

## I

(Information)

## COUNCIL

## COUNCIL RESOLUTION

of 28 October 1999

on the role of standardisation in Europe

(2000/C 141/01)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

1. RECALLING the objectives of the Treaty establishing the European Community, particularly the free movement of goods and services, the strengthening of economic and social cohesion, the protection of workers and consumers, the preservation, protection and improvement of the quality of the environment, the competitiveness of industry, and the role standardisation can play to attain these objectives;
2. RECALLING its Resolution of 7 May 1985 on a new approach to technical harmonisation and standards <sup>(1)</sup>, and its Resolution of 18 June 1992 on the role of standardisation in the European economy <sup>(2)</sup>;
3. NOTING the Commission's Report of 13 May 1998 on efficiency and accountability of European standardisation under the new approach <sup>(3)</sup>;
4. RECALLING its Conclusions of 18 May 1998 <sup>(4)</sup> in which it agreed, *inter alia*, 'on the need, in the light of the Commission's Report, for further reflection and discussions on standardisation issues in the Council as well as in other appropriate fora';
5. ACKNOWLEDGING that a strong European standardisation system has been developed, and that in particular through the new approach this has contributed in a significant way to the functioning of the single market, the protection of health and safety, the competitiveness of industry and the promotion of international trade, and has been supporting an increasing range of Community policies;
6. CONSIDERING that it is now timely to address aspects of the implementation of the new approach where experience shows improvement to be possible;
7. RECOGNISING that the environment in which standardisation operates is changing rapidly for reasons arising from global trade relations, technological progress, or particular customer wishes; recognising the existence of

different concepts of standardisation at the global level and the increasing tendency of interested parties to elaborate technical specifications outside recognised standardisation infrastructures; and recognising that it is now timely to introduce policies to address new challenges and provide for the success of standardisation in the future;

8. BELIEVING that in responding to these needs, it is important to build on the basic structure of standardisation already existing in Europe, including the current status and responsibilities of national standards bodies in the European and international standards bodies (national delegation principle);
9. ACKNOWLEDGING the opportunities offered to Europe by the enlargement of the Union and the challenges it poses to the applicant countries and their standards bodies in order to become part of and attain the full benefit of the European standardisation system;
10. EMPHASISING the role of European standardisation as a means to meet specific needs of the European market, to serve the public interest, in particular in support of European policies, to provide standards in new domains, to implement international standards in a coherent way and, while respecting the independence of national standards bodies, to facilitate mutual understanding between Member States' standards bodies and the preparation of coherent positions in international standardisation;

HAS THEREFORE AGREED on the following:

#### Principles of standardisation

11. CONFIRMS that standardisation is a voluntary, consensus-driven activity, carried out by and for the interested parties themselves, based on openness and transparency, within independent and recognised standards organisations, leading to the adoption of standards compliance with which is voluntary;
12. EMPHASISES that standards should be fit for purpose, have a high degree of acceptability as a result of the full involvement of all relevant interested parties in the standardisation process, be coherent with each other and allow for technological innovation and competition; that therefore they should be based on sound scientific research, be updated regularly, and be performance-based where possible;

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 136, 4.8.1985.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ C 173, 9.7.1992.

<sup>(3)</sup> COM(98) 291.

<sup>(4)</sup> Doc. 8884/98 MI 60 ECO 91.

13. ENCOURAGES the European standards bodies, in addition to maintaining the framework for the elaboration of formal standards required, *inter alia*, to support health, safety and environmental provisions in legislation, to continue to develop new policies to adapt to evolving market needs by:

- diversifying the range of products and services offered to interested parties,
- developing a graduated system of products other than formal standards, which comprises elaboration procedures and consultation processes adapted to the purpose of each product, and which provides for these products to be transformed into formal standards, where appropriate, as soon as possible;

while maintaining their commitment to formal standardisation;

14. REQUESTS the Commission to examine how a Community framework of principles should be developed with regard to the use within Community policies of specifications which do not have the status of formal standards;

15. REQUESTS the Commission to examine whether differences between standardisation in the field of information and communications technology and standardisation in other sectors give rise to problems and opportunities and, if so, how these should be addressed;

16. CALLS UPON national as well as European standards bodies to continue to support the functioning of the European standardisation infrastructure and the attainment of common European objectives;

### Enlargement

17. WELCOMES the measures by the applicant countries and their standards bodies to create and further develop, with the support of the European Union, the necessary standardisation infrastructures to meet the conditions for membership of the European standards bodies so as to allow for a full and effective participation in European standardisation; calls upon the European standards bodies to carefully examine the need to adapt their internal procedures to an increased membership;

### Role of public authorities

18. HIGHLIGHTS the legitimate interest of public authorities in European standardisation given its wide impact on society and given the new dimension it has taken as a result of the wide recourse made to it by Community policies, especially in support of legislation under the new approach;

19. REQUESTS public authorities to acknowledge the strategic importance of standardisation, in particular by maintaining a stable and transparent legal, political and financial framework at the European, international and national levels, in which standardisation can further evolve, in ensuring compliance with the principles governing standardisation, and, where appropriate, in contributing to the standardisation process;

20. NOTES that the new approach created for the completion of the internal market, which combines the official instrument of the Directive with voluntarily applied European standards, has proved itself and should be further applied, and invites the Commission to examine systematically whether the new approach principle can be applied to sectors not yet covered as a means of improving and simplifying legislation wherever possible;

