

New Offices But Business As Usual For FIA Bureau



Johann Grill, the Director General of the FIA European Bureau.

The FIA European Bureau welcomed over 100 guests to a ceremony to mark the official inauguration of its new offices in central Brussels. Werner Kraus, President of the FIA Eurocouncil, greeted the attendees, who included European parliamentarians, European Commission officials and automotive executives.

Kraus said: "We are all gathered here today in the new offices which also stand as a symbol for a strong presence of the FIA on a European level. With its new premises the FIA European Bureau will continue to successfully represent the motorists' interest on the European level and be the focal point of a series of international activities of the European clubs."

From these offices the FIA executives are charged with effectively ensuring that the interests of national automotive clubs and their 43 million members are well represented in all relevant debates taking place in Brussels. The European Bureau's modus operandi is to influence transport policy at the European Commission level.

The FIA has an integral role in shaping automotive policy. By representing 207 national automobile organisations in 122 countries on five continents, the FIA offers a global voice for mobility. It defends the rights of motorists within international bodies such as the UN and the European Union.

Johann Grill, the Director General of the FIA European Bureau, said: "It is at those levels that the main regulations on road safety or environmental protection are decided today. It is at that level that the FIA has an essential part to play."

With its new offices the FIA Bureau remains in the centre of Brussels European quarter. Grill added: "It is a must to be in walking distance to the institutions we are working with. We regularly invite European parliamentarians and Commission officials to our working group meetings and to debates and conferences that we organise."

The move can only help the FIA Bureau to remain at the core of the major policy-making institutions. Part of its remit is to oversee and influence draft legislations before they come into effect. Transport and mobility issues are debated by numerous European institutions such as the European parliament, the European Forum for Energy and Transport, and the Council of Ministers.

There are a vast range of policy areas that the FIA Bureau must keep an eye on, from consumer testing and road safety to driving education and pollution. Currently, the Bureau is keeping a close track of a European Commission white paper which will define future road transport policy. Entitled "Road transport policy for 2010: decision time," it proposes almost sixty measures to develop rules for the road across Europe.

These very general proposals cover a number of areas from passengers' rights to the creation of trans-European infrastructures and the development of radio-navigation by satellite.

Other proposals under the scrutiny of the Bureau include a restructuring of the taxation systems for private cars, and the promotion of driving aid systems that improve road safety, such as electronic stability control.

Another important area for the Bureau is the legal side of motoring and consumer protection. This covers subjects such as insurance and driving licences. The Bureau is currently lobbying for the replacement of all European Union driving licences with information-storing smart cards. This is no easy task especially as there are around around 110 types of licence currently valid in the European Union.

The directive, currently being drafted, states that the administrative validity of the card would be limited to ten years for everybody. It would also make it easier to clamp down on the increasing use of fake licences.

A further important area of legislation for the Bureau is pedestrian safety. There is still a lot that can be done to increase the protection of pedestrians in collisions. But the Bureau has already made progress in this area, influencing a recent European directive, which came into effect in 2005, that prescribes a series of pedestrian safety tests that have to be carried out before a vehicle goes into circulation.

These are just a few of the many areas of policy covered by the FIA Bureau. Clearly, its remit is wide-ranging. No doubt, with a new office in the centre of Brussels it is certain to have a major influence on European transport and mobility legislation for many years to come.

The new office of the FIA European Bureau is located at rue d'Arlon 53, Brussels, opposite the Concert Noble. Telephone numbers, web site and e-mail addresses remain unchanged.