European Economic and Social Committee

INT/803
European standardisation 2017

OPINION

of the
European Economic and Social Committee

on the
Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee – The annual Union work programme for European standardisation for 2017
[COM(2016) 357 final]

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<th>Consultation</th>
<th>European Commission, 17/08/2016</th>
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<td>Legal basis</td>
<td>Article 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union</td>
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<td>Section responsible</td>
<td>Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption</td>
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<td>Adopted in section</td>
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<td>14/12/2016</td>
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<td>Plenary session No</td>
<td>521</td>
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1. **Conclusions and recommendations**

1.1 The European Economic and Social Committee welcomes the EU’s 2017 annual work programme on European standardisation, which forms part of a comprehensive standardisation package.

1.2 The Commission's proposed annual plan follows on from, and adds to, the measures outlined in the 2016 plan, on which the Committee has already commented in earlier opinions.

1.3 The Committee reiterates the importance of standards for making the single market more competitive and developing innovative products and services, and for increasing their quality and safety for the benefit of consumers, workers, businesses and the environment.

1.4 As the representative of organised civil society, the Committee supports such a standardisation system which meets the needs both of society and the economy.

1.5 The Committee points out once again that ensuring the pluralism of European standardisation systems by including the organisations referred to in annex III of Regulation (EU) No 1025/2012 guarantees greater transparency and access to this system. The participation of society representatives in the standardisation system must not be limited to the EU level. These stakeholders should be involved in national standardisation systems too.

1.6 Standards are developed in support of EU legislations and policies (“new legislative approach” related standards, Energy Union, etc.). In addition, the development of digitalisation in industry, the supply chain and services means that ICT standards and standards for services are key to conducting business in different sectors of the economy. The Commission recognised in this connection that measures in both of these areas will be a priority and this is welcomed by the Committee.

1.7 At the same time, the Committee points out that competitiveness of SMEs should be supported by involving them in the process of drafting and implementing standards, and by adopting appropriate educational measures to raise awareness of the benefits of standards.

1.8 The TTIP negotiations currently being conducted by the Commission and the completed CETA negotiations show that standardisation, on account of the various systems involved, is a major point of discussion. According to the Committee, therefore, stakeholders need to be informed about the differences between the standardisation systems of the negotiating parties and the potential risks and benefits arising from these differences should be highlighted.

1.9 The Committee supports the proposal to establish an interinstitutional dialogue on standardisation - a view it has already expressed in an earlier opinion.

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1.10 The Committee also welcomes the Commission proposal to carry out research into the impact of standards on the economy and society.

2. European Commission proposals

2.1 In line with Regulation (EU) No 1025/2012, the Commission communication sets out the EU’s 2017 annual work programme on European standardisation.

2.2 The annual programme is part of a comprehensive package, including the Commission communication on European standards for the 21st century, a staff working document on service standardisation and the communication on the Article 24 report on the implementation of the regulation.

2.3 The 2017 work programme on standardisation adds to the measures outlined in the 2016 programme, most of which are at the implementation stage.

2.4 The strategic priorities for European standardisation in 2017 are as follows:

- ICT standardisation in the digital single market;
- services standardisation;
- drafting by European standardisation organisations of standards and standardisation documents relating to the Connected Digital Single Market, a Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy, and a Deeper and Fairer Internal Market with a Strengthened Industrial Base;
- international cooperation on standardisation;
- support for standardisation through scientific research.

2.5 To enhance the evidence base of the annual governance cycle on EU standardisation policy, the Commission will also:

- examine the economic and societal impact of standardisation;
- set up an inter-institutional dialogue.

3. General comments

3.1 The Committee welcomes the next annual work programme on standardisation since applying standards to production and services helps increase competitiveness in the single market - a view it has already expressed on several occasions.

3.2 The Committee takes a positive view of the fact that the measures outlined in the Commission’s previous annual plan will continue, ensuring continuity and enabling the priorities of the single market strategy to be met.

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3.2.1 The 2017 annual work programme sets out in more detail, and adds to, the priorities already being implemented. The objective here is to adapt the European standardisation system to the changing international situation and challenges in the global market.

