

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on ‘the Environmental Noise Directive — the way forward’

(2012/C 113/08)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- welcomes the real benefits brought by the directive but is disappointed that neither the END nor the report on its implementation make any specific reference to local and regional authorities and the crucial role which they play in combating excessive noise;
- notes that noise pollution is primarily a local problem, but one that largely requires a European solution, and calls in this connection for the EU to develop an ambitious emissions policy for noise, in the form of European measures to tackle the problem at source;
- proposes that following a thorough assessment of the impact on local and regional authorities, the Commission set trigger or target values based on WHO health recommendations;
- highlights the need for linkages and complementarity between the different legislative instruments regulating materials associated with noise at source and for legislative gaps to be filled, specifically concerning vehicles – especially cars and lorries – roads, railways and airports, by drawing up an overarching legal framework;
- highlights the importance of providing regional and local authorities with financial support and technical guidance, as well as ancillary EU and national measures, for dealing with EU policy on noise pollution;
- calls for noise and noise pollution concerns to be incorporated into all relevant policy files and initiatives, especially in a future Seventh EU Environment Action Programme and a second EU Action Plan on the Environment and Health, as well as in sustainable transport initiatives under the EU regional development programmes and land-use policies;
- suggests that the Commission extend the concept of multilevel governance to other areas such as noise. The Covenant of Mayors could be the benchmark in this regard.

Rapporteur

José MACÁRIO CORREIA (PT/EPP), Mayor of Faro

Reference document

Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the Environmental Noise Directive in accordance with Article 11 of Directive 2002/49/EC

COM(2011) 321 final

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

A. General comments

1. asserts the importance of combating noise pollution and of building on the European noise policy adopted on 25 June 2002 in the form of Directive 2002/49/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, known as the Environmental Noise Directive (END);

2. welcomes the real benefits brought by the directive in terms of drawing up noise maps, establishing common indicators, assessing the exposure of the EU population to noise and establishing the bodies competent to draw up action plans;

3. welcomes the Commission Report on the implementation of the directive as a good starting point for a necessary revision of the END;

4. regrets that certain Member States failed to produce the required noise maps by the set deadline, and that an infringement procedure had to be launched in the case of Malta;

5. is disappointed that neither the END nor the report on its implementation make any specific reference to local and regional authorities and underlines the crucial role which they play in combating excessive noise; therefore wishes to be fully involved in developing future policies;

6. notes that noise pollution is primarily a local problem, but one that largely requires a European solution, and calls in this connection for the EU to develop an ambitious emissions policy for noise, in the form of European measures to tackle the problem at source;

7. reiterates the need to draw up objectives to combat noise experienced by people in built-up areas, in public parks or other quiet areas in an agglomeration, in quiet areas in open country and near schools, hospitals and other noise-sensitive buildings and areas;

8. notes that the Commission in its listing of health impacts of noise omits to clearly spell out one of the most common impacts of noise exposure, which is tinnitus and hyperacusis (extreme sensitiveness to noise) often caused by a drop in hearing capacity due to exposure to high noise levels. At least

10 % of the population suffer from tinnitus and/or hyperacusis, a phenomenon that is increasing among young people due to high noise levels. Information to the general public concerning health-related problems due to exposure to noise is therefore of greatest importance;

9. notes that in the listing of prior and future EU initiatives in the field there is no mention of actions to reduce the high noise levels in some public places such as discos;

10. highlights the need to take account of recent data from the World Health Organization (WHO) concerning the noise values/bands applied in noise maps according to which, reporting bands of L_{NIGHT} indicator values should be lowered to 40 dB and the social costs of road, rail and air traffic noise should also be factored in; urges that recent WHO data should also be incorporated into the exposure-cost curves used to calculate the social costs of traffic noise;

11. calls for noise and noise pollution concerns to be incorporated into all relevant policy files and initiatives, especially in a future Seventh EU Environment Action Programme and a second EU Action Plan on the Environment and Health, as well as in sustainable transport initiatives under the EU regional development programmes and land-use policies;

B. Tackling noise at source

12. highlights the need for linkages and complementarity between the different legislative instruments regulating materials associated with noise at source and for legislative gaps to be filled, specifically concerning vehicles – especially cars and lorries – roads, railways and airports, by drawing up an overarching legal framework;