21. CONSIDERS that cooperation between the Community and the European standards bodies should be based on a partnership, characterised by common objectives, and that new mechanisms for cooperation and transparency between the Commission, national authorities and the European standards bodies should be created, and in particular calls upon the European standards bodies to adopt procedures to resolve, in cooperation with the public authorities, problems which might otherwise lead to the application of the safeguard clause;

### Efficiency

22. INVITES the European standards bodies to constantly update their policies for increasing the efficiency of the standardisation process, so as to deliver in a timely way the standards that meet the requirements of the market, including SMEs, and — as the case may be — of the terms of Community mandates and of Community legislation; and to report on a regular basis on the impact of policies on efficiency;

23. in this context, INVITES the European standards bodies to consider more frequent recourse to indicative voting at an earlier stage in the standardisation process in order to verify consensus in cases where all the necessary technical elements are present, where the non-respect of agreed target dates is at risk, and where a draft is likely to obtain the number of positive votes required;

24. INVITES the European standards bodies to develop or improve existing mechanisms, supplementing consensus at national level, allowing them to give broad consideration to the positions expressed by the various interest groups during the standardisation process;

## 25. CALLS UPON the Commission:

- to ensure that standardisation mandates under the new approach are prepared accurately and efficiently, affording Member States and the European standards bodies sufficient opportunity to contribute,
  - to ensure that standardisation activities covered by mandates are subject to thorough monitoring and that appropriate measures are examined with the European standards bodies in order to ensure proper progress, and
  - to carry out, as part of the continuous evaluation process, studies on the overall impact of standardisation, and to contribute, in close cooperation with the European standards bodies, to establishing a system for benchmarking the performances of those bodies, and to keep the Council informed of progress in this work;
26. CALLS UPON public authorities in the Member States to make appropriate and timely contributions to the process of standardisation, in particular where standardisation is undertaken in support of Community policy or in the public interest;
27. INVITES all interested parties to participate actively in the elaboration of standards and to contribute to the management of the standardisation process;
28. WELCOMES the presentation by the European standards bodies of common, user-friendly, up-to-date and readily accessible information on progress in standardisation, and invites the standards bodies continually to improve their provision of information;
29. NOTES WITH CONCERN that the production of harmonised European standards is subject to delays in some sectors, and in particular the absence so far of harmonised standards in relation to Council Directive 89/106/EEC of 21 December 1988 on the approximation of laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States relating to construction products<sup>(1)</sup> and calls upon all concerned to take the necessary steps to allow delivery of the standards needed to facilitate the free movement of goods in this sector;

**Financing**

30. CONSIDERS that the costs of elaborating standards should in principle be borne by the interested parties themselves;
31. CONFIRMS ITS INTENTION to continue to provide targeted Community financial support to European standardisation within appropriate budgetary limits;

32. INVITES the national and European standards bodies and public authorities to examine how the viability of an overall standardisation system in Europe can best be financially guaranteed in the light of a rapidly changing European and international environment and of anticipate changes in the traditional sources of income;

**International standardisation**

33. RECOGNISING the increasing importance of international standards as markets become globalised, CONFIRMS its commitment to international standardisation and to the obligations under the World Trade Organisation's Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement (WTO-TBT), believing in particular that the use of full international standards should be further promoted through this Agreement, and noting that the Commission, the Member States and the European standards bodies have created instruments to implement these obligations effectively;
34. CALLS UPON Europe's trading partners to give concrete expression to their commitment to international standardisation by introducing standards-receptive regulatory models and to promote the coherence of standards by withdrawing national standards which conflict with international standards, except where such international standards would be ineffective or inappropriate, for instance, because of an insufficient level of protection or fundamental climatic or geographical factors or fundamental technological problems;
35. EMPHASISES the exemplary nature of the Vienna Agreement (between ISO and CEN) and the Dresden Agreement (between IEC and Cenelec) and ENCOURAGES standards bodies of Europe's trading partners to adopt comparable mechanisms for cooperation with international standards bodies and for the transposition of international standards;
36. STRESSES the need for European participants in international standards bodies to use their best efforts to ensure that those bodies are efficient and accountable, and that international standards are of sufficiently high quality to play the role given to them by the WTO-TBT Agreement;
37. STRESSES the need, while respecting the independence of national standards bodies, to ensure that interests defined at European level be presented coherently in both international standards bodies and intergovernmental fora, and that to this end appropriate mechanisms for the exchange of relevant information and preparatory consultations be foreseen by the Commission, the Member States and the European standards bodies;

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 40, 11.2.1989, p. 12.

## 38. REMINDS the European parties

- of the need to take full account of the essential requirements of Community legislation, and
- that, in compliance with, *inter alia*, Article 137 of the Treaty, Member States are entitled to specify national requirements concerning the health and safety of workers at work, environmental protection, consumer protection and other relevant policies,

when the elaboration of a harmonised standard is based on international work;

39. STRESSES that interested parties such as workers', consumers', and environmental interest groups should be fully involved in the standardisation process at all relevant stages, when standards are drawn up at the international level;
40. REQUESTS the Commission to develop, in consultation with the Member States, guidelines for a European standard-

isation policy in the international context which takes into account the elements referred to in paragraphs 33 to 39 above and to report to the Council before July 2001. Such guidelines should build on the experiences and strengths of European standardisation as a contribution to the development, in close cooperation with Europe's trading partners, of international standards which play an important role in the removal of technical barriers to trade;

**Conclusion**

41. CALLS UPON the Commission to report to the Council by 30 June 2001 on the action it has taken in accordance with this resolution;
42. RESOLVES TO REVIEW the implementation of this resolution on the basis, *inter alia*, of the Commission's report and to decide on further action if necessary.