

# **The 125th anniversary of the International Association of Public Transport (UITP)**

Brussels, 19 September 2010

## **Speech by Vice-President Siim Kallas**

Your Royal Highness

Ladies and gentleman, dear fellow speakers.

It is a great pleasure for me to be able to be here today and to celebrate with you the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Association of Public Transport, UITP.

An event like today's provides us with a valuable opportunity to take a look back – to note the successes and also the challenges that we have overcome.

We should also use this moment to look to the future to think about what lies ahead for us, in the coming years.

The world has changed dramatically since the early days of UITP, when the members of the first international public transport platform gathered in Brussels in the summer of 1885. We suffered the devastation of two World Wars and saw our continent divided by the 'iron curtain' for almost half a century.

But we have also seen the division of Europe overcome. The European Union has grown and prospered, and some 500 million people in 27 countries benefit today from the peace, solidarity and the freedoms that the Union offers them. Having come from the eastern part of Europe I could tell you a great deal about these freedoms. Starting with people – the main freedom for everyone is the freedom of movement, the freedom to travel.

However much our world has changed over the past 125 years, one thing has remained true throughout: our cities are the centres of our social, economic, and cultural life.

There is no doubt that for our cities to be attractive and to function properly they have to be able to provide effective and efficient urban transport systems that meet at least the basic mobility needs of all our citizens, businesses and industries .

Today's increased transport activity between and within our cities is a direct indicator of the freedom of movement which our citizens enjoy.

We need to reduce the negative impacts of transport on the environment and climate and on our health and safety.

We have acted. Through the Euro emission standards, for instance, we have been able to reduce considerably the emission of harmful pollutants from cars and other road vehicles. We have succeeded in enhancing safety

standards for all transport modes. And, of course, in many cities in Europe, high-quality public transport has been developed to become the backbone of the urban transport system.

In spite of the progress we have been able to make, however, we need to step up our efforts substantially if we want to make sure that the future development of the European transport system will follow a more sustainable path. We are keenly aware of the difficult heritage we will leave for future generations if we don't act more decisively.

Urban areas will have to be a focal point of our efforts. In many cities, we suffer today from almost chronic traffic jams, from poor air quality due to the transport-related emissions of pollutants, and from noise. Safety and security also remain issues to be addressed.

Furthermore, the transport sector's continued dependence on oil raises serious concerns about our long term energy supply security and jeopardises our efforts to successfully lessen the effects of climate change.

Estimates show that urban traffic accounts for approximately 40% of the CO<sub>2</sub> and 70% of emissions of other pollutants arising from road transport.

Gradual improvements and new technologies will not be enough to bring about the fundamental transformation of urban transport systems we need. We will need to establish a new "culture for urban mobility". In particular, we will have to make better and more balanced use of the different transport modes. Walking, cycling, and of course, public transport can be attractive alternatives to the use of the private car. If we can offer our citizens more attractive, reliable and safe options to move to and within their cities, it will make our cities more liveable and have a direct and positive impact on our quality of life. In any case public transport must be a good alternative, not forced, not a torture.

Clearly, our towns and cities will be the key players in addressing the issues I have outlined and in improving their urban transport systems. Because every city in Europe is different, local authorities will be crucial in selecting and implementing more sustainable urban transport solutions that fit their city's and their citizens' particular needs and circumstances.

But they cannot and should not have to do this alone. I am convinced that a lot can be gained by learning from each other, by working together, and by coordinating our efforts. With over 3000 members in over 90 countries, UITP has been an important facilitator for such cooperation in the field of urban transport for 125 years.

Because urban mobility is a shared responsibility which needs to be addressed at all levels: local, regional, national, and European, I can promise you that the European Commission will continue to encourage and support efforts at the local level through concrete actions.

Last year, in our Action Plan on Urban Mobility, we had already announced the implementation of 20 initiatives which will be implemented over the next few years, so that they can already begin to benefit our towns and cities.

Looking further into the future, in a few months, we will present our vision in our new Transport White Paper, which will shape European transport policy for the next 10 years and also include the urban dimension of transport.

I am confident that if we join our efforts we will be able to address the many challenges successfully. I am happy to see that UITP, on its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, remains as vital as ever. I feel confident that UITP will continue to be a valuable partner for cities and their transport operators in Europe and worldwide.

And, I am looking forward personally to the continuation of a close and very constructive partnership.

Happy anniversary, and thank you for your attention.