

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a Community framework for noise classification of civil subsonic aircraft for the purposes of calculating noise charges'

(COM(2001) 74 final — 2001/0308 (COD))

(2002/C 221/05)

On 29 January 2002 the Council of the European Union decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 80(2) of the Treaty establishing the European Union, on the above-mentioned proposal.

The Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 30 April 2002. The rapporteur was Mr Green.

At its 391st plenary session (meeting of 29 May 2002), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 96 votes to zero, with two abstentions.

1. Background

1.1. In its Communication on Air Transport and Environment⁽¹⁾ the Commission proposed the introduction of economic incentives designed to reward the best technology and to punish the worst.

1.2. The present initiative is based on the recommendation on noise charges adopted in June 2000 by the Directors General for Civil Aviation of the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC).

1.3. As Community airport charging systems differ from one Member State to another, the introduction of a common framework for aircraft noise classification should enhance transparency, fairness of treatment and predictability of the noise component of the airport charges.

2. The Commission proposal

2.1. The Commission proposal incorporates the general principles of ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organisation) charging policy, namely transparency, cost-relatedness and proportionality between noise charges and noise impact.

2.2. The proposal also recommends the application of the principle of revenue neutrality, which implies that the sum of noise surcharges and rebates should not exceed the cost of provision of the service.

2.3. The common framework is established for charging purposes only, and could not be used for operating restrictions.

2.4. The proposal is based on the absolute noise performance of individual aircraft as measured by ICAO for aircraft noise certification. It makes the distinction between aircraft noise at departure and at arrival.

2.5. The variation between the minimum and maximum noise charges should be no more than 1:20.

2.6. The proposal also contains a discretionary provision on information to the public, concerning the noise productivity of aircraft (i.e. the noise emitted per passenger or tonne of cargo).

2.7. Moreover, a regulatory committee is to be set up to assist the Commission in ensuring that the directive refers to the most recent edition of Annex 16 — Vol. 1 to the international civil aviation convention.

3. General comments

3.1. The EESC welcomes and supports the Commission's proposal for a common classification of aircraft noise, as this contributes to harmonising the existing systems.

3.2. The EESC however underlines that the responsibility for decision to introduce noise charges in order to address noise problems at airports remains with the Member States.

3.3. The EESC therefore insists that the common framework should not be interpreted as an invitation to introduce aircraft noise charges at airports where there is no noise problem.

3.4. The proposed Community framework for noise classification seems complicated, as at each airport extremely detailed information is needed on each aircraft's registered noise data.

⁽¹⁾ COM(1999) 640 final.

3.5. The noise charge could be adjusted to take account of the fact that large aircraft make less noise per unit of load (whether passengers or freight). This is not clear from the form contained in the annex. The adjustment could be made in the form of a discount for the aircraft in question, after prior consideration of each airport's specific circumstances.

3.6. The introduction of charges in some airports can lead to airlines using their noisier aircraft on routes between airports with no noise charges; thus all airports should consider against this background to what extent noise charges are to be introduced.

Brussels, 29 May 2002.

4. **Specific comments**

4.1. The only remark concerns the ratio of 1:20 between the maximum and minimum charges (Article 3.3 of the proposal). Such a variation should not be limited to 'a given time period', but should apply on a 24-hour basis. This means for example that the maximum charge for a night flight could not be more than 20 times the minimum charge for a day-time flight.

4.2. The EESC therefore proposes the deletion of the words 'within a given time period' in Article 3.3.

The President
of the Economic and Social Committee
Göke FRERICHS
