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Future of European standardisation

P7_TA(2010)0384

European Parliament resolution of 21 October 2010 on the future of European standardisation (2010/2051(INI))

(2012/C 70 E/05)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the public hearing on the future of European standardisation held by its Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection on 23 June 2010,
- having regard to the responses to the Commission's public consultation on the review of the European standardisation system (held from 23 March to 21 May 2010),
- having regard to the impact assessment study on the 'Standardisation Package' carried out for the Commission Directorate-General for Enterprise and Industry (9 March 2010),
- having regard to the report of the Expert Panel for the Review of the European Standardisation System (EXPRESS) entitled 'Standardisation for a competitive and innovative Europe: a vision for 2020' (February 2010),
- having regard to Professor Mario Monti's report of 9 May 2010 to the President of the Commission entitled 'A New Strategy for the Single Market',
- having regard to the Commission communication of 3 March 2010 on 'Europe 2020: a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' (COM(2010)2020),
- having regard to the study on SME access to European standardisation, entitled 'Enabling small and medium-sized enterprises to achieve greater benefit from standards and from involvement in standardisation', commissioned by the European Committee for Standardisation (CEN) and the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardisation (CENELEC) (August 2009),
- having regard to the study on access to standardisation carried out for the Commission Directorate-General for Enterprise and Industry (10 March 2009),
- having regard to the Commission report of 21 December 2009 on the operation of Directive 98/34/EC from 2006 to 2008 (COM(2009)0690) and to the accompanying Commission staff working document (SEC(2009)1704),
- having regard to the white paper of 3 July 2009 on 'Modernising ICT Standardisation in the EU – The Way Forward' (COM(2009)0324),
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 25 September 2008 on standardisation and innovation,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 25 June 2008 entitled 'Think Small First' - A 'Small Business Act' for Europe' (COM(2008)0394),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 11 March 2008 entitled 'Towards an increased contribution from standardisation to innovation in Europe' (COM(2008)0133),

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- having regard to the Commission communication of 18 October 2004 on the role of European standardisation in the framework of European policies and legislation (COM(2004)0674) and the accompanying Commission staff working document entitled 'The challenges for European standardisation',
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 25 February 2004 entitled 'Integration of Environmental Aspects into European Standardisation' (COM(2004)0130),
 - having regard to the Commission staff working document of 26 July 2001 on 'European Policy Principles on International Standardisation' (SEC(2001)1296),
 - having regard to its resolution of 12 February 1999 on the Commission report on efficiency and accountability in European standardisation under the New Approach ⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to the Commission report of 13 May 1998 on efficiency and accountability in European standardisation under the New Approach (COM(1998)0291),
 - having regard to Decision No 1673/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 on the financing of European standardisation ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to Directive 98/34/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 June 1998 laying down a procedure for the provision of information in the field of technical standards and regulations ⁽³⁾,
 - having regard to Council Decision 87/95/EEC of 22 December 1986 on standardisation in the field of information technology and telecommunications ⁽⁴⁾,
 - having regard to the June 1991 Vienna Agreement on technical cooperation between ISO and CEN and to the September 1996 Dresden Agreement on exchanges of technical data between CENELEC and the IEC,
 - having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection and the opinion of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (A7-0276/2010),
- A. whereas the European standardisation system has been a central element in the delivery of the single market, in particular through the use of standards in key legislative areas under the 'New Approach', integrated into the 'New Legislative Framework',
- B. whereas the current legal framework has contributed to the success of European standardisation, enabling the development of European standards which are needed by all economic actors in order to ensure the smooth functioning of the internal market, facilitate world trade and market access and boost sustainable growth and competitiveness,
- C. whereas the European standardisation system plays a key role in responding to the increasing need, in European policy and legislation, for standards capable of ensuring product safety, accessibility, innovation, interoperability and environmental protection,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 150, 28.5.1999, p. 624.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 315, 15.11.2006, p. 9.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 204, 21.7.1998, p. 37.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 36, 7.2.1987, p. 31.

