

Future of European standardisation

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The Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Edvard KOUŘÍK (ECR, CZ) on the future of European harmonisation standards, as a follow up to the Commission's report on the application of procedure for the provision of information in the field of technical standards and regulations as laid down by Directive 98/34/EC.

Members welcome the Commission's intention to review the European standardisation system and to adopt and submit without delay a proposal for a modern, integrated standardisation policy, including a revision of Directive 98/34/EC laying down a procedure for the provision of information in the field of technical standards and regulations. The Commission is called upon to accompany the proposal for the review of the current legal framework on European standardisation with a strategy document establishing a comprehensive framework for action at European and national level.

The report endorses the Commission's intention to integrate into the legal framework of European standardisation the principles of the World Trade Organization's agreement on technical barriers to trade (transparency, openness, impartiality, consensus, effectiveness, relevance and coherence) in order to reinforce their application within the European standardisation system. It stresses, however, that these principles are not in themselves sufficient to ensure that all stakeholders – in particular those representing health and safety, consumer and environmental interests – are adequately represented in the standard-setting process within the European standardisation system. It considers, therefore, that a vital element is the addition of the principle of appropriate representation.

Members ask the Commission to identify, through its impact assessment in the context of the revision of the European standardisation system, the best way to reach this aim, evaluating the necessary funding to help SMEs. It stresses, that the development of European service standards, and the drawing-up by professional bodies of their own quality charters or labels at Union level should benefit further harmonisation in the services sector, increase the transparency, quality and competitiveness of European services and promote competition, innovation, the reduction of trade barriers and consumer protection.

1) Empowering the European standardisation system: Members stress that the European legislator must be highly vigilant and precise when defining the essential requirements in regulation, while the Commission must clearly and accurately define the objectives of the standardisation work in the mandates. It stresses that the role of standardisers should be limited to defining the technical means of reaching the goals set by the legislator as well as ensuring a high level of protection.

The report maintains that it is of the utmost importance to draw a clear line between legislation and standardisation and reiterates that it is essential for European standards to be developed within a reasonable period of time. It recognises the importance of simplifying the procedure for establishing standards.

The Commission is also invited to:

- develop and implement, in cooperation with the European Standards Organisations (ESOs), an improved and coherent system for coordinating standardisation policy and activities, which should cover all aspects of the standardisation process, from the preparation and delivery of mandates, through the monitoring of technical committee work, ensuring that the standards produced are consistent with EU policies and meet the essential requirements of the respective legislation, to the formal adoption, publication and use of the standards;
- revise and rationalise the process to deliver standardisation mandates to ESOs, so as to include a consultation phase with relevant stakeholders;
- present an action plan aiming at a more integrated EU standardisation system, more efficient and effective standard-setting, better access to standardisation, in particular for SMEs, a stronger EU role in standard-setting at international level and a more sustainable financing system for the development of standards;
- identify a procedure for ensuring that mandated standards comply with other EU policies and legislation beyond the scope of the 'New Approach';
- make decisions on formal objections to standards public in a consolidated way, and make available an updated table of all actions in relation to formal objections;
- present an annual report on the standardisation mandates and the progress on their fulfilment.

In this context, the Parliament sets out a series of recommendations which aim to:

- Improve access to the standardisation process: Parliament encourages European and national standardisation bodies, therefore, to promote and facilitate effective participation in the standardisation process by all interested parties, in particular representatives of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and all stakeholders representing the public interest such as consumers (including people with disabilities and vulnerable consumers), environmentalists, workers and bodies representing other societal interests.
- Enhance the national delegation principle: the resolution notes that, although National Standards Boards (NSBs) constitute a core element in the European standardisation system, there are significant differences among them in terms of resources, technical expertise and stakeholder engagement in the standardisation process. It stresses that the existing inequalities create a significant imbalance in their effective participation in the European standardisation system. It asks the Commission and the ESOs to promote training programmes and to take all measures needed to enable weaker NSBs to assume a more active role in the standardisation process.
- Facilitate access to standards: Parliament maintains that users' access to European standards developed in support of EU policies and legislation is an important issue that needs to be further examined. It takes the view that different systems of price setting should be considered for private/industrial standards and for harmonised/mandated standards. It calls, in particular, on NSBs to reduce costs through special rates and by offering bundles of standards at a reduced price, and to investigate additional ways of improving access, especially for SMEs.
- Members emphasise that standards should be comprehensible, simple and easy to use so that they can be implemented better by

users and it underlines the importance of providing standards in all EU official languages in order to ensure proper understanding by users. The Commission is called upon to further support, and simplify the financial arrangements for, the translation of harmonised standards.

2) Standardisation in support of innovation and sustainable competitiveness: Parliament recognises that European standardisation is an important tool for promoting innovation, research and development (R&D) and contributing to the Union's competitiveness and the completion of the internal market. It stresses the need to improve mutual awareness and cooperation between standardisers, innovators, academia and the research communities.

The resolution calls on the Commission and the Member States, in cooperation with NSBs, to promote the inclusion of standardisation in academic curricula, education (e.g. economic and technical schools), lifelong learning programmes and information campaigns in order to raise awareness amongst current and prospective economic operators and policy-makers about the importance and benefits of standards.

Parliament calls on the Commission to develop technology-watch activities so as to identify future R&D output that could benefit from standardisation. It stresses that the improvement of human health and living conditions implies developing products that can contribute to the healthy development of the population and improve accessibility, in particular for children and vulnerable people and considers, therefore, that there is an urgent need to integrate health aspects into all relevant products and services and that the European standardisation system needs to develop an improved system to ensure that such aspects are properly addressed when standards are developed.

The resolution stresses the imperative need to adapt ICT standardisation policy to market and policy developments, which will lead to achieving important European policy goals requiring interoperability, such as e-health, accessibility, security, e-business, e-government and transport, and will contribute to the development of standards in support of personal data protection.

Lastly, Parliament urges all the Member States to ratify without delay the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and implement effectively its provisions with regard to the promotion of universal design principles in the standards-setting process.