4. Strategic priorities for European standardisation

4.1 At a time of rapid development in information technology, it is essential to draw up appropriate standards to ensure interoperability and security in cyberspace.

4.1.1 Technologies such as 5G communications, cloud computing, the internet of things (IoT) and big data technologies are used in the following areas: e-health, smart energy, smart cities, advanced technologies and smart factories, and networked and automated vehicles, and they require standards for cybersecurity, risk management and monitoring guidelines for supervisory bodies and regulators.

4.1.2 The level of security, data protection and access to the internet of things still need to be improved. Standardisation in this area may be a precondition for the interoperability of the IoT and for ensuring cybersecurity, data protection and accessibility for consumers.

4.2 The Committee welcomes the fact that the Commission will ask European standardisation organisations to carry out a check of existing appropriate standards before requesting for new standards for services to be developed.

4.2.1 At the same time, the Committee considers that, for the purpose of future work, it is good practice to notify stakeholders of the Commission mandates on which work is still being carried out and which mandates have been completed or suspended.

4.2.2 When assessing existing standards, it is important to take into account whether they meet the specific needs of vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities. One example might be standards relating to the electronic signature, which do not meet the needs of consumers with disabilities. In this case, recommending that a new standard be drafted would be justified.

4.2.3 When new standardisation processes are initiated, the specific needs of vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, must be taken into account, where relevant, as part of the definition of the terms for the standardisation process. A new procedure should be adopted allowing accessibility experts and disability organisations to participate without cost in standardisation processes where relevant.

4.3 The Committee has underlined on several occasions the considerable impact of standards on the quality of products and services in the single market. It therefore welcomes the Commission’s plans to improve development of standards for services by monitoring national standards and market requirements and identifying areas where there is a need for new standards.

4.3.1 The Committee agrees with the Commission’s suggestion that national standardisation bodies deciding on whether to develop a national service standard should consider the European
dimension and whether it might be better to develop a European standard. This could help remove barriers and potential conflicts in the area of services.

4.4 The ever increasing reach of online services, both private and public (hospitals, care institutions, smart transport, etc.) requires technical solutions to ensure greater anonymity for consumers and to limit the risk of their data being processed excessively.

4.5 Future work on standardisation should help improve quality, accessibility and safety of transport services, and limit the environmental pollution caused by transport.

4.6 In the energy field, the Commission's work will be aimed at linking up infrastructure, diversifying energy sources, limiting use of energy and promoting climate-friendly technologies.

4.6.1 The Committee agrees that drawing up uniform standards for smart energy networks will improve the interoperability of the network, and that optimising all elements of that network will contribute to lower costs and increased effectiveness while helping to integrate distributed energy sources, including renewable energy. This will allow end users to make full use of smart energy systems.

4.7 The Committee welcomes the fact that the Commission document raises the issue of the biodegradability of plastic packaging, production of sustainable chemicals using secondary materials and the methods for assessing the risks of substances not included in the relevant lists but used to produce plastic products intended to come into contact with food.

4.7.1 Taking into account the high risks involved, standards concerning the above areas should include strict requirements to protect both consumer health and the environment.

5. **International cooperation**

5.1 The Commission encourages European standardisation organisations to promote international and European standards across the world, as a way of supporting European industry and facilitating market access.

5.2 At a time when the CETA agreement negotiated with Canada is proving controversial in Member States, and with the TTIP negotiations still ongoing, the role played by standards in world trade needs to be continually stressed.

5.2.1 Apart from delivering the benefit of removing technical barriers to trade, dialogue with non-European partners (China, India …) should contribute to the roll-out of the European standardisation model, exchange of information between European and national standardisation organisations and implementation of ISO and IEC standards, and in sectors where international standardisation is insufficient or lacking, to the development and implementation of European standards.
6. **Standardisation as a way of supporting innovation**

6.1 The Committee supports the idea of linking standardisation closely with scientific research and converting knowledge into standards.

6.2 Dialogue between research institutions and the technical committees CEN and CENELEC and ETSI as part of the Horizon 2020 programme should boost innovativeness.

Brussels, 14 December 2016

Georges Dassis
The president of the European Economic and Social Committee