Commission for better standards to boost European competitiveness and promote consumers' interest

Brussels, 1 June 2011. Standards are a decisive tool in international competition. Consumers should not be obliged to change several chargers for their electronic devices. And a mass diffusion of electric cars will not happen without common standards for their recharge. Mobile phone or software companies are publicly showcasing their battle for the leadership of their respective standards. No doubt, a good standard can ease consumers' life, promote sustainability, enhance European competitiveness and technological leadership in global markets. The European Commission proposes today a series of legislative and non-legislative measures to develop more and faster standards. Standards are sets of voluntary technical and quality criteria for products, services and production processes. Nobody is obliged to use or apply them but they help businesses work together and to save money for consumers. But in the past, it took several years to develop a European standard so that some standards have lagged too far behind rapidly evolving technologies. Consequently, certain sectors have been reluctant to engage in standardisation or are unable to benefit from the positive effects of standards. This should be changed with the package presented today. The European Council of 4 February, in its conclusions on the "Innovation Union", invited the Commission “to make proposals to accelerate, simplify and modernize standardization procedures, notably to allow standards developed by industry to be turned into European standards”.

European Commission Vice-President Antonio Tajani, responsible for industry and entrepreneurship said: "To be successful, Europe needs to react to the challenge of rapid innovation, sustainability, convergence of technologies, and fierce global competition. A dynamic European standardisation system is essential to spur quality and innovation and to strengthen Europe’s role as a global economic player. Moreover, standards allow us all to have the best quality and sustainable products for a lower price. Standardisation is also a key issue for the well functioning of our internal market."
The most important steps that the Commission took today to strengthen the system of standard-setting in Europe and to implement the commitments of the Europe 2020 flagships, Industrial policy, Innovation Union, Digital Agenda and Internal market Act are the following:

- **Europe will push for more international standards** in those economic sectors where Europe is a global leader;
- High-tech products are often sold in combination with maintenance services. Although there are many European standards for products, there are hardly any for services. Therefore, **more market-driven European standards for services** could be developed giving companies commercial advantages;
- To propose a light and fast way to recognise the increasingly important ICT standards developed by global ICT standards development organisations, such as those underpinning the internet, to be used in public procurement, EU policies and legislation. This will stimulate innovation, cut administrative overheads and build a truly digital society by encouraging interoperability between devices, applications, data repositories, services and networks.
- The Commission will **enhance its cooperation with the leading standardisation organisations in Europe** (i.e. CEN, CENELEC and ETSI) so that their standards will be available more rapidly. Businesses using these standards can make their products more compatible with other products so that consumers will have a broader choice at a lower price;
- **European standards** will be drafted with the help of organisations representing those most affected, or most concerned – consumers, small businesses, environmental and social organisations.

The new standard for a universal mobile-phone charger to fit all models is a perfect example of the tremendous value of European standards for our daily lives.

Some of the actions proposed today will be implemented immediately while the others need the approval of the European Parliament and the Council.

**Background**

In an era of increasing global competition, European competitiveness depends on our ability to foster innovation in products, services and processes and fully exploit the potential of the Internal market.

The strategy presented today sets out a package of measures, both legislative and non-legislative. The legislative measures are contained in the accompanying proposal for a Regulation on standardisation, which updates and combines existing European legislation and is accompanied by an Impact Assessment. Non-legislative measures include actions to be taken by the Commission and a series of recommendations addressed to other actors in the European standardisation system (see [MEMO/11/369](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/european-standards/standardisation-policy/index_en.htm)). This proposal is one of the 12 key actions in the single market act. It also fulfils a key action of the Digital Agenda for Europe.

**For more information**


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