

ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCILCONSEIL
ECONOMIQUE
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UNRESTRICTED

E/CONF.8/C.III/SR.6 Rev.1
21 November 1949

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ROAD AND MOTOR TRANSPORT

COMMITTEE III ON ROAD TRAFFIC

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE SIXTH MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 29 August 1949, at 10.15 AM

MASTER

10 JAN 1950

CHAIRMAN: Mr. MELLINI (Italy)

SECRETARY: Mr. CLARKE

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DISCUSSION OF DRAFT PROVISIONS FOR INSERTION IN A
CONVENTION ON ROAD AND MOTOR TRANSPORT PREPARED BY THE
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE (Item 4 of the Conference
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Article 15

Mr. TAYLOR (United Kingdom) presented verbally an amended draft of Article 15. The three main objects of the amendment were to ensure, first, that a time limit was specified which would give countries enough time to convert their existing signs; that the new system should be flexible, that was that it should be capable of being further developed as road traffic evolved; and that, as agreed during discussions in the Working Party of the Inland Transport Committee of the Economic Commission for Europe, the symbols given in the Annex should serve only as examples, which might be modified in detail so long as their fundamental character remained unchanged.

The CHAIRMAN considered that a definite time-limit should be fixed, and proposed a period of three years for Europe, and rather longer for countries outside Europe. With regard to flexibility, it might be possible to set up a central committee to make enquiries annually, whether the signs in use corresponded to traffic requirements. Excessive flexibility, however, presented some danger; modifications must correspond to international, not merely to local, requirements. The symbols to be used might be varied somewhat, but their shape and colour should remain uniform. He was not quite sure whether the idea of flexibility in the British proposal related to general development or to local variations.

Mr. ROSCIONI (Italy) suggested that the fixing of a time-limit fell within the competence of Committee II.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that Committee III would nevertheless have to give some indication of how long a change-over in the system of road signals might be expected to take.

Mr. MASLOG (Philippine Republic), supported the United Kingdom point of view. He thought that it might be possible to reach a compromise between the European and other systems of signs and signals.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that the Conference's task was to achieve the unification of traffic conditions. Countries outside Europe might be permitted a longer period of time in which to complete their conversion. But if States were to retain their national systems, the whole two years of preparatory work for the Conference would have been in vain.

Mr. BLOM-ANDERSEN (Denmark), agreeing that European countries would not require so much time for the conversion, as those outside Europe, suggested that a distinction might also be made between international trunk routes, on which the change-over could be effected within three years, and secondary roads, which would require a much longer period. Unless that distinction was made, Denmark might be obliged to defer ratification of the Convention.

Mr. ZACH (Czechoslovakia) agreed with the Chairman's views. He emphasised that an international system employing inscriptions in different languages would be quite impracticable; only symbols would be readily comprehensible to men of all countries.

Mr. TAYLOR (United Kingdom) stated that one of the objects of his amendment was to ensure that regional systems should be set up should it prove impossible to agree on a world system.

Mr. MASLOG (Philippines), thought that it might not be too difficult to work out a compromise solution. For example, signs used in the Philippines were very similar to those used in Europe, except that they used a diamond instead of a triangle, which left more space for the symbol and for any inscription necessary.

Mr. DIJKMANS van GUNST (Netherlands) was of the opinion that Article 15 did not bind all States to adopt a uniform system; it only specified that the system should be standard within each country.

Paragraph 6 of Article 15 went no farther than to express a hope that States would adopt the system of uniform signs and signals specified in Annex 4. While it was evident that the time was not yet ripe for the introduction of a world-wide system, it was essential that States forming a single unit in respect of traffic, for example, those of

Western Europe, should employ identical signs. The United Kingdom proposal was thus a step in the right direction.

The CHAIRMAN thought that the wording of the United Kingdom amendment which referred to "States which have common land frontiers" would mean that the United Kingdom itself would be left outside any European system; that would be disastrous in view of that country's importance in international traffic. That involved a question of principle which, if the United Kingdom representative insisted on his amendment, would have to be submitted to the Conference.

If accepted, the Netherlands interpretation would, he thought, reduce the significance of the Convention.

Mr. THIROT (France) pointed out that if international agreement was to be reached, individual countries must submit to a minimum of discipline by adopting the broad outlines of the system of signals given in the Annex. Within that frame-work some flexibility might be permitted, and was in fact provided for by paragraph 1 of Article 15, which used the words "as far as possible". He failed to understand the desire for a greater measure of flexibility, since paragraph 1 simply laid down that a new sign should conform with the system in use in the State in question. That State was therefore at liberty to adapt its signs generally to the needs of its population.

He supported the Danish proposal for different time limits for international trunk routes and for secondary roads.

