

Opinion on the proposal for a Council Decision on the Loran-C radionavigation system ⁽¹⁾

(91/C 159/08)

On 11 February 1991 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 84(2) of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, on the abovementioned proposal.

The Section for Transport and Communications, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its Opinion on 10 April 1991, in the light of the Report by Mr Colombo.

At its 286th plenary session (meeting of 24 April 1991) the Economic and Social Committee unanimously adopted the following Opinion.

The Committee endorses the Commission proposal, subject to the following comments:

1. Introduction

1.1. The aim of the proposal is to raise the level of maritime navigational safety to the maximum currently possible.

1.2. To achieve this aim, pending the development of the satellite systems which are not expected to be operational before 1995, Loran-C has been identified as one of the most reliable instruments; this makes it essential in the necessary transitional phase.

1.3. Even after the satellite systems have been brought into operation Loran-C will be of great assistance to navigation, since it is a terrestrially-based system which can naturally complement them on a regional scale.

1.4. The complementarity of the systems should lead to a doubling of the level of safety by adding two independent types of technology together, bearing in mind also that it would be difficult to avoid the satellite systems being used mainly for military purposes, and that such systems can easily be blacked out by countries at war (as occurred recently during the Gulf War).

1.5. The decision to tackle this problem at Community level is called for not only by the need to improve the level of maritime navigational safety but also by the decision of the US Coastguard service to cease funding and manning all Loran-C stations outside the US at the end of 1994. This was accompanied by an offer to transfer all or part of Loran-C station equipment to host countries free of charge once the stations have closed down.

1.6. The Loran-C system is based on a technology which, apart from involving lower operating costs than other available systems, offers the greatest accuracy; in addition, the system can easily be expanded, making it possible to set up regional chains to cover the whole European area. A wide variety of high-precision instruments are commercially available at relatively low cost in relation to the safety they guarantee (it is possible to obtain an instrument giving optimum safeguards and accuracy for upwards of \$ 1 000).

1.7. Loran-C operates on the principle of measuring the difference between the times of arrival of pulses of radio-frequency energy radiated by a chain of synchronized transmitters which are hundreds of miles apart.

1.8. Although the Loran-C technology now makes it possible to obtain further information on the same instrument (speed of the vessel, registration of a route between two nautical points with automatic indication of vessels which have diverged from their route, etc), there is no doubt that the main value of this technology lies in the safety field. It enables any vessel to signal its position at any moment, with considerable accuracy, thus facilitating any rescue operations, for which there is likely to be a growing need, as a rapid increase in pleasure-boat traffic has been forecast.

1.9. The Loran-C technology is not covered by exclusive patents. This means that continuous future improvement of the instruments is possible; in combination with visual navigation systems (lighthouses, navigation lights, buoys, etc.), it will help to raise the level of maritime navigational safety.

1.10. The Loran-C system can be extended to cover air and land use in addition to maritime navigational safety tasks.

⁽¹⁾ OJ No C 53, 28. 2. 1991, p. 71.

2. The Committee's comments

2.1. In the light of the general picture given above, the aims of maximum safety in maritime navigation and of protecting the marine environment are to be welcomed.

2.2. The Committee thinks it essential for the development of the Loran-C system—a technology proposed also by the Member States themselves—to involve a role for the Community bodies in coordinating the various initiatives and giving positive encouragement to ever broader participation of the Member States at the European level.

2.2.1. Apart from making it possible to cover increasingly wide areas, it is important to achieve a rational and balanced distribution of the costs between the various users and governments.

2.2.2. Whereas satellite technology is the most suitable for global coverage, adding zones together can make the Loran-C system also suitable for covering areas larger than that of Europe.

2.3. The Committee thinks it necessary, as a matter of priority, to solve the problems arising in the Eastern Mediterranean from the closure of the station at Kargaburun in Turkey, which leaves a large navigation area uncovered.

2.4. The Committee fully supports the European Community's coordination efforts, intended to ensure the development of a compatible system and its inclusion of the largest possible number of European States.

It regards these efforts as a fundamental factor for the safety of maritime navigation in European and adjacent waters.

Done at Brussels, 24 April 1991.

*The Chairman
of the Economic and Social Committee*

François STAEDLIN

Opinion on the Commission Communication entitled: Towards Europe-wide systems and services — Green Paper on a common approach in the field of satellite communications in the European Community

(91/C 159/09)

On 29 November 1990 the Commission decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 198 of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, on the abovementioned proposal.

The Section for Transport and Communications, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its Opinion on 10 April 1991. The Rapporteur was Miss Barrow.

At its 286th plenary session (meeting of 24 April 1991), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following Opinion unanimously.

1. The package of proposals which the Commission has referred to the Committee is designed to facilitate and encourage the use of satellite communications. These have been developed dramatically during recent years and, as the European Community approaches the Europe-wide market of 1992, satellite communications are becoming a vital element for the trans-European services and networks needed for the single European market, and the broader continental dimension which

is developing from the revolutionary changes in Eastern Europe.

2. Introduction

2.1. In recent years the dominant trend worldwide in telecommunications (including broadcasting) has been liberalisation, corporatisation and privatisation. Some