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- D. whereas principle VII of the ‘Small Business Act’ underlines the importance of promoting SME participation and defence of SMEs’ interests in standardisation,
- E. whereas the development of European standards contributes to the development of global standards,
- F. whereas a modern and flexible European standardisation system is a crucial component for an ambitious and renewed European industrial policy,
- G. whereas European standardisation operates within – and in various relations to – the global ecosystem and relies on specific structures and a dedicated set of processes for standards development as implemented by CEN and CENELEC on the basis of the national delegation principle and by the European Telecom Standards Institute (ETSI) on the basis of direct membership,
- H. whereas the Monti report on a new strategy for the single market affirms that standardisation is key for the governance of the single market and emphasises that it is necessary to review the European standards process, maintaining the benefits of the current system and striking the right balance between the European and national dimensions,
- I. whereas European standardisation – in order to address the future needs of business and consumers and to yield all its potential benefits in support of public and societal objectives – must adapt to the challenges resulting from globalisation, climate change, the emergence of new economic powers and the evolution of technology,
- J. whereas it is necessary to develop a strategic approach to European standardisation and review the current system in order for it to remain successful and respond to the needs of the forthcoming decade, thereby allowing Europe to maintain a leading role in the global standardisation system,

Introduction

1. Welcomes the Commission’s intention to review the European standardisation system with a view to preserving its many successful elements, improving its deficiencies and striking the right balance between the European, national and international dimensions; stresses that the proposed review should build on the strengths of the existing system, which constitute a solid basis for improvement, refraining from any radical changes that would undermine the core values of the system;
2. Urges the Commission 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, Decision 87/95/EEC on ICT standardisation and Decision 1673/2006/EC on the financing of European standardisation, as stated in the Commission Work Programme for 2010;
3. Stresses that the review of the European standardisation system must contribute to European innovation and sustainable development, enhance the Union’s competitiveness, strengthen its place in international trade and benefit the welfare of its citizens;
4. Commends the report of the Expert Panel for the Review of the European Standardisation System (EXPRESS); calls on European and national standardisation organisations, the Member States and the Commission to implement its strategic recommendations in order to deliver a European standardisation system capable of responding to societal and economic needs and maintaining its leading role in the global standardisation system;
5. Asks the Commission 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, including concrete proposals for those improvements that cannot be implemented through the review of the legislation; stresses that such a strategy document should not be limited to the recommendations contained in the EXPRESS report;

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6. Welcomes the Commission white paper on 'Modernising ICT Standardisation in the EU – The Way Forward'; calls on the Member States and the Commission to implement the key recommendations outlined in the white paper in order to ensure the development, within the European and international standardisation systems, of relevant global ICT standards for implementation and use in EU policies and public procurement;
7. 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; holds the view that the integration of those principles should not increase the number of recognised European standardisation organisations (ESOs) beyond the three existing ones, namely CEN, CENELEC and ETSI;
8. Considers that these principles could be complemented by additional attributes such as maintenance, availability, quality, neutrality and accountability; believes that all those principles need to be further detailed and defined, and that a specific monitoring system must be introduced to ensure their implementation at national and European level in the development of standards in support of EU policies and legislation;
9. 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; considers, therefore, that a vital element is the addition of the principle of 'appropriate representation', given that it is of the utmost importance, whenever the public interest is concerned, to incorporate all stakeholder positions in an appropriate manner, especially in the development of standards intended to support EU legislation and policies, while acknowledging the need to engage the most relevant technical experts for a given standardisation project;
10. Stresses that SMEs, although they represent an essential part of the European market, are not adequately involved in the standardisation system and cannot, therefore, exploit entirely the benefits derived from standardisation; believes that it is essential to improve their representation and participation in the system, especially in the technical committees at national level; asks 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;
11. Points out that, although standards have contributed to a considerable improvement in the quality and safety of goods, their availability in the area of services is far from commensurate with the economic importance and potential of this sector; notes in particular that the number of national standards for services developed in Europe in recent years exceeds by far the equivalent number of European standards developed in the sector;
12. Recognises that service standards often respond to national specificities and that their development is related to the needs of the market, the interests of consumers and the public interest; 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, as provided for in Directive 2006/123/EC on services in the internal market, 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;
13. Supports, therefore, the Commission's intention to include service standards in the legal framework of European standardisation, as this will not only ensure the notification of all national service standards that could potentially constitute technical barriers to trade in the internal market, but also provide a proper legal basis on which the Commission can request the ESOs to develop standards in well-defined and carefully assessed areas in the services sector; suggests to the Commission that it encourage service providers to develop standards within the ESOs in order, insofar as possible, to avoid fragmentation among different national standards, while ensuring that service standards are related to the needs of the market and consumers and the public interest; supports actions taken to ensure the quality of service provision, such as quality charters or labels drawn up by professional bodies, and encourages all relevant actors to participate in the European standardisation process;