Mr. CONNORS (United States of America) reminded the meeting that the Western Hemisphere had its own homogeneous system of road signs and signals, which differed somewhat from that of Europe. The countries of the Americas did not expect European countries to adopt that system, any more than they themselves expected to have to adopt the European system. The United States delegation, unlike the Netherlands delegation, considered that Article 15 laid a definite obligation on Contracting States. Therefore, being unable to accept Article 15 and Annex 4, it proposed that the two be placed in a supplementary protocol for separate signature.

The United States Government was most anxious to accede to the Convention, but the 48 States of the Union, each of which was autonomous

in the matter of traffic regulations, in company with other American countries had already evolved a uniform system which they were unwilling to abandon.

The CHAIRMAN thought that in view of its importance the United States proposal should be submitted to the Co-ordination Committee. While appreciating the fact that the Western hemisphere wished to maintain its own system of road signals he still felt that if the United States of America, in company, presumably with other countries, intended to accede to a Convention from which the Chapter on Signs and Signals had been deleted, it might be better if the Convention were confined to Europe alone.

He suggested, therefore, that the Committee discuss the Netherlands' interpretation of Article 15. However, he would first like to know whether a solution could be found which would bring the United Kingdom within the European bloc.

Mr. TAYLOR (United Kingdom) wished to correct the impression that the United Kingdom amendment had been submitted with the object of relieving the United Kingdom Government of the necessity of conforming with a European system of signs and signals. His Government, on the contrary, wished to accept Article 15 and Annex 4 and would like to see, if not world-wide, at least regional homogeneity achieved. He thought that if States with a common land frontier or "a substantial volume of road traffic" were specified, the inclusion of the United Kingdom would be ensured.

He himself did not believe that Article 15 gave individual States as much latitude as the Netherlands representative had assumed; he took the "new signs" referred to in paragraph 1 to mean entirely new signs, whereas the United Kingdom recommendations were concerned with those signs already specified in Annex 4.

Since the United Kingdom amendment had not yet been circulated, he proposed that discussion of it be deferred until the working paper was available.

Mr. HOMAYOUNFAR (Iran) associated himself with the views expressed by the Netherlands and French representatives. He proposed the deletion of paragraphs 4 and 5 from Article 15.

The Committee agreed that discussion of Article 15 should be deferred until the United Kingdom amendment was available as a working paper.

Annex 3.

The Committee unanimously adopted Part I of Annex 3.

Mr. TAYLOR (United Kingdom) stated that the United Kingdom delegation reserved its position.

Mr. DIJKMANS van GUNST (Netherlands) also reserved his position, in view of the fact that the Netherlands practised an entirely different system of priorities.

Mr. PLAMEZ (Switzerland) drew attention to the fact that Part II of the Annex referred only to "vehicles", whereas paragraph 2 of Article 10 spoke of "drivers"; was that distinction intentional?

The CHAIRMAN was of the opinion that the provisions of Annex 3 should be limited to vehicles alone.

Mr. SEN (India), who was in favour of deleting paragraph 1 of Part II, pointed out that, where more than two vehicles were involved, the principle stated in that paragraph, if taken to its logical conclusion, would mean that none of the vehicles could proceed. He thought that the whole question of priority at such cross-roads could be left to common-sense. In the case of countries with a considerable volume of animal-drawn traffic, the proposed system of priorities would slow down traffic considerably. Moreover, the adoption of a completely new system would, for a few years at least, increase the danger of accidents.

Mr. DIJKMANS van GUNST (Netherlands) pointed out that the Committee was discussing an Annex, a part of the Convention which Governments so far, would not be obliged to sign.

Mr. MASLOG (Philippine Republic) thought that, even in the case of mixed traffic, safety should come before speed.

Mr. SEN (India) pointed out that the text referred to two vehicles only.

The CHAIRMAN proposed that the word "two" be deleted, and the text altered throughout to read "vehicles".

After a short discussion,

Part II of Annex 3 was referred to the Special Group of the Committee for re-drafting.

Replying to an enquiry by Mr. CHARPIE (Switzerland) as to whether some provision should not be made for the case of cycles overtaking, the CHAIRMAN said he thought that the text, as it stood, was adequate.

Mr. BLOM-ANDERSEN (Denmark) drew attention to the draft amendment which he had submitted during the discussion of paragraph 4 (c) of Article 10, to the effect that national legislation should decide whether the provisions of paragraph 4 (c) of Article 10 should also apply to cyclists. He would leave the exact wording of the amendment to the Secretary.

Replying to a question by the CHAIRMAN, he said that he would prefer his amendment to be inserted in Article 10 rather than in Annex 3.

The Secretary was requested to draft a text of the Danish proposal for discussion at the afternoon meeting.

The Committee unanimously adopted Part III of Annex 3.

The Committee further agreed that in discussing Annex 4, the signs would not be examined singly, but by categories.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.