

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EC) No. 2236/95 laying down general rules for the granting of Community financial aid in the field of trans-European networks'

(COM(2001) 545 final — 2001/0226 (COD))

(2002/C 125/04)

On 18 February 2002 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 156 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, 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 26 February 2002. The rapporteur was Mr Kleemann.

At its 389th Plenary Session on 20 and 21 March (meeting of 20 March), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion unanimously.

1. General comments

1.1. Many factors are responsible for the rise in EU traffic levels, but the growth in car traffic — both work-related and private — plays a major part in the use of transport systems. On the one hand, car traffic levels have risen considerably because of the need to commute between home and work, changes in consumer behaviour and the disproportionate growth in leisure travel. On the other hand, traffic density has increased considerably over the past few years, owing to heavy goods vehicles in certain regions and conurbations. Globalisation of the economy, the increased functioning of the internal market, changes in production methods and the logistics associated with this contribute, among other things, to changes in the structure of the economy and inevitably generate increased traffic across all transport modes. With the accession of the applicant countries this will increasingly affect cross-border routes which, according to the Commission, are also currently the weakest points.

2. Specific comments

Current capacity, especially on cross-border routes, is inadequate.

2.1. The ESC therefore agrees with the Commission that additional financial resources are needed for the most urgent improvements in cross-border transport infrastructure, not just within the Community, but also with the applicant countries through other programmes. Given the anticipated volumes of traffic, the question of expanding infrastructure — including rail infrastructure — within the applicant countries (to meet EU standards) should also be addressed during the accession negotiations.

2.2. Even in the case of cross-border rail projects on Community territory involving necessary infrastructure measures, such as building tunnels or bridges, the ESC thinks that their sustainability and economic and social viability should be assessed in all cases.

2.3. The ESC agrees with the new Article 5(3)(a). The rail networks of the applicant countries already fail to meet economic needs and capacity bottlenecks will therefore increase very rapidly given the anticipated economic growth. We would particularly point out that the Community provides alternative funding options (e.g. ISPA, TINA) for the applicant countries, though it must be ensured that these are coordinated with the guidelines.

2.4. With regard to funding for the inland waterway network, the Commission is asked to list in a document all types of funding for transport networks within and outside the Community, especially in the applicant countries.

2.5. Article 5(3)(b) should cover all other projects (road, terminals, air and water, pipelines, etc.) relating to bottlenecks at borders. It would be helpful if the amendment were more specific.

2.6. Article 5(3)(c) is to be endorsed.

3. Conclusions

3.1. The ESC supports the possibility of increasing the ceiling for financial aid from 10 % to 20 % of total investment costs for cross-border transport projects and for projects that

make a major contribution to the objectives of the trans-European networks, and it hopes that the goals set are thus achieved more quickly.

3.2. In an own-initiative opinion the Committee is urging that Community financial involvement in projects to improve and extend the inland waterway network be stepped

up⁽¹⁾. Community support for the elimination of bottlenecks is also to be doubled (from 10 % to 20 %). Such an increase should on no account be allowed to affect the increase in Community grants for the TENs.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 80 of 3.4.2002, 'The future of the trans-European inland waterway network' is currently being drawn up by the ESC.

Brussels, 20 March 2002.

The President

of the Economic and Social Committee

Göke FRERICHS

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 rules and procedures with regard to the introduction of noise-related operating restrictions at Community airports'

(COM(2001) 695 final — 2001/0282 (COD))

(2002/C 125/05)

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 26 February 2002. The rapporteur was Mr Green.

At its 389th Plenary Session of 20 and 21 March 2002 (meeting of 20 March 2002), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 74 votes in favour with one abstention.

1. Background

1.1. At the Council meeting in Luxembourg on 16 October 2001 the Transport Ministers noted that the resolution on environmental protection adopted by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO)'s 33rd assembly (25 September — 5 October 2001) opens up a prospect of replacing the 'Hushkits' Regulation in the near future.

1.2. To combat aircraft noise around airports, the EU proposed a Regulation in 1999, which would ban aircraft equipped with noise reduction devices ('Hushkits') from EU airports from 1 April 2002. Only hushkitted aircrafts registered outside the EU but operating there before 1 April 1999, would be allowed to continue.

1.3. In March 2000 the United States lodged a complaint in the ICAO Council against the fifteen EU Member States on the grounds that this Regulation was an infringement of the Chicago Convention and Annex 16 thereto.

1.4. The 1999 regulation was challenged by the United States, which claimed that it breached international agreements on aircraft noise and would disrupt the market for used aircraft.

1.5. The Council's conclusions also took note of the Commission's intention of presenting as speedily as possible a proposal which, in compliance with ICAO conditions, can establish a framework for operational restrictions in the Community, making full use of the flexibility provided by the ICAO, and which protects people living around airports.