

**EUROPEAN STANDARDISATION**  
**UNICE POSITION PAPER**

Increased reference to standards in legislation is being discussed in connection with the revision of the New Approach and the proposal to use the New Approach in new areas, e.g. for environmental objectives (cf. Council Recommendation). Focus is on issues such as transparency, balanced stakeholder participation, financing, etc.

Furthermore, the Commission Report to the Council and the European Parliament on actions taken following the resolutions on European Standardisation COM (2001) 527 final, has been published with a view to generating debate and providing guidance concerning further work and reporting.

UNICE would like to contribute to the discussions by commenting on various statements, e.g. from consumer organisations. Industry believes that the existing system does provide structures that are open for active participation of all stakeholders if it is used as designed. Below we comment on some of the key issues in this connection.

As for the statements of the Commission mid-term report, UNICE welcomes the attention that is paid to the well-functioning of the standardisation process and finds the current reporting which is being made, e.g. in the form of the Scoreboard, useful and necessary.

## **1. Transparency and access of all stakeholders in the process**

Standardisation is a market-driven activity.

Manufacturers have a clear interest in active participation of all stakeholders in the process. Thus goods and services that adopt standards developed with consumer and environmental NGO participation may be more easily accepted in the marketplace. Likewise it is beneficial for industry that regulatory authorities are active in the process so as to avoid later blocking by use of the safeguard clause.

Standardisation is a result of dialogue and consensus. Wider participation in the work of the various interested parties (such as consumers and Member-State administrations) is the best guarantee for finding widely accepted solutions.

Wider participation in the work would also be more effective than making the organisation and procedures for standardisation more complex, e.g. by creating a possible external mediation and arbitration procedure. Such external mediation would run the risk of making the standardisation system even more complicated and lengthy.

It is a fact that the present system involving the national level gives opportunity for participation by all stakeholders (be it active or of purely informative character). A big challenge for active participation of e.g. consumers is, however, *competence*. Standards in many areas require specialist and in-depth knowledge of technical issues.

Increased use of the Internet for information on the work of technical committees and commissions, and for test surveys also increases transparency and gives consumers and other stakeholders easy access to the standardisation process.

Effective participation of NGOs in European standardisation work requires these associations to take the necessary steps to co-ordinate their positions at national level and to select priority subjects for consumer protection in order to make the best possible use of their human and financial resources. This is also the way industry has to organise itself.

## **2. Use of New Deliverables (such as industry agreements and specifications)**

Developing standards can be a very lengthy process which is inappropriate for sectors with fast changing technology, e.g. within the IT sector where a "fast-track" solution is needed, e.g. to ensure interoperability. This is the reason for increasingly strong pressure for more systematic recourse to use of specifications which do not, however, provide the same degree of consensus. There is consequently a general understanding that they should not be widely used to support European legislation in the field of safety, health and environment.

## **3. Monitoring the standardisation process**

Standards giving presumption of conformity with European legislation are developed according to mandates drawn up at the initiative of the Commission in co-operation with Member States. The existing system comprises a monitoring of the whole process. Participation of all stakeholders including public authorities in the process itself also serves as a guarantee that all aspects in connection with public interests are covered.

Other monitoring systems outside the standards bodies would not give any added value but would only complicate and delay the whole process further. Instead, public authorities and NGOs should be encouraged to commit themselves as early as possible in the developing process at national level.

## **4. The mandating process**

UNICE recognises the great importance that mandates have in giving precise instructions to standardisers on the kind of standards expected and what the standards must cover in order to be accepted for giving presumption of conformity. In interpreting the intentions of a directive it is, however, very important that neither the Commission nor the Member States bring in other dimensions than were foreseen in the directive or go beyond the essential requirements.

UNICE believes that informal consultation with relevant stakeholders can help clarify the requisite content of the mandates.

## **5. Use of the New Approach in new areas**

The New Approach is a proven success within the area of health and safety. It opens up for flexibility and innovation when it is up to manufacturers to specify the technical details.

As for environmental aspects, it should be noted that as there is no clear conversion factor between the ranking of e.g. energy consumption or air pollution versus waste or fire protection. It is a political task to balance one factor against the other and to set the priorities. If political decisions are clear when essential requirements and mandates are set up, industry sees no reason why standardisation should not be used as a tool for conformity assessment also in the environmental area. In areas where it does not seem possible to reach agreement on a standard (e.g. where there is no technical "truth", but a solution is desirable for political reasons), voluntary agreements might be an appropriate tool for conformity assessment.

## **6. Financing**

UNICE agrees with the Commission statement that the issue of future financing of European standardisation will increase in importance, and it seems more and more difficult to provide sufficient private funding.

The large number of mandated standards which have replaced detailed regulation makes public funding - from European as well as national level - both natural and necessary. Industry consequently urges the Commission and national authorities continuously to support the process financially to ensure efficient completion of the standardisation programme, and thus the well-functioning of the Internal Market.

## **7. International standardisation**

The importance of international standardisation is growing at the same pace as international trade and is of special importance to industry. UNICE supports European policy principles on international standardisation (SEC(2001) 1296 of 26.07.2001) and the Commission efforts to clarify the role of international standards in the context of the WTO-TBT agreement.

International, European and national standardisation bodies complement each other. This implies that national standardisation bodies commit themselves to contributing to international standardisation work and regional standardisation bodies are encouraged to enter into co-operation agreements with ISO and IEC.

A clear hierarchy of international, regional and national standards whereby regional and national standards adopt the content of international standards is a precondition for industry and society to benefit fully from the potential of international standardisation.

Common regulatory objectives and mutual recognition of conformity assessment procedures are, however, also important for obtaining wide use of international standards. UNICE therefore backs initiatives to further these goals.