

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Directive amending Council Directive 92/23/EEC relating to tyres for motor vehicles and their trailers and to their fitting' ⁽¹⁾

(98/C 235/05)

On 6 January 1998 the Council decided to consult Economic and Social Committee, under Article 100a of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned proposal.

The Section for Industry, Commerce, Crafts and Services, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 6 May 1998. The rapporteur was Mr Bagliano.

At its 355th plenary session (meeting of 27 May 1998), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 101 votes in favour, with 2 abstentions.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Commission's proposed directive is intended to fill a gap in the measures so far adopted against noise caused by road traffic.

1.2. Directive 70/157/EEC on the permissible sound level of motor vehicles is set out in such a way as to draw attention to — and therefore limit — only the noise arising from the exhaust and the mechanical parts of vehicles. At that time these were indeed the main sources of traffic noise.

1.2.1. The tightening up of technical requirements imposed by subsequent amendments to the above Directive have resulted in a considerable reduction in the noise from these sources, but have at the same time drawn attention to the problem of noise produced by the contact between tyres in motion and road surfaces.

1.3. This was brought out by Article 4 of the most recent amendment to the aforementioned Directive 70/157/EEC (Directive 92/97/EEC of 19 December 1992) in which the Council delegates to the Commission the task of drawing up a proposal designed to limit the noise produced by tyre/road surface contact, while taking safety requirements into account. The draft directive under consideration fulfils this mandate.

1.3.1. The present proposal is for an amendment to Directive 92/23/EEC relating to tyres for motor vehicles and their trailers and to their fitting; that Directive did not, however, cover noise. It defines both the method of measurement of the tyre-road noise and the maximum permissible level for different types of tyre.

2. General comments

2.1. The scope of the proposed directive covers all types of tyres fitted to cars (category M1 vehicles) and to both light and heavy commercial vehicles (categories M2, M3, N1, N2 and N3) and their trailers. It excludes

vehicles designed for uses other than the transport of people or things, which can only occasionally use the road infrastructure (e.g. farm tractors).

2.1.1. In view of this very wide scope, the Commission has developed a common method of measurement but proposes maximum permissible noise levels which are differentiated by category of vehicle. Within each category, these levels are linked:

- for passenger cars: to the nominal rim size of the tyre (thus taking account of the constraints imposed by roadholding and special uses considerations);
- for commercial vehicles: to the specific use category of the tyre (e.g. normal, for snow conditions, or special).

2.1.2. This represents an attempt to define requirements designed to limit the tyre-road noise while respecting safety considerations.

2.1.3. However, the noise levels corresponding to different types of road surface (or indeed to different atmospheric conditions) for the same type of tyre do not fall within the scope of the proposed directive. Here the Committee would point out that the 12th recital of Directive No 92/97/EEC of 19 December 1992 explicitly states that 'it is necessary to continue studies and research so as to be able to ascertain numerical indices in order to establish objective criteria for road conformity'.

3. Timetable

3.1. The draft directive provides for these requirements to come into force on 1 October 2001. This would apply both to new types of tyre brought onto the market and to new vehicles, which will have to be fitted only with tyres conforming to the said requirements.

3.2. From 1 October 2005 onwards all tyres brought onto the market will have to conform to the requirements of the draft directive.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 30, 28.1.1998, p. 8.

3.3. Still excluded from the draft directive's provisions are:

- tyres intended to be fitted to vehicles registered for the first time before 1 October 1980;
- spare tyres intended for temporary use, tyres whose speed rating is less than 80 km/h, and tyres whose nominal rim diameter does not exceed 254 mm.

4. Comments

4.1. The method of measurement involves checking the tyre-road noise at a normal speed of 80 km/h while the vehicle is freewheeling in neutral on a standardized road surface.

4.1.1. The measures to be adopted to meet these requirements will therefore have their optimum effect in reducing noise due to road traffic in extra-urban areas and in freely moving traffic conditions.

4.1.2. However, the tyre noise during acceleration or braking — conditions which are more frequent in urban or congested traffic — will not be tested. The Committee also acknowledges that there is at present no established testing procedure to solve this problem, important though it is.

4.2. Technical solutions required to ensure tyre performance for special uses, such as on snow-covered or excavated roads, justify the higher limit values for noise set by the draft directive.

4.2.1. Differentiated limits are also justified for passenger car tyres, whose characteristics must be compatible with the performance of the cars to which they are fitted, in order to ensure maximum driving safety. The Committee agrees with this approach.

4.3. The proposed noise levels are well-balanced in that, while they require a considerable effort on the part of the tyre industry, they are industrially achievable in the timescale envisaged.

4.3.1. These levels also meet the expectations of the public, who wish to see action to reduce the noise generated by road traffic; they make a further contri-

but ion to the improvements already achieved by the automobile industry in this field.

4.4. The dates of entry in force of the requirements in this draft directive are consistent with the periods needed by the tyre industry to adapt to them.

4.4.1. However, the Council will have to check with the industry on the availability of types of tyre already conforming to these requirements for all models of vehicle to be produced in 2001 — the deadline by which only tyres complying with the limits in this draft directive may be fitted.

4.4.2. The Committee thinks it realistic to provide for a grace period of at least two years (i.e. until 2003) for newly registered vehicles (old models), while 2001 remains the reference date for new type approvals (new models) alone.

4.5. Also important is the Commission's statement that these requirements are a first step in combating noise produced by moving tyres on road surfaces, and that they will have to be reviewed later in the light of their effects — both on the market and on the environment.

4.5.1. This statement — in the Explanatory Memorandum — should, however, be included also in the preamble to the draft directive itself, as 'whereas' (6):

'Whereas the requirements intended to reduce the noise arising from contact between tyres in motion and road surfaces constitute a first step in the fight against this source of noise; whereas they must subsequently be reviewed in the light of their effect on the market and the environment, taking account of the ever-growing impact which the type of road surface will have as a noise source.'

The proposed recital would supplement the 12th recital of Directive No 92/97/EEC, mentioned in point 2.1.3 above.

5. Conclusions

The Committee endorses the objective of the proposed directive, and recommends in particular:

- that account be taken of the comment in point 4.4 above;
- that more emphasis be placed, in a suitable 'whereas' of the preamble, on the need for a review of the effectiveness of the measures adopted.

Brussels, 27 May 1998.

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of the Economic and Social Committee*
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