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UNICE OPINION ON RESEARCH AND STANDARDISATION

UNICE welcomes publication by the European Commission of its working document on *“Research and Standardisation. Greater consideration of the prenormative dimension in Community research programmes”* (COM 1998-31 final).

In its opinion on the European Commission working paper *“Towards the 5th RTD Framework Programme 1998-2002”* dated October 1996, UNICE already claimed that it regards “standardisation [as] an important factor for innovation and competitiveness” and recommended that “due attention be paid to prelegislative/prenormative research in the 5th Framework Programme” and that “industry should be deeply involved in the definition of these research actions”, given its interest in seeing legislation and standards based on sound science.

UNICE supports the views (p.8) that *“the European [standardisation] strategy [should consist] of combating protectionist standards and promoting the adoption of international rules and standards, thereby providing European manufacturers with access to the world market without barriers. The production of new, specific standards requires prior research which the Community must support”*.

The importance of high quality standards as an economic instrument *“to promote the competitiveness and interoperability of products and services”* is often underestimated by the authorities but also by the enterprises themselves.

UNICE shares the view that *“standards [must] provide a bridge between the technical and the regulatory and economic framework”* and strongly encourages the development of *“performance standards (p.5) as opposed to product standards which describe in detail a product or a process”* since *“performance standards enable manufacturers to demonstrate that their products are consistent with the essential requirements set out in the [European] directives”*.

In line with its recent document on *“Industrial services : requirements for R&D and relevant statistics”* dated April 1998, UNICE welcomes the inclusion of services in the activities benefiting from European-Union-supported prenormative research but regrets the limitation in the definition (p.3) that excludes banking,

insurance and distribution since interoperability, and thus, standardisation are of utmost importance for these activities.

In general, UNICE supports the recommendations made in the Commission document in order “[to increase] the effectiveness of Community prenormative research”, in particular :

- *encourage the adoption of voluntary standards between manufacturers and suppliers and opt, whenever possible, for performance standards;*
- *make programme participants ... aware of the importance of the normative dimension.* However, “prenormative aspects” of research projects should, in UNICE’s view, only be considered as a selection criterion at the “*preliminary evaluation stages*”, when appropriate, since standardisation is not the prime objective of the majority of high quality research projects presented to the Framework Programmes.
- *facilitate the protection of intellectual property rights when the results of research are transferred to standardisation bodies.*

Concerning more specifically the future prenormative research programmes, UNICE strongly recommends that :

- due place is reserved within **all** thematic programmes of the 5th Framework Programme and their relevant key actions for “*developing tools in support of quality such as measurements, tests, management and quality assurance techniques ...*”. The External Advisory Groups (EAGs) will have an important role to play for suggesting/monitoring how much money should be spent in this regard in the individual key actions and specific RTD programmes.
- that the **real** economic operators, especially industry, and their representative organisations be consulted for the orientation of European policy regarding prenormative research (see p.17).

Finally, UNICE appreciates that “*the JRC has opened a dialogue with the CEN-STAR to improve the utilisation of its research through standardisation*”. This could give the JRC an impetus in its newly declared mission realignment “*to provide scientific and technical support to the forming, putting into operation and following up the policies of the European Union*” by “*servicing the citizen, reinforcing sustainable development and supporting European competitiveness*”.

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