the human lives that are lost are invaluable. In addition, the financial cost of medical care, rehabilitation and disability retirement is a major burden for the country. Available statistics at EU level show that economic costs are estimated annually at 2% of EU GDP.

What has been done till now

At national and European level, efforts are being made to combat this phenomenon.

For example;

- At national level:

The Law 4530/2018, "*Transport arrangements and other provisions*", published in the Government Gazette (Government Gazette A '56 / volume A/ 30-03-2018), includes, inter alia, amendments to the Road Traffic Code. **The new law introduces increased penalties, taking into account the risk profile of each offense and the financial situation of each offender.** Particularly for the non-use of helmets, administrative measures of deprivation of driver's license and vehicle placards for 60 days are provided. A fine is imposed as well, depending on the infringer's income.

- Correspondingly at European level:

- ✓ **Theoretical and practical training.** Then, issue of driving license **initially** for a moped & **progressive** access to a larger cubic and class motorcycle license.



- ✓ **Installation of high-tech safety equipment** in motorcycles and mopeds, such as smart ABS.

- ✓ **Government subsidy for road education programs for children of all ages**, for their education and awareness on road safety issues.

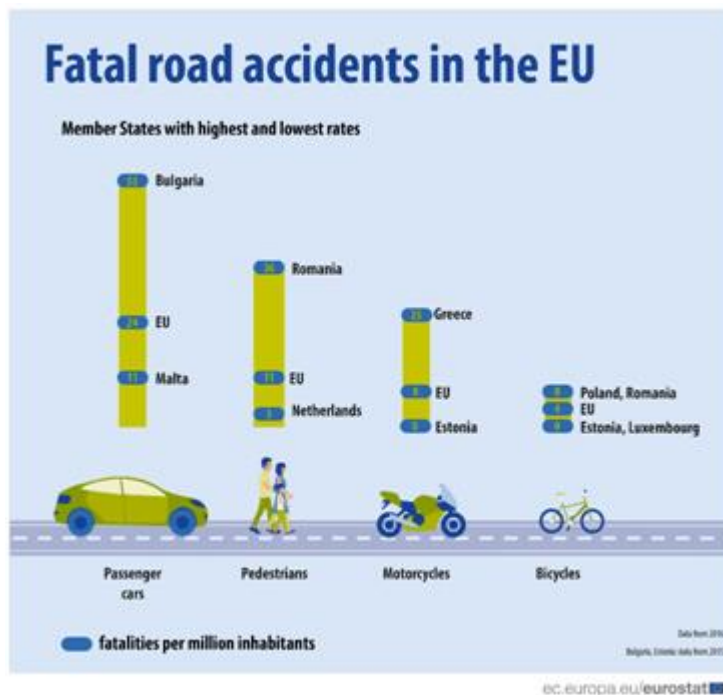
- ✓ **Elaboration of research programs** for the increased road safety of motorcyclists by applying new technologies to intelligent transport systems (VRUITS) or intelligent vehicle restraint systems (SMART RRS safety guards).

In spite of all these efforts, violations of regulations by motorcyclists are multiple. On a daily basis, serious injuries and fatal accidents occur, happenings that are either reported to the media or we see right in front of us or we experience in our close environment.

Facing the reality

Riders and motorcyclists account for 28% of all road fatalities in the world, and this percentage is even higher in some regions, for example, 43% in Southeast Asia and 36% in the Western Pacific.

It is inconceivable that despite the fact that there are ways to be effectively protected against such sad situations, people underestimate the visible dangers, on the grounds that nothing will happen to them. The lack of awareness of these risks is a key factor of this situation and reflects the irresponsibility of a high proportion of motorcyclists. As shown in the diagram below, in 2016 Greece was ranked first, among the countries of the European Union, in fatal motorcycle accidents per million inhabitants. This is a fact that must concern us and motivate us to change mindset.



The Greek Police published an analysis of the fatal accidents that occurred during the first half of 2018. In absolute terms, two-wheeled accidents account for 31.3% of the deaths and they are in the second place, after the fatal accidents caused by cars, at a rate of 53.8%.

However, taking into account that the number of cars that move in the Greek territory and the kilometers traveled by them are much more than the number of motorcycles, the common sense estimates that the percentage of fatal motorcycle accidents is much higher than that of cars. These percentages and reasoning justify the urgent need to find a solution.



Head injuries are the main cause of death and serious disability for motorcyclists. The proper use of a helmet can lead to a 42% reduction of the risk of fatal injuries and a 69% reduction of the risk of serious head injuries.

The correct use of the helmet is itself a very important means of preventing road deaths. The best practice for all laws that enforce helmets for motorcyclists includes the requirement, with no exception, for drivers and passengers, to wear a helmet on all roads and in any case. Moreover, the correct fit and attachment of the helmet to the head should be required.

It should be noted that across the whole of Greece, during a week (24-30 September 2018), Traffic Controls were carried out on 2,742 motorcycles, with which 1,598 violations for not wearing helmet were identified, i.e. more than the half of the motorcyclists checked, violated the Road Traffic Code. In addition, it was noted that the vast majority of offenses occurred by people driving low-powered motorcycles, under the simple logic of offenders that these motorcycles do not develop large and thus dangerous final speeds. Unfortunately, reality shows that the majority of serious incidents are related to motorcycles driven at low speed next to our house or our work.

Recommendations

As an active citizen of Greece and EU I make the following suggestions, which, I believe, could contribute to the drastic reduction of motorcycle accidents:

1. In case of non-use of helmet by the driver, without a passenger on the motorcycle, a removal of registration plates and driver's license for one month, a fine of 700€ and record of points for one year in the point system of the competent Ministry should be imposed.

2. If a helmet is used by the driver, but it is not used by the passenger due to driver's negligence, he has to be punished by a removal of registration plates and driver's license for one year, a fine of 1,000€ and ex officio criminal prosecution for passenger exposure to deadly danger. Also, a fine of 200€ per adult passenger should

be added. Before the return of driver's license, a psychiatrist's examination of the driver should be envisaged. If the examination indicates irresponsibility of the driver, he must repeat the driving test to regain the driving license. If the violation is repeated within one year of regaining the driving license, it has to be withdrawn for five years and only after the expiration of the sentence it will be possible for him to repeat the driving test for a new regaining of the driving license.



- 3.** In case of **non-use of helmet by the driver and the passenger or in case of use of helmet only by the passenger**, all the relevant of suggestion 2 must be applied, but the fine will be 700€ for the driver.

- 4.** In case of **impromptu motorcycle races**, a removal of registration plates and driving license for one year, a fine of 3,000€ and ex officio criminal prosecution for a public exposure to mortal danger has to be imposed. If the violation is repeated within one year of the end of the sentence, the offender has to be punished by seizure of the motorcycle and imprisonment.

- 5.** In case of a **countercurrent movement**, the same penalty as in suggestion 1 has to be applied.

- 6.** In case of an **irregular overtaking**, the punishment must be a fine of 500€ and record of points for one year in the point system of the competent Ministry.

- 7.** In case of **alcohol test**, the permitted limit for motorcyclists has to be the half of that for car drivers.

- 8. Extensive projections** in giant screens and in the media **with real-time motorcycle accident shots**, taken from traffic management cameras, under the aegis of the competent Ministries, will surely make everyone more conscious.



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