

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

COM(83) 281 final

Brussels, 25 May 1983

Proposal for a
COUNCIL DIRECTIVE
amending Directive 80/181/EEC on the approximation of the laws of
the Member States relating to units of measurement

(submitted to the Council by the Commission)

COM(83) 281 final

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

I. INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to the Council Directive of 20 December 1979 (80/181/EEC) on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to units of measurement and on the repeal of Directive 71/254.EEC, the millimetre of mercury is only permitted to remain in use as a unit for the measurement of blood pressure until 31 December 1985. In taking this decision, the Council was guided by the recommendation (WHA 30.39) adopted by the 13th World Health Assembly on 18 May 1977 concerning the use in medicine of units of the international system (SI). In this recommendation, the World Health Assembly also advocated a changeover to the SI system in the field of medicine. It merely recommended retaining the millimetre of mercury in addition to the kilopascal unit as a unit for the measurement of the pressure of body fluids until such time as the pascal had become more firmly established in other fields.

This recommendation has been almost unanimously rejected by the medical profession. Under pressure from international medical associations, the World Health Assembly stated in a further recommendation (WHA 34.27) on 22 May 1981 that there was at present no necessity to replace the millimetre of mercury by the kilopascal as the unit of measurement.

The Commission regrets the recommendation of 22 May 1981 because it means that there is unlikely to be a worldwide change-over to the kilopascal unit for an indefinite period. It considers that the reasons put forward for the retention of the millimetre of mercury as the unit of measurement are unconvincing, yet is of the opinion that the Community cannot simply ignore the amended recommendation. Use of the kilopascal cannot be imposed against the express will of the medical profession in the Community. Nor can it be expected that other states, such as the USA, will line up with the Community and prohibit the millimetre of mercury as the unit of measurement.

II. THE PRESENT PROPOSAL

In these circumstances, the Commission proposes that the present provision for a fixed transitional period be repealed and that the use of the millimetre of mercury in medicine be allowed to continue indefinitely. It further proposes that, in accordance with the World Health Assembly's recommendation of 1977, the use of the millimetre of mercury be permitted in medicine for measurement of the pressure of body fluids other than blood. This is desirable because the millimetre of mercury is also used as the unit for these measurements and in medical practice, e.g. in ophthalmology, these pressures are often compared with one another.

III. CONSULTATION OF THE PARLIAMENT AND THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

Pursuant to the second paragraph of Article 100 of the EEC Treaty, these two bodies must be consulted, since the implementation of the proposed provisions of the Directive involves the amendment of legislation in some Member States.

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THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community,
and in particular Article 100 thereof,;

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Parliament,

Having regard to the opinion of the Economic and Social Committee,

Whereas in a recommendation of 22 May 1981 the World Health Organization
requested that the millimetre of mercury be retained in addition to the
kilopascal as a unit for the measurement of the pressure of blood and
other body fluids; whereas it is advisable for the Commission to adopt
this solution;

Whereas therefore Council Directive 80/181/EEC¹ should be amended accordingly.

HAS ADOPTED THIS DIRECTIVE:

¹OJ No L 39, 15.2.1980, p. 40.

Article 1

The Annex to Directive 80/181/EEC is hereby amended as follows:

1. The following is added to the table in section 4 of Chapter I:

Quantity	Unit		
	Name	Symbol	Value
Blood pressure and pressure of other body fluids	Millimetre of mercury	mm Hg*	1 mm Hg = 133,322 Pa

2. The note below the table is hereby replaced by the following :

"The prefixes and their symbols listed in 1.3 may be used in conjunction with the above units, with the exception of the millimetre of mercury and its symbol. The multiple of 10^2 is, however, called a 'hectare'."

3. The unit of measurement for blood pressure in the table in Chapter II is deleted.

4. The note below the table is replaced by the following:

"The prefixes and their symbols listed in 1.3 of Chapter I may be used in conjunction with the units and symbols contained in this section, with the exception of the symbol 'g'."

Article 2

Member States shall bring into force the laws, regulations and administrative provisions necessary to comply with this Directive on 1 March 1984. They shall forthwith inform the Commission thereof.

Article 3

This Directive is addressed to the Member States.

Done at Brussels,

For the Council
The President

