

(English version)

Question for written answer E-003253/26
to the Commission
Marcin Sypniewski (ESN)
(11 August 2026)

Subject: Restrictions on the use of church bells and freedom of religion

In Poland, noise protection rules also apply to church bells, which are treated in case law as installations capable of causing noise emissions. This may lead to restrictions on the use of bells used directly in connection with religious service and ceremonies.

Bells are an integral part of religious practice, as well as being part of the traditional soundscape and cultural heritage of Polish local communities. In many towns and villages, they also serve the long-established function of indicating the time. Directive 2002/49/EC establishes a framework for the assessment and management of environmental noise. When applying EU law, Member States are bound by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 10 of which protects the freedom to manifest religion.

Given the above:

1. In the Commission's view, must national legislation and decisions concerning noise, adopted or applied within the scope of EU law, take into account the specific liturgical, cultural and transient nature of the sound of church bells?
2. Does the Commission consider that applying the same criteria to bells used directly in the context of religious worship as are applied to long-term sources of industrial noise may infringe the principle of proportionality and Article 10 of the Charter?
3. Does the Commission intend to issue guidelines on taking fundamental rights, including freedom of religion, into account in the national implementation of EU regulations relating to noise?

Submitted: 11.8.2026

Answer given by Ms Roswall on behalf of the European Commission
(23 September 2026)

The Environmental Noise Directive ⁽¹⁾ aims to establish a common EU approach to avoid, prevent or reduce the harmful effects of exposure to environmental noise primarily caused by transport traffic, as well as from industrial activities listed in Annex I of the Industrial Emissions Directive ⁽²⁾.

Pursuant to its Article 2(2), the directive does not apply to noise that is caused by the exposed person himself, noise from domestic activities, noise created by neighbours, noise at workplaces or noise inside means of transport or due to military activities in military areas.

Every five years, Member States are required to establish strategic noise maps and adopt action plans for major roads ⁽³⁾, major railways ⁽⁴⁾, major airports ⁽⁵⁾ and large agglomerations ⁽⁶⁾.

These obligations do not concern noise from other sources, such as noise from neighbours, noise from domestic or leisure activities, including noise associated with the church bells, leaving these areas subject to the regulation and protection under the domestic law (taking into account national, regional and local circumstances).

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union ⁽⁷⁾ applies to Member States only when they are implementing EU law. As mentioned above, the directive does not apply to noise associated with church bells.

In such situation, it is for Member States to ensure that fundamental rights are protected in accordance with their domestic laws and international human rights obligations.

⁽¹⁾ Directive 2002/49/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 June 2002 relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise — Declaration by the Commission in the Conciliation Committee on the directive relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise, OJ L 189, 18.7.2002, pp. 12.

⁽²⁾ Directive 2010/75/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 November 2010 on industrial emissions, OJ L 334, 17.12.2010, pp. 17.

⁽³⁾ More than 3 million vehicles a year.

⁽⁴⁾ More than 30 000 trains a year.

⁽⁵⁾ More than 50 000 take-offs or landings a year.

⁽⁶⁾ With more than 100 000 inhabitants.

⁽⁷⁾ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf.