

**Speech by Mr Jean-Paul Mingasson  
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**Conference**

**Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions caused by on-vehicle air conditioning**

**Brussels, 11 February 2003**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am honoured to bring to a close this conference on greenhouse gas emissions, which was opened by Commissioner Wallström. The European Commission attributes great importance to this question, which is bound to figure in the “sustainable development” policy.

During these two days experts from the major industrial countries have held an exchange of views. It is a fact that motor vehicle air conditioning systems represent highly evolved industrial interests in America, Asia and the warmer regions. In recent years, the European Union has experienced a sharp increase in the demand for passenger cars to be equipped in this way and, as you are aware, today’s motor industry is completely globalised.

Consequently, the problem of the greenhouse effect can only be tackled in a global context and in accordance with the principle of proportionality. The remedy must be commensurate to the ill.

To date, more than 100 countries have ratified the Kyoto Protocol seeking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 5.2% between 1990 and 2010. Fluorinated gases and carbon dioxide used in air conditioning systems are clearly covered by the Kyoto Protocol. The European Union along with its Member States both present and future and, in addition, Switzerland, Norway, Japan and Canada are all signatories to this agreement. Consequently, as Commissioner Wallström has stressed, we all have a special collective responsibility to work for reductions in emissions of this type of gas from motor vehicle air conditioning systems.

The automobile industry has indicated its desire for harmonisation on a global scale. Clearly, for an industry that operates globally, the best solution would be a global one: this would permit increased levels of mass production, thereby making it possible to reduce costs to the consumer as well as facilitating global trade. This will ensure a “level playing field” and allow the unhindered development of healthy and fair competition.

To this end, we are fortunate enough to have the World Forum for the Harmonisation of Vehicle Regulations - which does not merely function, but functions very well indeed - under the auspices of the United Nations (WP29 to be initiated). The main manufacturing countries, the industry and the NGOs make up this Working Party in Geneva charged with the task of achieving consensus in the preparation of international regulations. The European Commission is playing a very active role in this area.

### **What are the findings to date?**

In their conclusions of 10 October 2000, the Ministers of the Environment of the European Union invited the Commission to study and prepare measures aimed at reducing all greenhouse gas emissions.

On the basis of the studies carried out by the European Commission, it has now been concluded that, although the effects of the emissions from the air conditioning systems of new cars were slight compared with other emission sources, they were nevertheless significant when considered in conjunction with the increase in fuel

consumption linked to air conditioning. There are reasons for anticipating a notable increase in the future in the number of these air conditioning systems; while their contribution to the global greenhouse effect would remain below 1%, they would nevertheless account for 10% of emissions from motor vehicles. It is also a fact that discussions over these two days have pointed to the possible existence of a major repository for performance improvement, notably through new system types using other coolant gases such as CO<sub>2</sub> and, above all, improved monitoring of the motor vehicle maintenance and repairs sector. In this context, it is appropriate - in accordance with the principle of proportionality - that measures should be taken to deal with the question of quality control involving service and maintenance work by garages throughout the life of the vehicles, and subsequently when the vehicle wrecks are recycled. In my opinion, one of the achievements of this conference is that it has made all the interested parties stop and think: the automobile industry along with its equipment manufacturers and the repairs sector, the administrative authorities, the policymakers and the NGOs.

### **What is to be done at Community level?**

The Commission has the responsibility and the desire to ensure synergy and coherence in the various policies of the Union. In this instance, the policies in question cover the environment, industry, transport and research and development.

In the area with which we are concerned, the Union has already adopted a number of measures such as compulsory recovery of coolants by the vehicle manufacturer. This came about with the adoption in 2001 of the Directive on end-of-life vehicles. It would appear, however, that more thought needs to be given to the application of good practice in the recycling of motor vehicle wrecks.

What we now have to do is to take the initiative as regards the design of air conditioning systems for new vehicles. Other measures could be applied to vehicles already in circulation involving, for instance, a systematic inspection of the air conditioning systems coinciding with the obligatory periodical motor vehicle inspection.

As regards the various policies involved, I should also like to stress the potential role of the Union's research, development and innovation programmes. The development of coolants meeting higher safety and environmental protection standards or the elaboration of a more compact air conditioning architecture could help to solve the problem.

Lastly, I would remind you of our commitment, under the auspices of the United Nations, to draw up global regulations in the context of the World Forum for the Harmonisation of Vehicle Regulations.

### **What should we expect from the automobile industry?**

As far as motor vehicles are concerned, society simultaneously demands greater safety, greater comfort and greater environmental protection. Consumers themselves are beginning to develop a sense of European citizenship and to pay attention to the impact of motor vehicles on the environment. The consumer has a crucial role to play in the market economies, since it is the consumer's purchasing decisions that determine the industry's supply situation.

Nowadays, the level of safety of new vehicles is very high. At the same time, their size and the degree of comfort they offer have increased significantly. While it is true that advances in the areas of safety and comfort tend to produce heavier vehicles, it is equally true that new vehicles have significantly reduced their harmful emission and fuel consumption levels.

This progress is attributable to several factors, including of course the rules laid down by the Community but also, it has to be stressed, the competitiveness of the market and a growing awareness of the societal and environmental responsibilities incumbent on the industry. I am thinking, in particular, of the voluntary agreement signed by the European, Japanese and Korean automobile industries to reduce very significantly CO<sub>2</sub> emissions across the entire passenger car production range.

The Commission therefore expects the automobile industry to discharge to the full its responsibilities to contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

### **In conclusion**

As announced by Mrs Wallström at the opening of the conference, the Commission will this year be presenting proposals for legislation aimed at reducing, on a global scale, the emissions of fluorinated gases. This will help, in line with your wishes, to create a solid basis of support for stakeholders' expectations. Against this background, the Commission will be encouraging the players to work in partnership and to take on responsibilities. It will apply the methods agreed in its "better regulation" programme when it formulates its legislative proposals this autumn, that is to say by holding wide-ranging consultations with stakeholders – and today's conference represents a first stage in this process – and by embarking on an assessment of the impact of its proposals which will need to take account of developments affecting what is technologically possible, while at the same time consulting the alternatives. Lastly, in accordance with the precepts for implementing the sustainable development strategy, it will be up to the Commission to ensure that there is a fair balance between the environmental, economic and societal objectives. It cannot be repeated too often that maintenance of the competitiveness of the industry concerned is absolutely essential if there is to be any possibility of progress.

On behalf of the Commission, I should like to thank all the participants at this conference who have helped to contribute to this productive debate.

Thank you for your attention.