

European Commission Discussion Paper

'Towards an increased contribution from standardisation to innovation in Europe' ENTR/13/JA D (2007)

Note from the ANEC Secretary-General

ANEC welcomes the initiative of the Council to review the contribution of European standardisation to innovation. We also welcome the commitment of the Commission to issue a Communication on standardisation and innovation later in 2007.

As the Introduction to the paper notes, standardisation can support innovation in creating wealth and improving the welfare of European citizens. Hence it is vital that citizens are able to influence the standards development process. It is therefore a little disappointing, although understandable within the context of the Lisbon Agenda, that much of the paper focuses on SMEs in the development process.

ANEC has long called¹ on the European standards bodies to reform their processes and procedures in order to ensure a more balanced participation in their technical structures. However, the influence of national standards bodies in CEN and national electrotechnical committees in CENELEC, and pre-eminence of national business models over a deepening commitment to European and international standardisation, has not made change forthcoming.

The focus on national delegations makes it impossible for the composition of a related European committee to be fair to all parties and, without ANEC acting at European level, it is unlikely that consumer interests would be taken into account. The situation is still not equitable, however, as the 260 experts whose participation ANEC is able to facilitate in the three European standards bodies are met by 60.000 experts in CEN alone², most of whom are from industrial interests.

CEN and CENELEC emphasise that the national delegations are required to convey a consensual view in their positions. They also stress that the public comment phase, through which all draft European Standards must pass, ensures that all stakeholders not represented directly in the committee can express a view. But with ninety-two per cent of the costs of European standardisation being met by industry³, industry is able to dominate discussions in the committees and is well-placed to influence the content of standards. Moreover, less engaged groupings at the national level are not aware of the existence of the public comment phase.

¹ For example, ANEC position paper 'Proposals for improving public interest stakeholder participation in CEN and CENELEC' (document ANEC-GA-2006-G-004)

² Source: CEN promotional poster

³ Source: Roland Berger study conducted for CEN in 1999

ETSI is not based on national delegations but its direct membership naturally favours participants from industry and, often, multinational companies.

Furthermore, consumers and other socio-economic stakeholders who find themselves placed at the periphery of the system, find it difficult to access draft standards or even to find information about draft standards. Many national standards bodies (including AFNOR, BSI and DIN⁴) fail to make draft standards freely available and information about standards is sometimes seen as an 'added value' (and chargeable) service.

The national orientation of CEN and CENELEC also means that the associations are restricted from supporting the needs of the European market. It is not in the interests of a national standards body to support development of a European (or International) standard, where there will be peer competition for sale of a common product, if the market need can be satisfied by the development of a national standard, particularly if that standard is able to command the status of a *de facto* international standard.

The pre-eminent national interests mean that the Brussels-based secretariats of CEN and CENELEC cannot make drafts of European Standards available or sell European Standards (even though the CEN/CENELEC Internal Regulations recognise that the "CEN/CENELEC publications exist in their own right"⁵). This does not help promotion of European standardisation as a tool to aid competitiveness and innovation, either at the European level or on the global stage.

Although the Commission hints, in this paper and elsewhere, at the future recognition of consortia standards and specifications in support of European policies, it is far from certain that the procedures of such informal standards-setting bodies can provide the Commission with an assurance that democratic values will be upheld. The imposition of political requirements on the consortia would not be welcomed and would anyway be likely to defeat the aim of achieving the more rapid development of standards. It would also be almost impossible for organisations, such as ANEC, to represent their constituencies across an even more fragmented standardisation landscape.

Despite their imperfections, the formal European standards bodies should remain the exclusive partners of the Commission in the provisions of deliverables to support both European legislation and broader public policies. Evolution is preferred to revolution. The European standards bodies should be encouraged to collaborate more closely with consortia and consortia should be encouraged to view the European standards body as the means for their standards to receive a 'formal European endorsement'. It should be promoted and perceived as a 'win-win' situation.

⁴ Source: On-line catalogues

⁵ Clause 10.1, CEN/CENELEC Internal Regulations – Part 2 : 2006

In cases where the Commission does not have confidence in the ability of the formal European standardisation system to deliver standards (or other deliverables) that are fit for its purpose (in terms of speed, content or democratic accountability), it should not hesitate to consider legislation. ANEC holds grave concerns that the proposed Internal Market Package (and consequent extension of the New Approach) will pass further responsibilities to a system that is flawed and, in its present guise, is unable to offer a surety of protection to consumer interests.

ANEC recognises the benefits that can be derived from the development of European and International Standards in parallel. But the development of common standards in ISO (or IEC) can make it difficult for some European interests to be heard.

CEN (and CENELEC) should ensure in all such cases that a mirror committee exists to allow a consensual European view to be formulated. Recalling the need in both ISO and IEC for International Standards to reflect Global Relevance, the Commission must also not be discouraged from mandating CEN and CENELEC to develop European Standards if there is risk that an International Standard would require the agreement of too many compromises on health and safety.

In order to achieve greater democracy in the standards development process, both at European and international level, ANEC calls for a wider and deeper application of IT solutions in the process. For the most part, the standards bodies have used IT tools simply to facilitate the traditional committee methodology. But, in order to achieve a more open process (and to reduce development times), internet technologies should be further embraced in what has been termed the 'Wiki Way of Working'. Some in the standards bodies claim that this would lead to a 'flood' of undisciplined participation but, in reality, it is likely that only organised European and international associations, presently at the margins of the system, would be motivated to participate.

Consumer representation in European standardisation under the New Approach has shown that consumer participation does not represent an obstacle to competitiveness but is an important and accepted principle of the European standardisation system. Indeed, consumer representatives have been credited with introducing new concepts in the development of European Standards - such as Design for All - so contributing to the gestation of innovative products and services.

In conclusion, reform of the European standardisation system is needed if standards are to benefit society, in terms of promoting European competitiveness on the global stage and improving the welfare of European citizens.

Innovation is but one justification for reform.