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Empowering the European standardisation system

(a) General points

14. Reaffirms that European standardisation in support of 'New Approach' legislation has proved to be a successful and essential tool for the completion of the single market; notes that the number of standardisation mandates supporting legislation in areas beyond those covered by the 'New Approach' has increased in recent years, indicating that this model has been adopted across a broad range of EU policies; believes that it is desirable to extend the use of standards in other areas of Union legislation and policies beyond the single market, taking into account the specificities of the areas concerned, in accordance with the principles of better regulation;

15. Maintains that it is of the utmost importance to draw a clear line between legislation and standardisation in order to avoid any misinterpretation with regard to the objectives of the law and the desired level of protection; stresses 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; 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;

16. Reiterates that it is essential for European standards to be developed within a reasonable period of time, in particular in those areas where standards are needed quickly in order to meet the requirements of public policies and rapidly changing market conditions; invites, therefore, the European and national standards bodies to continue improving their efficiency and effectiveness, bearing in mind that the acceleration of the standardisation process must not take place to the detriment of the principles of openness, quality, transparency and consensus among all interested parties;

17. Recognises the importance of simplifying the procedure for establishing standards; invites the Commission, in collaboration with stakeholders, to find new ways to optimise the effective adoption of European standards;

18. Believes that the standardisation process will be partly accelerated through better consultation between the Commission and the ESOs prior to issuing a mandate, which will enable them to respond more quickly, preferably within a two-month period, about their possibility to undertake a standardisation project;

19. Notes the importance of the Directive 98/34/EC Committee as a forum between the Commission and the Member States in the discussion of issues related to technical regulations and standardisation; considers that European Parliament representatives should be invited to the meetings of this Committee (or its successor body), which, while maintaining the observership of European and national standardisation bodies, should also, where appropriate, be open to the observership of European-level stakeholder organisations, especially during the discussion of standardisation mandates;

20. Urges the Commission to develop and implement, in cooperation with the 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; emphasises the role that relevant stakeholder categories could play as an advisory group assisting the Commission in developing a harmonised European standardisation policy platform;

21. Calls on Member States to implement a coordinated policy on standardisation and adopt a coherent approach with regard to the use of standards in support of legislation; calls on the Commission to make sure that the achievement of EU policy goals is not put at risk through uncoordinated standardisation efforts, competing or unnecessary standards, or a superfluity of certification schemes;

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22. Calls on the Commission to revise and rationalise the process to deliver standardisation mandates to ESOs, so as to include a consultation phase with relevant stakeholders and a thorough analysis that justifies the need for new standard-setting activity, in order to ensure the relevance of standard-setting and avoid duplication and the proliferation of divergent standards and specifications;

23. Calls also on the Commission to 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;

24. Stresses the important role of the 'New Approach consultants' in verifying that harmonised standards comply with the corresponding EU legislation; draws attention to the fact that such consultants are currently selected by, and operate within, the ESOs, which places a significant administrative burden on these organisations and, at times, causes concern among stakeholders about the impartiality and independence of the process; calls on the Commission, therefore, to assess the need for a review of the existing procedures; believes, furthermore, that the Commission should identify a procedure for ensuring that mandated standards comply with other EU policies and legislation beyond the scope of the 'New Approach'; considers that this should take place during the development of the standards in order to avoid delays and inefficiencies due to ex-post rejection;

25. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to check standards against delivery in a more thorough way in order to ensure that they meet the requirements of the mandate, in particular when the standards are used for the purposes of 'New Approach' legislation, while ensuring that no significant additional delays are built into the procedure for approving standards; intends to examine – in the context of the forthcoming review of the European standardisation system – the possibility of extending to Parliament the right, currently accorded to the Commission and Member States, to dispute a harmonised standard which does not appear to entirely satisfy the essential requirements of the corresponding legislation;

26. Asks the Commission, for the sake of transparency, to 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; calls also on the Commission to present an annual report on the standardisation mandates and the progress on their fulfilment;

27. Invites the ESOs to reinforce their existing appeal mechanisms which are meant to be used should a disagreement over a standard arise; notes that the current mechanisms may not always be effective as their composition reflects in practice the position of those that approved a standard; proposes, therefore, enlarging the composition to enable the participation of external independent experts and/or European societal stakeholders that are currently associate members or cooperating partners of the ESOs;