13. recognises the importance of remedying a number of shortcomings in the current directive, and deems it necessary and appropriate to develop comparative methodologies for noise measurement, use of networks for noise measurement and observation, including standardisation criteria, trigger or target values, reporting and assessment methods and enforcement;

14. asserts the need to tackle noise at source and the cost-effectiveness of noise prevention, making use of technical advances and the observance of emission limits for noise pollution control as opposed to minimising its effects;

15. emphasises the advantages of reducing traffic noise at source as a means of lowering council and highway authorities' expenditure, specifically on placing anti-noise walls and insulation;

16. stresses the importance of incorporating noise pollution reduction into land-use and town planning policies, particularly in order to limit road traffic and neighbourhood noise at source;

17. stresses the importance of including noise reduction in the goals for a competitive and resource-efficient transport system identified by the Commission in its White Paper entitled *Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area - Towards a competitive and resource efficient transport system* and suggests the application and evaluation of certain measures in the area of sustainability, energy efficiency and air quality with a view to achieving noise reduction. The Committee suggests that an action plan be drawn up to ensure the implementation of the White Paper, setting out a timeline, measures and evaluation deadlines;

18. the Committee is of the opinion that an ambitious European noise emissions policy should include at least the following measures:

- for new vehicles: emissions standards for all types of vehicles and machines (used on and under the ground, on or under water, in the air etc.);
- for existing vehicles: measures to replace old vehicles and machines with low-noise models and to retrofit rail-mounted vehicles with noise reduction technologies;
- review the test methods used. The Committee recommends the development of new test methods for vehicles and machines which test emissions in real life conditions;
- develop and improve low-noise tyres;

19. calls for the transport sector to incorporate noise pollution reduction targets, possibly by means of market-based instruments such as charges for access to or use of a (road, rail, maritime or air) network, to ensure polluters bear the cost of the noise they cause;

20. recommends a concerted strategy and more ambitious noise-reduction goals in the review of Directive 70/157/EEC on Noise from Motor Vehicles, in Directive 2001/43/EC on tyre noise and in proposals related to noise from category L vehicles regulated by Directive 97/24/EC and calls for measures to be adopted to guarantee, in principle, those living near airports a quiet night for at least 7 hours;

21. welcomes recent developments concerning the new labelling system for tyres, which will give consumers, fleet

managers and public authorities the opportunity to choose the best performers in terms of noise; suggests in this context that the labels should allow consumers also to balance the noise-performance of a given tyre with its fuel-consumption characteristics; furthermore, suggests that such labels should also be linked to clear European standards for vehicles which are capable, together with the use of the appropriate road-surfacing technologies, of reducing road noise levels by half (10dB); recalls, however, the special situation with regard to the possible use of certain tyres, spiked or non-spiked, for example, in winter or other extreme conditions, designed to ensure road safety in emergency situations, which prevails in the northern Member States;

22. notes that development of quiet surfacing materials should take into account local climate and weather conditions as well as improvements in the surfacing's durability against anti-skid treatments (salting, studded tyres).

23. points to the importance of Directive 2000/14/EC on the noise emission in the environment by equipment for use outdoors;

24. acknowledges the need to replace or adapt existing rolling stock as quickly as possible, and at the latest by 2020 and to provide incentives for the use of quieter equipment. Market-based instruments such as rail track access charges should be used to ensure polluters pay for the noise costs they cause. Additional measures, such as a ban on using rolling stock which has not been fitted with the least-noisy technologies, should be envisaged in the medium term, in case the market-based instruments prove insufficient. The CoR points in particular here to the review of EU rail noise policy, as well as the pilot projects already up and running in Germany and the Netherlands on rail noise;

25. draws attention to the importance of improving urban areas by encouraging quieter transport modes, including hybrid and electric cars and quieter and more sustainable public transport;

26. recommends the adoption of urban planning measures such as trams and other forms of public transport including underground systems, promoting cycling and walking, restricting car traffic and vehicle speed, greening public procurement and providing local and regional authorities with the right incentives and appropriate information on EU funding mechanisms;

C. Challenges to be tackled by the future END

27. calls for a revision of Annex V of the directive, which sets out the minimum requirements for Noise Action Plans in bullet form, as well as Annex VI, which defines which information needs to be sent to the European Commission for this purpose, with a view to ensuring more widespread and more effective compliance with the directive and being able to compare outcomes between the Member States;

