Noise pollution: noise classification of civil subsonic aircraft, calculation of noise charges

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PURPOSE : to establish a Community framework for noise classification of civil subsonic aircraft for the purposes of calculating noise charges. CONTENT : the aim of this proposed Directive is to enhance the environmental effectiveness of noise charges levied at airport level by ensuring that common criteria based on the noise performance of aircraft are used when calculating the level of these charges for environmental purposes. Community airport charging systems differ from one Member State to another. There may also be differences within Member States. In 8 Member States the charging system incorporates an environmental component, such as a specific noise charge or as part of the landing charge modulated according to the noise of the aircraft. At a large number of airports, which currently apply noise related airport charges, the charging system only differentiates between Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 aircraft, as defined by Annex 16 - volume 1 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation. Other airport charging systems, which classify aircraft in a larger number of noise groups than just Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 and which use either noise certification data or operational noise levels. The Commission has addressed the current lack of harmonisation in airport charging systems in general and presented on 23 April a Proposal for a Council Directive on airport charges. The aim was to establish a common framework to ensure fair and equitable treatment of users. It would also allow airports to adapt the use of the charging system to be compatible with environmental contraints. In relation to the environmental component, the proposal allowed for the modulation of airport charges on the basis of the environmental costs due to air traffic, provided that it was revenue neutral and applied in a transparent and non-discriminatory manner. However, the proposal did not contain any guidelines on the criteria to be used for this modulation. So far, it has not been possible to reach a common position in the Council on this proposal. The present proposal for a Directive addresses that shortcoming and provides a common framework for aircraft noise classification. The framework could usefully complement the proposed airport charges directive or could stand-alone, as the introduction of a common framework would enhance convergence, transparency and predictability in the noise component of charging systems. The proposed common classification of aircraft is based on the principle that an aircraft operator should pay a fair price that should be proportional to its noise impact, independently of the weight of the aircraft or of the transport service rendered. However, additional data reflecting the 'noise productivity' (i.e. the noise emitted per passenger or tonne of cargo) could usefully complement the aircraft classification. Such data would make it possible to recognise the environmental merits or larger aircraft, even if these aircraft are noisier in absolute terms when compared to lighter aircraft. Therefore, the proposal contains a discretionary provision on information to the public concerning the noise productivity of heavier aircraft.