28. Expresses its support for the Keymark, a voluntary European certification mark, owned by CEN/CENELEC, which demonstrates compliance with European standards; stresses that the Keymark is a valuable alternative to the various national certification schemes that entail multiple testing and marking of products in several Member States and can therefore become a barrier to trade within the Internal Market and cause significant costs for small companies that may be reflected in higher prices for the consumer; encourages, therefore, national standards bodies, and other national certification bodies, to promote the Keymark as an alternative to national certification schemes; calls also for a pan-European information campaign in order to raise awareness amongst businesses and consumers about the benefits of the Keymark;

29. Is aware that the current system of EU funding in support of European standardisation often leads to frustration in terms of rule changes, the high cost of auditing and delays in the authorisation of payments; stresses that there is an urgent need to reduce these costs and the high administrative burden that at times outweigh the benefits of the financial support provided, while respecting EU financial rules; calls on the Commission and all stakeholders to ensure the financial sustainability of the system, including through public-private partnerships and through multiannual financial planning, which is essential to ensure its effectiveness and efficiency in global competition; considers that the Commission and the ESOs could improve their cooperation in order to guarantee a stable and user-friendly framework for the EU financial contribution to European standardisation which will increase significantly the efficiency of the system;

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(b) Improving access to the standardisation process

30. Recognises the principle of national delegation as a cornerstone of the European standardisation system, particularly in the standards-development process of CEN and CENELEC; notes, however, that – as confirmed in the study on access to standardisation – in the vast majority of European countries societal stakeholders participate very little, or not at all, in the standard-setting process;

31. 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;

32. Calls also on the Commission to investigate the reasons for the low level of societal stakeholder and SME participation at national level and, where appropriate, to promote measures for the Member States which will give societal stakeholders and SMEs better access to the national standardisation process; welcomes the efforts of CEN/CENELEC and national standards bodies (NSBs) in implementing the 'Toolbox of 58 recommendations' of the study on SME access to standardisation and the recommendations of the EXPRESS Report with a view to improving access for all stakeholders;

33. Stresses the need, which has been recognised since the 1990s, to ensure direct participation by societal stakeholders at European level in order to reflect their views more effectively, given that their representation on national technical committees in most Member States remains weak; affirms that, as very limited success has been achieved in increasing societal stakeholder participation at national level, financial and political support for the European organisations established to represent such stakeholders needs to be maintained and strengthened at least in the period to 2020; calls on those organisations to play a prominent role in providing advice to Member States and national stakeholder associations with a view to strengthening the participation of the respective stakeholders at national level;

34. Holds the view that these European organisations representing societal interests must obtain a stronger role within the ESOs; calls therefore on the Commission and the ESOs to promote different measures to achieve this purpose, including, without prejudice to the national delegation principle, providing those organisations with an effective membership, but without voting rights, within the ESOs, on condition that they are associate members or cooperating partners; considers also that the NSBs must play a key role in promoting and reinforcing the participation of societal stakeholders in the standardisation process, given the primacy of the national delegation principle;

35. Notes recent developments in the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO), in particular the model used to develop the ISO 26000 standard on social responsibility, in which NSBs were entitled to nominate to the respective working group only one representative from each of six stakeholder categories (industry, consumers, government, labour, NGO, SSRO (service, support, research and others)) that were identified; maintains that the use of a similar model should be thoroughly assessed by the ESOs and the Commission, in cooperation with all interested parties, as an alternative for the drafting of standards in areas of exceptional public interest, and that the findings of this assessment should be reported to Parliament; invites the Commission to propose financial means to support such an alternative model;

(c) Enhancing the national delegation principle

36. Points out that, although 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; stresses that the existing inequalities create a significant imbalance in their effective participation in the European standardisation system, while limited resources in some NSBs may hamper their effective involvement in the standard-setting process;

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37. Asks the Commission and the ESOs to promote training programmes and to take all measures needed to enable weaker NSBs, which do not currently run technical-committee secretariats, or do not participate in European standardisation at a level commensurate with their economic structure, to assume a more active role in the standardisation process, in order to enhance confidence in the internal market and ensure a level playing field; considers that training programmes are also necessary for the SMEs in order to increase their participation in the standard-setting process and raise the importance of standardisation as a strategic business tool;

