



Questions and Answers: An EU Standardisation Strategy

Brussels, 2 February 2022

1. Why are standards important?

Standards have played a leading role in creating the EU Single Market and supporting European competitiveness. They help manufacturers to ensure the interoperability of products and services, reduce costs, improve safety and foster innovation.

Standards underpin the successful roll-out of important investment projects, like hydrogen or batteries. By valorising innovation investment, they provide a first-mover advantage for EU businesses.

As a global standard-setter, the European Union also exports best practices and increases synergies in global value chains. This enhances trade flows and opportunities for European businesses to scale up their activities. EU standards are synonymous with quality around the world.

2. What are European harmonised standards?

A harmonised European standard is a European standard developed at the request of the Commission by one of the European standardisation organisations (ESOs), in view of applying Union harmonisation legislation.

Harmonised EU standards provide the technical specifications needed for a product to respect EU law. They complement and specify the requirements of the respective EU harmonised legislation. Compliance with a harmonised standard grants products the presumption of conformity with the relevant legislation. This allows manufacturers to access the EU market.

The list of harmonised standards is regularly updated and published in the Official Journal of the EU. Currently, more than 3600 references to harmonised standards are published in the Official Journal of the EU in support of EU product legislation.

Each European standard (EN) supports the functioning of the Single Market. European standards replace 34 different national standards in EU, EEA/EFTA and candidate/neighbouring countries, preventing technical fragmentation and ensuring coherence of the system.

3. How does EU standardisation work?

The European standardisation system is based on a public-private partnership between the Commission and the standardisation community, which is structured in private non-for-profit organisations: the European Committee for Standardisation (CEN), the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardisation (CENELEC), and the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI). European standards in support of EU legislation and policies are developed exclusively through one of them. Standardisation activities at these organisations are based on consensus-building among different actors, including industry, SMEs, trade organisations and other private, societal and public stakeholders.

The Commission is responsible for the assessment of European harmonised standards developed in support of EU law and for their reference in the Official Journal of the EU. Once a standard is referenced in the Official Journal, it is considered to be part of EU law.

The Commission provides financial support to the three European Standardisation Organisations, for their work in support of EU legislation and policies.

4. Why is a new Standardisation Strategy needed?

Until now, standardisation has often been considered a merely technical matter, and EU leadership in international standardisation has too often been taken for granted.

The new [Standardisation Strategy](#) puts standards in the focus of EU policy. Standards will play a

critical enabling role to face the current challenges of our industries. We will need standards for the data economy, to enable data inter-operability be it for robots, autonomous cars or machinery. Standards are also essential to ensure that new technologies reflect our democratic values, be it in ensuring data protection standards or by addressing the governance of internet protocols.

At the same time, standards are also becoming a crucial aspect of strengthening Europe's open strategic autonomy. Increasingly, third countries are taking a more assertive stance to standardisation, and pushing for their technological solutions through technical standardisation committees. The EU wants to lead in such efforts, especially when it comes to strategic areas like batteries or other solutions related to the green and digital twin transitions.

5. What are the key objectives of the new Standardisation Strategy?

The new Strategy proposes a series of actions aimed at ensuring European leadership in global standards, making standardisation a driver of European competitiveness and resilience, ensuring standards support our investments in the green and digital transitions and embedding democratic values in technology applications.

To do so, the Strategy first proposes actions to improve the agility and governance of the European standardisation system and shorten the time needed to develop European standards. This includes better anticipating and prioritising urgent standardisation needs in strategic areas and improving the governance of the European standardisation organisations. In this view, the Commission is proposing to amend the rules relating to the governance of the European Standardisation Organisations, to make sure that key decisions are taken by national standardisation bodies from the EU and the European Economic Area (EEA). This will also ensure greater inclusiveness of the process, given that these national bodies represent all relevant stakeholders in their respective Member States.

The Strategy also envisages a series of measures to support the standardisation of the results of European-funded research. Given the increasing lack of available standardisation expertise, especially due to a generational change, the Strategy will also support the development of new skilled experts to support standardisation of new generation technologies.

The Strategy also foresees actions to increase the coordination of European and Member States' interests in international standardisation organisations. This will help address the current fragmentation and strengthen the EU's voice in global standardisation, in an inclusive manner. It will also help to harness Europe's potential to be the first mover and to lead international standards setting, leveraging its cooperation with other like-minded international partners.

