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UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ROAD AND MOTOR TRANSPORT

COMMITTEE III ON ROAD TRAFFIC

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE TENTH MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 1 September 1949, at 10 a.m.

CHAIRMAN: Mr. MELLINI (Italy)

SECRETARY: Mr. AMBROZEK

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CONSIDERATION OF DRAFT ARTICLES FOR INSERTION IN A CONVENTION ON
ROAD AND MOTOR TRANSPORT PREPARED BY THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR
EUROPE (Item 4 of the Conference Agenda) (Document E/CONF.8/3)
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Annex 4 (Articles 5 - 9)

Article 5 (continued)

Mr. TAYLOR (United Kingdom) explained that the amendment he had submitted at the previous meeting had been of a drafting character, and had not been intended to change the substance of Article 5.

The Committee adopted Article 5 subject to further minor drafting changes.

Article 6.

Mr. BLOM-ANDERSEN (Denmark) said the Scandinavian countries had already made reservations as to that part of the text of paragraph 2 of Article 6 which stated "..... and a reduced size for use where conditions do not permit the erection of the standard size". That wording seemed too restrictive, and it might be better to replace the word "permit" by the word "require".

Mr. THIROT (France) thought the ECE Draft sufficient, since in actual practice the conditions on roads where traffic was fastest were usually such as to permit the erection of a sign of standard size, conversely, where it was only possible to put up a sign of reduced size, traffic usually proceeded more slowly.

Mr. ROSCIONI (Italy) thought the text by no means restrictive as it stood, since paragraph 1 stated that the dimensions of sign plates should be such that the sign could be easily seen from a distance, and the second sentence of paragraph 2 was prefaced by the words "In general".

Mr. TAYLOR (United Kingdom) proposed that, as there might be certain cases where traffic required the standard sign but physical conditions would not permit of its erection, the text should read "..... where conditions do not permit or require the erection"

The Committee adopted the text proposed by the United Kingdom representative for Article 6 of Annex 4 subject to eventual drafting changes.

The Committee adopted Articles 7 and 8 of Annex 4.

Article 9.

At the invitation of the CHAIRMAN, Mr. PERLOWSKI (AIT/FLA), after stressing the importance of Article 9 of Annex 4, recalled the statement made at a previous meeting by the United Kingdom representative, regretting that the Conference had renounced the possibility of achieving world-wide uniformity of signs and signals, and that it should have considered that the European and American systems should be allowed to exist side by side. He (Mr. Perlowski) did not share such a pessimistic view. He considered that at the present time only one system was in fact international. The American system, if by that term was understood the system practised in the United States of America, had originally been based on the use of words rather than symbols, and that made it essentially national. But recent trends showed that symbols were growing in favour, and their value had been recognized in the United States of America and at the Third Inter-American Travel Congress held at Bariloche, Argentina on 20 February 1949. That meant that the two systems were already verging upon similarity; the essential difference now existing was in the shape of the particular symbols used. Thus, in the United States of America the danger sign was not a triangle, but a square standing on one of its corners. However, in many South American countries the triangle was already in use.

Since the 1926 and 1931 Conventions had been signed, considerable technical progress had been achieved in motor vehicle construction, which had far exceeded the advances made in road building. It was therefore increasingly important that drivers, for whom it was now a normal thing to travel at 100 kilometres an hour, should know the exact gravity of the dangers confronting them, so that they could reduce speed accordingly. Such a need had already been recognized in France, where serious hazards were indicated by a special supplementary inscription "Danger", and in the United Kingdom where a supplementary sign bearing the words "You have been warned" had been employed. The main object of the joint amendment submitted by the General Committee of the AIT/FLA and the FIAC (Document E/CONF.8/34) was to distinguish

between three main categories of hazard, and in doing so to combine the North American with the European danger sign. In that way, serious hazards would be indicated by triangular danger signs, while less serious dangers would be shown by signs in the shape of a square standing on one of its corners. Such a combination had already been applied in Argentina, and had reduced accidents considerably.

That proposal would allow both the ECE system and the North American system to be preserved, and at the same time, by combining the danger signals of both, would mark a first step towards a world wide unification of signals. It would also, he believed, contribute towards a greater measure of road safety throughout the world.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that the proposals submitted by the General Committee of the AIT/FIA and the FIAC might be discussed in the Conference. That would not preclude the Committee continuing the discussion of Article 9, which was of a general character. Had the United States representative any comments on the proposals made by the representative of the AIT/FIA?

Mr. CONNORS (United States of America) replied that the more extensive the use of the triangular danger sign in Europe and non-American countries, the easier it would be for the Western Hemisphere to accept it at some later date. In October, 1949, the American Association of State Highway Officials would meet at San Antonio, Texas, to discuss inter alia the question of danger signs. The heads of all the State Highway Commissions would be represented at that meeting. Among them would be Mr. Fairbank, deputy head of the United States delegation, who would inform the Committee at a later meeting of United States reactions to the proposals of the General Committee of the AIT/FIA and the FIAC.

The CHAIRMAN replied that even if the United States could accept the triangular sign merely for a limited number of hazards, some progress towards world-wide unification would thereby be made.

Mr. FARAKEN (Observer for the Government of Australia), said that in 1946 the Standards Association of Australia had been requested by the road authorities in that country to prepare a system of signs

taking into account both the European and the American systems. In the code recommended by the Association, mandatory signs were circular, informative signs rectangular, and the red triangle had been retained for important danger signals. The signs and signals had not yet been generally adopted and the Australian Road authorities were awaiting with interest the result of the deliberations of the present Conference.

Mr. BARIM (Turkey) thought the unification of the American and European systems would be further encouraged if more latitude were allowed in the colour of signs. He had gathered from private conversations with representatives that there was some opposition to the ECE proposal to colour signs red, white and black. Such signs were more expensive to produce and maintain than two-colour signs and they were not always adapted to the physical conditions obtaining in the various countries. The colours used in the United States of America were yellow and black, and representatives might perhaps state their views as to whether such a combination of colours should be allowed by the present Convention.

The CHAIRMAN replied that that question might usefully be considered when the Committee discussed the joint proposals of the AIT/FIA and the FIAC.

Mr. ZACH (Czechoslovakia) drew attention to the amendment proposed by his delegation to the effect that wherever the text spoke of "light colour", the words "light yellow" should be used. (Document E/CONF.8/19, page 2).

The Committee adopted the Czechoslovak amendment.

Following a proposal by the United Kingdom representative, the Committee agreed to delete the words "the direction of" from the second line of paragraph 4 of Article 9 of Annex 4.

Mr. PLUMEX (Switzerland) thought more latitude should be allowed regarding the side of the road on which signs were to be placed (paragraph 4). In Switzerland, there were some cases where it was physically impossible to place a sign on the traffic side of the road. The Annex should allow certain exceptions to cover such cases.

Mr. ROSCIONI (Italy) replied that the Swiss proposal would give rise to the unsatisfactory situation whereby the driver would have in all cases to keep a look out for traffic signs on both sides of the road.

Mr. THÉROT (France) agreed with the Italian representative, and thought the text should allow of no exceptions since it might otherwise lead to abuse.

Mr. PLUMÉZ (Switzerland) said he would not press his amendment.

The Committee adopted Article 9 of Annex 4 subject to eventual drafting changes.

The meeting rose at 12:45 p.m.