38. Commends the initiative of CEN and CENELEC to introduce a peer assessment process in order to evaluate the correct application by the NSBs of the WTO principles (and additional attributes) and to encourage continuous improvement and exchange of good practice; stresses that this project should serve as an effective tool for the strengthening of the NSBs and the improved participation of all relevant stakeholders at national level; believes that this project should involve all NSBs and be underpinned by independent audits; invites CEN and CENELEC to prepare and make publicly available a report on the results of the peer assessment process;

39. Urges Member States to ensure effective representation of all relevant stakeholders on national technical committees by establishing monitoring and reporting mechanisms and providing training and financial support to weaker societal stakeholders, and, where appropriate, to federations of SMEs and craft enterprises, in order to ensure their effective participation; stresses the importance of providing digital access to users on information about standards;

40. Calls on the ESOs and Member States to provide periodically to the Commission a progress report on their actions to ensure appropriate representation of all stakeholders in the technical bodies responsible for the development of mandated standards, which should be based on specific reporting requirements; stresses that these reports should subsequently feed into a Commission report on the efforts undertaken by the European and national standardisation organisations and the results achieved;

41. Invites NSBs to provide free access to standardisation committees for the weaker stakeholders and develop tools to improve stakeholder involvement, including a free-of-charge, easy-to-use online consultation mechanism for all new standards proposals; encourages those organisations to make full use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to strengthen stakeholder participation through web-based meetings and online discussion; encourages also NSBs to ensure communication beyond the system boundaries, especially for public enquiries on new standards, given that public enquiries are usually directed at the current participants of the system;

42. Regrets that public authorities in most Member States show limited interest in participating in the standards-development process, notwithstanding the importance of standardisation as a tool to support legislation and public policies; urges Member States – as the representatives of the interests of the citizens – and in particular market surveillance authorities to send representatives to take part in all national technical committees mirroring the development of standards in support of EU policies and legislation; stresses that the presence of national authorities in the debate on standards development is crucial for the proper functioning of legislation in the areas covered by the 'New Approach', and for the avoidance of ex-post formal objections to harmonised standards;

43. Calls on NSBs, in the interests of fair competition in the internal market, to follow the ISO Code of Ethics, in order to ensure that the impartiality of standards is not endangered by other activities such as certification or accreditation; stresses also the importance of developing standards and guides for conformity assessment and promoting their adoption and fair use, in particular as far as requirements for integrity, objectivity and impartiality are concerned;

(d) Facilitating access to standards

44. Recognises that European standardisation helps create a level playing-field for all market actors, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises, which form the backbone of the European economy and are vital contributors to the system; acknowledges, however, that their involvement in standardisation is not always commensurate with their economic importance, whereas the complexity and cost of standards can represent an obstacle to SMEs;

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45. Emphasises that standards should be designed and adapted to take account of the characteristics and environment of SMEs, in particular small, micro and craft enterprises; welcomes recent initiatives taken by the European and national standardisation bodies to implement the recommendations in the study on SME access to European standardisation, and believes that these must be considered as best practices; welcomes and encourages also the measures proposed in the SME programmes of CEN/CENELEC to facilitate the use of standards by SMEs; stresses that further measures should be taken to ensure that SMEs can participate fully in the development of standards and have better and less costly access to them;

46. Stresses, in particular, that the Union and Member States should make it possible to take greater account of the interests of SMEs and craft enterprises when drawing up standards by implementing the strategic measures contained in the 'Small Business Act', in accordance with its seventh principle: EU financial support, cutting the cost of access to standards, systematic publication of abstracts of European standards, and fair composition of standardisation committees;

47. Calls also on the Commission to simplify procedures, where possible, and to take the 'think small first' principle into account in future changes; recommends that the Commission include the issue of standardisation in the next SME Week;

48. 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; takes the view that different systems of price setting should be considered for private/industrial standards and for harmonised/mandated standards; 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;

49. Recalls, however, that the purchase price of a standard corresponds only to a small proportion of the overall cost incurred by standards users, who usually need to dedicate substantially more resources in order to transpose the required standard into their business process;

50. Emphasises that standards should be comprehensible, simple and easy to use so that they can be implemented better by users; considers it essential to reduce, where appropriate, the excessive number of cross-references between standards, and to address current difficulties in identifying the group of standards relevant to a given product or process; calls on the national and European standards bodies and trade associations to provide user-friendly guidelines for the use of standards, free online abstracts, better online access to consultation drafts and simple electronic search functions;