28. suggests adopting the standardisation at EU level of tools and methodologies facilitating the drawing-up and/or actual implementation of Noise Action Plans and involving a wide range of stakeholders, from research institutes and universities to local and regional authorities, under the coordination of a single EU agency;

29. points out in this connection that in certain cases the body responsible for drawing up the noise action plan is not responsible for implementing it as well and requests that more attention be devoted to this issue;

30. suggests that the Commission extend the concept of multilevel governance to other areas such as noise. The Covenant of Mayors could be the benchmark in this regard;

31. calls for the CNOSSOS-EU (Common Noise Assessment Methods in Europe) project to be swiftly finalised, with a view to introducing a harmonised assessment method for all noise maps for road, railway and industrial noise and for aircraft noise;

32. proposes that following a thorough assessment of the impact on local and regional authorities, the Commission set trigger or target values based on WHO health recommendations, obliging Member States to take action as soon as a certain level of noise is reached;

33. has reservations regarding European immission standards for noise pollution if they are treated in separation from a comprehensive noise emission policy. Local and regional authorities must apply these European standards, although the local and regional measures available for doing so are often insufficient. Any introduction of such immission standards should therefore be conceived within the framework of an overall European noise policy that clearly links emissions and immissions policy. The following measures are therefore proposed:

- the drafting of a Thematic Strategy for noise setting out a European policy on noise (with a timetable, measures and assessment times);
- ensuring that the aspirations of the Environmental Noise Directive are in line with those of EU measures for reducing noise at source;
- the development of an EU emissions policy, which should take place before the revision of the directive. After all, it will take several years before EU measures on reducing noise at source have any effect;
- the revision of the END directive;

34. highlights the importance of reinstating the guideline values already contained in the Green Paper on Future Noise

Policy and confirmed as protection targets by recent WHO studies, which have been left out of the current directive and notes that noise from a number of different sources has a cumulative effect and that long-term WHO targets should be taken as a base when planning new projects;

35. recommends greater synergies between noise and air quality policies, (both the EU Air Quality Directive and the END lay down obligations as regards action plans) thus boosting more effective joint policy action;

36. suggests, following a thorough assessment of the impact on local and regional authorities, the setting of targets for reducing exposure to noise, as has been done for atmospheric and climate pollution, including a target for reducing the number of people exposed to night noise levels of 55 dB by at least 15 % by 2023;

37. believes that it is worth considering a reduction to an L_{DEN} of 40 dB and an L_{NIGHT} of 35 dB when drawing up future noise maps;

38. calls for some of the concepts contained in the directive to be clarified, specifically "agglomeration" and "quiet areas";

D. Role of regional and local authorities

39. highlights the importance of providing regional and local authorities with financial support and technical guidance, as well as ancillary EU and national measures, for dealing with EU policy on noise pollution;

40. reiterates the value of creating a network for regional and local authorities to exchange information, swap experience and adopt best practices, providing updated information that is available in all languages;

41. recommends that more and better information be provided to local and regional authorities, as well as support tools and guidance on the visualisation, in combined maps, of cumulative noise from different sources. On the basis of subsidiarity, it should be up to each local authority to decide on the best way of conducting information campaigns;

42. proposes launching regional and local level awareness and information campaigns on noise and holding public consultations and hearings to provide a more in-depth understanding of the situation and to clarify the issue for people;

43. suggests more partnerships between local and regional authorities and local NGOs and citizens' associations, particularly by awarding prizes and awards, which could also contribute to highlighting creative or cost-effective measures implemented across the EU;

E. Final recommendations

44. stresses that noise limit values are needed not only in order to secure a high level of protection but also to avoid distortions of competition in the single market on account of noise protection rules. It is, however, essential to comply with the principle of subsidiarity with regard to setting trigger and/or target values, implementing the directive and considering introducing additional measures in case of exceeding noise limit

values, taking into account the impact of those measures on local and regional authorities as well as the diversity of climate and other conditions in Europe;

45. highlights the importance of proportionality in terms of creating additional costs and administrative burdens for companies and public administrations, which must be weighed up against environmental benefits.

Brussels, 16 February 2012.

*The President
of the Committee of the Regions*
Mercedes BRESSO
