

(2005/C 234/04)

On 22 September 2004 the Council of the European Union decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 80 (2) of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the abovementioned 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 21 February 2005. The rapporteur was Mr McDonogh.

At its 415th plenary session of 9 and 10 March 2005 (meeting of 9 March) the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 126 votes in favour and one abstention.

1. Introduction

1.1 European airspace remains one of the world’s most congested traffic environments. Fragmentation of the air-management system into national isles of rules, procedures, markets and performance levels was identified by the High Level Group on the Single European Sky as the main impediment to making substantial progress in this industry. The Single European Sky package tackles these different forms of fragmentation through a number of initiatives.

2. Background

2.1 Adoption of the four regulations composing the Single European Sky package will fundamentally change the air-traffic management landscape. This complementary proposal for a Community air-traffic controller licence is important for several reasons.

The licence contributes to the balance between the different elements of the Single European Sky package, to ensure that not only institutional, economic or technical aspects are dealt with, but also social aspects.

2.2 In order to prepare this legislative initiative the Commission had launched a study to present the state of licensing in the different Member States. The study revealed that, despite many international regulations, issued by ICAO or by Eurocontrol, licensing remains highly fragmented in the EU Member States. The study recommended that Community legislation should cover the following areas:

a) age limitations, validity of rating endorsements and unit endorsements should be provided in relation to the conditions for obtaining and maintaining a licence;

b) competency checking of controllers, the training process and the requirements for examinations, including linguistic qualifications and assessments, should be described in relation to candidate training and competence standards;

c) all facilities should be accredited, and instructor qualification requirements should be specified in relation to recognition of Training Institutes and Training Units.

2.3 The preparatory study revealed that, despite the existing international regulation, national traditions are strong, yielding a variable level of quality and producing competencies which are difficult to compare. This fragmentation is no longer acceptable in a Community context, as it may lead to an increased safety hazard in Europe’s congested airspace. The harmonisation of air-traffic controllers’ licences will add to safety as competence levels will be harmonised inside and between service providers, contributing to a more efficient and safer interface between them. This will lead to more efficient organisation of the labour market for air-traffic controllers, increasing their availability and facilitating the establishment of functional airspace blocks. The licence will make the freedom of movement more effective by eradicating the current discretion which some Member States take with regard to the mutual recognition of each others’ licences.

2.4 Given the fact that most of the Member States already have legislation in place based on ICAO principles and that they are currently implementing Single European Sky legislation and ESARR5, it is of the utmost importance to ensure full consistency with this directive.

2.5 Only certified training providers would be enabled to submit courses and training plans for approval to the national supervisory authorities.
2.6 The directive goes beyond the existing licences in civil aviation for pilots (91/670/EEC). It is more comparable to licences in the maritime and railway sectors (proposal contained in COM(2004)142) whereby rules on competencies are set at European level and not left to Member States’ discretion. It is clear that this Directive for air-traffic controllers will also have authority beyond Community borders.

2.7 The costs will depend on the current level of quality of the training system. The Directive brings the quality of the output of the training system up to the level required to cope with the safety requirements stemming from Europe’s dense and complex traffic system.

2.8 By setting high standards for initial training and by enforcing more guarantees for neutral and objective examiners during unit training, the success rate of unit training should increase.

2.9 The cost for the follow-up of the different elements of the licensing chain may slightly increase, due in part to keeping records for auditing.

2.10 All in all, the possible increase of costs in the short term should be offset by cost saving through more rational use of the workforce in the longer term. Last but not least, the Directive will increase the safety of the flying public.

2.11 This proposal does not include a financial statement.

2.12 Implementation of the Single European Sky legislation requires the establishment of more detailed legislation, in particular on arrangements concerning the licensing of air-traffic controllers, in order to improve their availability and to promote the mutual recognition of licences, as foreseen in Article 5 of Regulation (EC) No. 550/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 March 2004 on the provision of air-navigation services in the single European sky (the service provision Regulation) (1).

