The European Standards Package

An Interview with Malcolm Harbour, Chairman of the European Parliament's Internal Market Committee

Malcolm Harbour, member of the European Parliament, discusses the European standardization system and the standardization package that the committee he chairs has recently amended and approved.

How will the new European standardization package (see sidebar below) foster the competitiveness of small- and medium-sized enterprises?

The new European standardization package is designed specifically to increase the competitiveness of enterprises, especially SMEs, whose participation in the standardization process is essential for technological progress in the European Union.

The provisions of the new package encourage stronger involvement of SMEs to help ensure that users' views are taken into account and that products meet needs. Standards bodies will facilitate SME participation by a choice of methods, including the possibility of making abstracts of standards available free of charge on national standards organization websites, identifying in annual work programs which standardization projects might be of particular interest to SMEs, providing free access to draft standards, or applying special reduced rates for standards and bundles of standards.

In addition, the new package encourages SME representation and participation in national technical committees while SME views should be taken into account in European technical committees.

How will referencing fora and consortia standards benefit the field of information and communications technology?

For a and consortia, which are often more receptive to innovative technologies, contribute considerably to the standardization system by providing specifications with global relevance. Most notably in the information and communications technology sector, a number of fora and consortia have evolved into global organizations, producing widely implemented specifications developed by using open, transparent and consensus-based processes.

We believe that European standardization organizations, and fora and 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. ESOs should develop and

THE STANDARDS PACKAGE

In September 2012, the European Parliament will vote on new regulations governing European standardization policy, known as the "standards package." These rules, which have been scrutinized in depth and extensively amended by Parliament's internal market committee, are intended to strengthen European Union standardization bodies, enhance the European single market and speed the standards development process.

In addition, the greater use of information and communications technology standards from consortia and fora for both regulatory and procurement purposes has been agreed to, but such standards will be considered technical specifications and will not have the same legal status as European harmonized standards. The package reaffirms existing EU policy stating that the term "international standardization body" specifically means the International Electrotechnical Commission, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Telecommunications Union.

implement an improved mechanism for the adoption of fora and consortia specifications as European standards, whereby the consensus of all stakeholders must be guaranteed through established procedures for consulting all concerned parties in accordance with the national delegation principle. This should not, of course, restrict the possibility of submitting fora and consortia specifications directly to international standards organizations in order to seek more global status.

What do you see as the remaining challenges of the European standardization system and how does it compare globally?

The European standardization system recognizes the primacy of international standards. European standards are, however, necessary where international standards are not available or where they do not adequately serve European needs, in particular those needs determined by European policies and legislation. Europe should strengthen its position within the international standardization environment in order to promote the development of standards with genuine global relevance, facilitate international trade and increase European competitiveness.

There are at least two unique values in the European system that could be used at a global level. Europe could 1) promote the methodology of the "New Approach,"[1] or equivalent standards-receptive regulatory models, in its regulatory trade-related cooperation with EU trading partners, and 2) promote at a global level the existing formal obligation in the European standardization system to withdraw contradictory national standards following the adoption of a common standard. We are aware that these two principles are specific to the European regulatory environment, but they could be used as a source of inspiration for future reforms at the international level.

An ongoing concern exists that the standards setting process is not fast enough. What is your sense of this issue in today's technology-driven society? How might the new European standardization package impact the process?

There are situations in less innovative sectors where standards do not need to adapt as quickly, but in competitive and innovative sectors speed is essential.

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The standardization package text, which the Parliament will approve in September, aims to speed up and simplify processes in several ways to ensure that standards can keep up with technology to a larger extent. There will be full consultation on the planned

EU work program for standardization to allow delay-inducing problems raised by member states to be identified well in advance. Standardization proposals in information technology will be subject to less cumbersome procedures for member state approval. There will be an early review of effectiveness of the new procedures, with special focus on approval times.

European and national standardization organizations should make more use of information and communication technologies, including online consultations and virtual meetings. Furthermore, national authorities are encouraged to give their input through their national standardization organizations during the standardization process in order to reduce modifications on the status of harmonized standards after their publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

In addition, a two-month deadline was set for European and national standardization organizations to notify regarding the existence of standards to the other European and national standardization organizations and to the commission, which will send its comments not later than one month after the notification.

The new standards package encourages and facilitates more effective participation of stakeholder organizations. Input from the European Commission's Joint Research Center should help to enable more innovative standards to be developed. Links to standardiza-

tion work are to be incorporated into the Horizon 2020 (see sidebar below) research and innovation strategy to ensure alignment and coherence with technological developments.

European Commissioner for Trade Karel De Gucht recently called for the European Union and the United States to seek "a new, comprehensive transatlantic agreement that covers all relevant economic issues." As the European Union and the United States work to identify new ways to strengthen this vibrant economic partnership, how can important objectives such as enhancing the compatibility of regulations and standards be achieved?

It must be borne in mind that the "single market" greatly impacts trade

relations with the United States, and it is important to consider future trade barriers, including non-tariff barriers.

I was recently in Washington, D.C., leading a delegation from the Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection, to discuss these issues and develop relationships with key players in Congress, the U.S. administration and U.S. stakeholders. While there, we met with ASTM International staff to discuss e-commerce, standardization and regulatory cooperation, and the EU draft data protection legislation. I think that there are many areas where we might be able to enhance the compatibility of our regulations and standards. It is clear that an ambitious approach to the EU-US economic partnership is vital, rather than purely focusing on free trade agreements and tariff barriers.

In the European Union, we have well-developed technology, which is why we want to step up economic partnership discussions. New technologies, including nanotechnologies, will be important in the future.

In terms of technical barriers to trade, it is imperative for the European Union, United States, Canada and Mexico to work together to develop a global set of standards to frame the future of global trade.

There are encouraging developments in standards cooperation through the Transatlantic Economic Council. Agreement has been reached to investigate common standards in emerging new areas such as nanomaterial safety, e-health, smart grids and electric vehicles. The commission's Joint Research Center has signed agreements with the U.S. government research laboratory to underpin this work with technical advice.

There is much more state-based regulation in the United States that is inhibiting trade than in the European Union, and we therefore need to look at stepping up dialogue and the exchange of best practice of technical standards, including the toy sector, to address technical issues that might prevent harmonization between the European Union and the United States.

REFERENCE

1. As summarized by the European Committee for Standardization, the New Approach "is the means by which open voluntary standardization can support regulations concerning products on the European market." When a manufacturer follows harmonized European standard(s) for a product, the company benefits from a "presumption of conformity" to European Council requirements and then receives access to the European single market. See www.cen.eu/cen/pages/faq.aspx#13.

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HORIZON 2020

Horizon 2020, the European Union framework program that funds research and innovation, is the heart of the Innovation Union, a Europe 2020 initiative to further the European Union's global competitiveness.

Horizon 2020 aims to:

▶ Strengthen the EU position in science;

▶ Strengthen industrial leadership in innovation by investing in key technologies, greater access to capital and support for small- and medium-sized enterprises; and

▶ Address such societal challenges as climate change, sustainable transport, affordable renewable energy, food safety and security, and the aging population.