51. Welcomes the ongoing initiative of the ESOs to draw up and publish on-line, without any access restriction, a summary of all their standards, and asks for the fast completion of this project; stresses, however, that this project should be also implemented at national level, in order to enable standards users to obtain information on the items covered by each standard in their own language via the websites of NSBs;

52. Underlines the importance of providing standards in all EU official languages in order to ensure proper understanding by users; calls on the Commission to further support, and simplify the financial arrangements for, the translation of harmonised standards;

Standardisation in support of innovation and sustainable competitiveness in a globalised environment

53. 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; underlines its important economic benefits, enabling companies to achieve faster knowledge transfer, cost and risk reduction, faster time to market and higher value for innovation;

54. Acknowledges that, although standardisation can be a major facilitator for the exploitation of new technologies, there is a significant gap in the transfer of R&D results into the development of standards; stresses the need to improve mutual awareness and cooperation between standardisers, innovators, academia and the research communities; underlines that the inclusion of new knowledge in standards, in particular from publicly funded research and innovation programmes, will promote innovation and competitiveness;

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55. 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; invites NSBs to enhance their cooperation with trade associations and to provide plausible information to SMEs on the economic advantages arising from the use of standards; calls also on the Commission to ensure that the issue of standardisation is raised within the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs programme; encourages actions to assess, quantify and communicate the economic and social benefits of standardisation;

56. Believes that the European framework programmes for research, competitiveness and innovation can provide an important contribution to the standard-setting process by devoting a chapter to standardisation; considers that such a measure would increase understanding of the benefits of standards and help to promote a systematic approach further upstream between research, innovation and standardisation; calls on the Commission to include 'relevance to standardisation' amongst the evaluation criteria of EU-funded R&D projects, to promote projects related to standardisation, and raise awareness about those projects via innovative means;

57. Calls also on the Commission to develop technology-watch activities so as to identify future R&D output that could benefit from standardisation, facilitate the flow and transparency of information necessary for market penetration and the operation of R&D, and, in this connection, promote easily accessible and user-friendly evaluation mechanisms via the internet;

58. Calls on Member States to use European standards in public procurement in order to improve the quality of public services and foster innovative technologies; stresses, however, that the use of standards should not result in additional barriers, in particular for small businesses seeking to participate in public procurement procedures;

59. Reaffirms that tackling climate change and other future global energy and environmental challenges implies developing and promoting clean technologies and green products; considers, therefore, that there is an urgent need to integrate environmental 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; stresses the need to promote the active involvement in standardisation committees – at national and European level – of environmental organisations and public authorities responsible for environmental protection; stresses that the need to bring European innovation efforts to bear on global strategies to combat climate change and respond to the challenges of energy, society and the environment must also be reflected in the establishment of new guidelines for standardisation models;

60. 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; 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; calls in that respect, for instance, for the establishment of European standards for orthopedically sound footwear for children; stresses the need to promote the active involvement in standardisation committees of health experts and public authorities responsible for health issues;

61. Emphasises that standardisation has great potential to remove barriers that prevent persons with disabilities and elderly people from exercising their capabilities and participating on equal terms in all areas of life; calls, therefore, for the development of standards that take into account the diverse needs of the population and create new opportunities for businesses to provide innovative solutions, with a view to fostering the development of products, services and infrastructures that are accessible to everyone; stresses the importance of the Design for All concept, which constitutes a creative and ethical challenge for standardisers, designers, entrepreneurs, public authorities and policymakers, since its aim is to enable all people to have equal access to, inter alia, the built environment, transportation, education, employment, housing, medical facilities, information and communication, culture, leisure and consumer products and services;

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62. Calls, therefore, on the Commission and the ESOs to develop and support a systematic approach to their standardisation activities in order to ensure that standards incorporate adequate accessibility requirements, in keeping with Design for All principles, including an appropriate verification mechanism to ensure that the standards in question properly reflect the needs of persons with disabilities and elderly people; calls, further, on the Commission, the Member States and the European and national standardisation organisations to develop and support training courses for persons with disabilities, to increase their effective participation in the standards-setting process, and for standardisers, to familiarise them with disability and accessibility issues;

63. 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; calls, further, on the Commission and the Member States to strengthen existing public procurement rules in order to promote the inclusion of accessibility clauses in public contract award procedures, with a view to fostering accessibility and providing incentives for manufacturers to develop and offer accessible products and services; calls for the promotion of EU-funded R&D projects to develop innovative, assistive technology products and for accessibility provisions to be made a criterion in the allocation of structural funding at national and regional level;