2.13 The introduction of such a Community licence is a means of recognising the specific role which air-traffic controllers play in the safe provision of air-traffic control. The establishment of Community competence standards will also reduce fragmentation in this field, making for more efficient organisation of work in the framework of growing regional collaboration between air-navigation service providers. This Directive is therefore an essential part of the Single European Sky legislation.

2.14 The objective of this Directive is to increase safety standards and to improve the operations of the Community air-traffic control system through the issuance of a Community air-traffic controller licence.

2.15 The holder of a rating who has not been providing air-traffic control services under any endorsement associated with that rating throughout any period of five years may not exercise the privileges of that rating without satisfying assessment and training requirements.

2.16 In order to ensure the levels of competence indispensable for air-traffic controllers to perform their work to high safety standards, the Member States shall ensure that national supervisory authorities supervise and monitor their training.

2.17 Each Member State shall recognise the licence and its associated ratings and endorsements issued by the national supervisory authority of another Member State in accordance with the provisions of this Directive.

3. Comments

3.1 The European Economic and Social Committee welcomes this proposal by the Commission to introduce new regulations governing Air-Traffic Controllers. These are necessary and timely because of the large increase projected in air-traffic movements over the next 10 years. There is also a need to have the same standard and qualifications throughout the EU, to ensure the safety of the travelling public. With the increase in air travel, there will be an increase in the demand for Air-Traffic Controllers worldwide. Freedom of movement is therefore essential.

3.2 The EESC wonders whether 4 years is a realistic estimate for the implementation of these regulations.

3.3 The Commission must ensure that the Directive does not permit the monopolisation of training at National level.

3.4 The licence endorsements should include language competency e.g. ENGLISH Level 4.

3.5 All initial ATC courses should be required to satisfy, as a minimum, the ECAC guidelines for Common Core Content training.

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3.6 The introduction of random alcohol and drug testing for all operational ATCOs is welcomed and is in line with ESARR5 as well as the psychological testing of all student ATCOs.

3.7 The issue of age is still a real concern. Statistics indicate a greater risk of serious illness or sudden death with age. National boundaries do not appear to have affected the requirement for an age limit on pilots.


The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Anne-Marie SIGMUND

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the second ‘Marco Polo’ programme for the granting of Community financial assistance to improve the environmental performance of the freight transport system (‘Marco Polo II’)


(2005/C 234/05)

On 15 February 2005 the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 71 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the abovementioned 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 21 February 2005. The rapporteur was Mr Levaux.

At its 415th plenary session of 9 and 10 March 2005 (meeting of 9 March), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 129 votes, with three abstentions.

1. Introduction: Outline of the Commission’s explanatory memorandum

1.1 The Commission presents its proposal for a regulation for the ‘Marco Polo II’ programme, setting out the reasons why freight transport infrastructures must be developed:

— freight transport is set to double by 2020 and existing networks are inadequate, resulting in road congestion, environmental degradation, accidents, and a loss of competitiveness; and

— sustainable development requirements are to be taken into account, which requires a more energy-efficient transport system.

1.2 The Commission reasserts that ‘a stronger reliance on intermodality is necessary’, because intermodality makes better use of existing infrastructures by incorporating short sea shipping, rail and inland waterways into the logistics chain. Intermodal policy is already covered by the Marco Polo I programme (2003/2006), which aimed to shift the average yearly increase of international road freight towards the three other modes of transport mentioned above.

1.3 The Commission proposes that the Marco Polo II programme continue this policy over the 2007-2013 period, extending the programme’s scope to cover all of the European Union’s neighbours and adding two new types of action:

— motorways of the sea; and

— traffic avoidance action.

3.8 Concerning in particular Article 4, the EESC suggests that:

— paragraph 5 should indicate that an effective appeals process must be in place to allow for redress for licensees;

— paragraph 7 should indicate that an effective appeals process be in place to allow for inappropriate medical findings leading to suspension of the licence.