6. What will the Commission do to improve the standardisation process in Europe?

The EU needs a fast, responsive, efficient and inclusive standardisation system to meet its objectives for the digital and green transitions of the EU economy, and to strengthen the resilience and the functioning of the Single Market.

This involves better addressing standardisation urgencies, or areas where standards are needed to avoid strategic dependencies and to manifest the EU's global leadership in strategic technologies. Improving the governance of the European Standardisation Organisations will help to achieve these objectives.

In addition, the Commission is also presenting a new [2022 annual Union work programme for European standardisation](#), reflecting the standardisation urgencies. It calls upon European Standardisation Organisations (ESOs) to prioritise the delivery of indicated standardisation requests without delay.

In addition, a High Level Forum will bring together representatives of Member States, European Standardisation Organisations and National Standardisation Bodies, industry, SMEs, civil society and academia to help set priorities, advise on future standardisation needs, coordinate European interests and ensure that European standardisation activities respond to the ambitions of the twin transitions and resilience of the EU. Furthermore, the Commission will increase internal coordination of standardisation activities through the creation of an *EU excellence hub* on standards, steered by a Chief Standardisation Officer.

7. Why is the Commission addressing the governance of European standardisation organisations?

The [Standardisation Regulation](#) gives a central role to three European Standardisation Organisations, namely CEN, CENELEC and ETSI. These are the only entities allowed to develop European standards in support of EU legislation.

The Commission wants to ensure a balanced stakeholder representation within the ESOs to avoid that large corporations (which are in many cases not headquartered in the EU) dominate the decision-making processes. In particular, it wants to ensure that key decisions on standards that are developed at the request of the Commission are taken by the national standardisation bodies of the EU and EEA Member States, which represent the full stakeholder community. This will also ensure that these organisations can respond to European standardisation requests by developing standards that comply with rules imposed in the interest of EU citizens. To this end, the Commission is today presenting [an amendment to Regulation \(EU\) No 1025/2012](#) to improve the governance in the European standardisation system. The Commission calls on the European Standardisation Organisations to align their internal governance processes accordingly to allow them to continue to respond to the Commission's requests for the development of new harmonised standards.

In addition, the Commission will continue to pay close attention to the inclusiveness of the system – the role of SMEs, civil society – by launching a review process of national measures.

8. How does the Commission plan to better coordinate EU and Member States' interests globally?

The EU remains committed to an open and transparent standardisation system in line with its obligations under the WTO/TBT Agreement.

Traditionally, the EU has been a strong leader in international standardisation activities but needs to take account of a changed geopolitical situation, as other countries start to approach international standardisation more strategically and gain influence in international standardisation committees.

To strengthen EU's position in international standardisation fora, the new Strategy proposes to better coordinate standardisation activities among the EU and national standardisation bodies. To this end, the High-Level Forum will facilitate the identification of the standardisation activities of strategic importance for the EU and will facilitate political concertation between the Commission and Member States on such priorities. This high-level political coordination will serve as a basis for collaborations on important international standardisation activities between the EU and like-minded partners.

9. What is the Commission doing to facilitate standardisation of EU funded research?

The Commission is proposing to better tap into the potential of EU funded research to valorise the innovation value of such projects and their potential for standardisation. Identifying future standardisation opportunities early on will help to build important bridges between the research, innovator and standardiser communities and anticipate early standardisation needs. To do this, the Commission will launch a 'standardisation booster', a platform to help beneficiaries, whose Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe research results are likely to lead to the revision or creation of a standard, to test the relevance of their results for standardisation.

A Code of Practice on standardisation for researchers will furthermore allow to strengthen the link between research/innovation and standardisation within the European Research Area (ERA), expected in mid-2022.

10. What is the Commission doing to enhance standardisation skills and expertise?

Standards rely on the best experts, but Europe is currently facing a generational shift that risks a loss of crucial standardisation expertise. Moreover, there is no formal education or vocational training on standardisation. At the same time, the standardisation landscape is becoming more complex: new technology challenges and horizontal considerations – like data protection or cybersecurity – will require new skills in the development of standards.

To address this, it is crucial to engage with the research and innovation community early on in standards development, and provide opportunities to build expertise and skills in standardisation. Moreover, the Commission will promote more academic awareness on standards through the future organisation of EU University Days. Training of researchers will also be encouraged through the existing tools under Horizon Europe and the EURATOM Research and Training Programme.

QANDA/22/662

Press contacts:

[Sonya GOSPODINOVA](#) (+32 2 296 69 53)

[Federica MICCOLI](#) (+32 2 295 83 00)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)