64. Stresses that, in order to further strengthen consumer protection, the procedure for developing standards relating to the General Product Safety Directive should be prioritised;

65. Draws attention to Parliament's resolution of 6 May 2010 on electric cars, which stresses the need for effective standardisation processes in various areas to accelerate the market introduction of electric cars in the interests of competitiveness and the environment;

66. Points out that both intellectual property rights (IPRs) and standardisation encourage innovation and facilitate the dissemination of technology; emphasises that a correct balance should be established between the interests of the users of standards and the rights of owners of intellectual property; calls on European and national standards bodies to be particularly vigilant when developing standards based on proprietary technologies, in order to allow broad access to all users; stresses the need to ensure that licences for any essential IPRs contained in standards are provided on fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory conditions;

67. Recognises that fora and consortia contribute considerably to the standardisation system by providing specifications with global relevance, which are often more receptive to innovative technologies; points out that, most notably in the ICT sector, a number of fora and consortia have evolved into global organisations producing widely implemented specifications on the basis of open, transparent and consensus-based development processes; believes that the ESOs and fora/consortia must find ways of cooperating in planning their activities by transferring standards to the most appropriate level, international or European, in order to ensure coherence and avoid fragmentation or duplication;

68. Calls also on the ESOs to develop and implement an improved mechanism for the adoption of fora/consortia specifications as European standards, whereby consensus on the part of all stakeholders must be guaranteed through the established procedures for consulting all parties concerned in accordance with the national delegation principle; stresses that this should not restrict the possibility of submitting fora/consortia specifications directly to international standards organisations in order to seek more global status, provided that this complies with the principles set out in the World Trade Organization's agreement on technical barriers to trade (transparency, openness, impartiality, consensus, effectiveness, relevance and coherence);

69. Recognises that interoperability is key to innovation and competitiveness, especially in the ICT sector, where fora and consortia play a role; points out that interoperability depends not only on standards/specifications development but also on their implementation by users; acknowledges the important role played by user-driven fora and consortia to achieve interoperability; calls on the Commission to enhance the coordination between the ICT fora and consortia and the formal standard-developing bodies, which could increase interoperability and minimise the risk of duplication and conflict between standards in the ICT sector;

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70. 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;

71. Calls on the Commission, in order to support other EU policies, to implement a modernised and extended EU standardisation policy for information technology, which should, inter alia, ensure interoperability, legal certainty and the application of appropriate safeguards, while minimising additional burdens for business, risks for users and obstacles to the free movement of information technology;

72. Calls on the Commission to make effective use of existing legal bases enabling information technology standardisation, and to identify additional information technology sectors and areas or applications where effective use of EU standardisation could be used to support EU policies, and to present appropriate proposals accordingly; calls also on the Commission to consider using, where appropriate, the 'New Approach' and the 'New Legislative Framework' as a model for a modernised ICT standardisation policy in support of EU policy;

73. Stresses that international standards are enablers for a global market by virtue of the use of one identical standard in many countries, centred on a 'performance-based' approach, encouraging consumer understanding and market confidence;

74. Emphasises that the regulatory dialogue is an important aspect of the external dimension of the Internal Market and that there is therefore a need to safeguard and enhance the European standardisation system's position in the international standardisation environment in order to promote the development of international standards with genuine global relevance, facilitate trade and increase European competitiveness, whilst taking into account the legitimate interests of the developing countries and taking care to avoid the unnecessary duplication of work already carried out at international level;

75. Supports the secondment of two European standardisation experts to China and India with the aim of supporting the ESOs, promoting European standards and providing feedback on the standardisation systems of those countries; asks the Commission to explore the necessity of seconding standardisation experts to other regions of the world in order to promote further the European standardisation system;

76. Calls on the Commission to coordinate its standardisation activities with our international partners, for instance within the transatlantic dialogue; encourages the Commission, with this in mind, to consider and take the necessary measures to reinforce the influence of European standardisation at world level so as to enhance the competitiveness of Europe's products and services in international trade;

77. Calls for a renewed commitment to international standardisation on the part of European stakeholders and NSBs, in order to capitalise on European leadership and gain first-mover advantages in global markets; stresses the need for better coordination between European stakeholders and NSBs in international standardisation at technical and political level;

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78. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.
