Summary of the main statements and discussion points
Noise in Europe conference - 24 April 2017

Morning sessions

- The WHO confirmed – based on its on-going scientific work - that noise remains a serious threat to human health, leading i.a. to stress, disturbing our sleep and even causing cardiovascular diseases.

- The EEA reported that more than 100 million European citizens are affected by noise levels harmful to their health. This means that noise pollution remains relevant to the European citizens.

- The evaluation of the Environmental Noise Directive showed that it is fit for purpose, but that is has not yet fully delivered on its potential due to delayed implementation.

- The EU has a number of legislative instruments to regulate noise at source, but there is a need to balance EU measures also against other issues, e.g. safety concerns.

- Target and limit values have been claimed to help mitigating measures to be put in place.

- Regulating noise at source has been stressed as an area where there is a need to make better progress. Introduction of taxes – thus internalising external costs – is one possibility.

- Urban planning is another good tool to combat noise.
Afternoon sessions

The first parallel session: Policy options:

- EU measures to protect Europeans from harmful effects of noise pollution would show that the EU protects its citizens.

- Technical and economic competitiveness considerations provide a further reason for addressing noise pollution at EU level.

- The ambition of the Environmental Noise Directive could be increased by going beyond the definition of a ‘common approach’ and by possibly introducing concrete targets at EU level, e.g. through binding science-based limit values.

- The scope of the Directive could be broadened beyond transport and industry sources.

- The reporting thresholds, which currently exclude significant levels of noise, could be lowered.

- Several definitions (such as "Quiet Areas", "Agglomerations", "Harmful effects") could be clarified.

- Public funding to introduce mitigation measures was considered to remain important.

- Costs should be internalised, respecting the polluter pays principle, thereby also ensuring a level playing field.

- Views on operational restrictions remained inconclusive between transport sector representatives and citizen representatives.

- Regulating noise at source was seen as key.

- More stringent noise standards introduced at international and EU level should be supported, but also balanced against other measures, such as road surfaces and, around airports, appropriate urban planning.

- Further tightening of the sound limit values have to consider also the impact on safety.

- A new road quality initiative would help to ensure quieter traffic.

- Guidance on choosing the right noise reduction measures would be very useful.
• Cost-benefit analyses and public participation were considered important for a successful noise policy.

• Citizens claimed harmonised, enforceable rules for all, with clear limits in line with WHO's recommendations, and a reflection on restriction of night flights and night trains.

• Actions to mitigate noise need should have "SMART" objectives and be target oriented.

• Member States have to improve implementation, and the Commission should strengthen its enforcement efforts, incl. via the Environmental Implementation Review.

• The public engagement process needs improvement.

• Citizen Science has a good potential to help gather noise data.

The second parallel session: Health effects:

• The Environmental Noise Guidelines for the European Region of the WHO, to be available by the end of this year, will not only contain updated exposure-response functions for the various noise sources and health outcomes, but also recommendations on effectiveness of interventions.

• It is particularly important that the environmental noise guidelines are established to fully protect against all serious adverse health effects.

• Evidence shows that children are particularly vulnerable to environmental noise, and that more research would help to find appropriate solutions.

• Citizens get more and more annoyed by environmental noise, with increasing risks for depression and heart diseases.

• Seeing the numerous health effects of noise and the significant health costs of 50-100 billion Euros per year, more EU action has been claimed, which would include a better implementation of Environmental Noise Directive.

The third parallel session: Strategies for effective noise control.

• Environmental noise is a burden and a major problem for healthy lives in urban and leisure areas, which needs to be addressed.
• Action plans with clear commitments and better integration into other planning process are important.

• Research and development of new materials, technical solutions and new transportation systems are key elements to ensure sustainable transportation.

• Research and Innovation Programmes need to continue, both at national and European level.

• Funding to cover the full life cycle costs to combat rail freight noise remains crucial.

• Views on operational restrictions varied, but flexibility has been pointed out to be important to find the best solutions.

• There are a number of promising options to combat road noise, such as low noise pavements, but also traffic management and noise barriers.

• Robust criteria for public procurement and asset management are needed.

• Traffic management measures need to be evaluated, which would include new vehicle technologies.

• A sustainable approach to noise barrier design and procurement is needed.

• The concept of smart cities can help minimize environmental noise.

• There are many links between strategic actions and solutions for environmental noise and other relevant urban planning actions.

Final remarks

• Environmental noise remains a problem in Europe. The necessary tools and solutions to address it exist. Main issues are to give more priority to their development and full implementation of legislation in place.

• The conference organised by the Commission is just a start and the debate should be pursued with all institutions and stakeholders.

• The report from the Commission on the directive is available at:  http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0151