



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
ENTERPRISE DIRECTORATE-GENERAL

Promotion of SMEs competitiveness
Crafts, small businesses, cooperatives and mutuals

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**STANDARDISATION MANDATE FOR CEN AND CENELEC
FOR THE DRAFTING OF A NORMATIVE DOCUMENT
ON THE QUALITY OF BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES**

1. GROUNDS

Business support services are an essential component of enterprise policy and business support policies. A business support service is a form of assistance adapted to the particular requirements of a business, which can run for an extended period and take an overview of the business's needs, and which has as its objective to contribute to the business's continued existence, development and growth. Sound support services double a business's chances of still existing on the market five years after creation. In a European economy dominated by businesses with fewer than ten employees, access to quality services is fundamental to the competitiveness and development of a business, its capacity to innovate, create wealth and, ultimately, to create jobs. On the other hand, poor advice or lack of support can lead to the premature demise of the business and the loss of considerable resources, both private and public.

(1) The creation of high-quality support services is an important objective of the European Charter for Small Enterprises.¹ However, although this is a strategic issue for businesses, the public authorities and the services sector in Europe, there is no normative reference document at European level that sets out and assesses in an objective, transparent manner the quality and efficiency of business support services. The creation of a European normative document would fill this gap and improve the quality and efficiency of the services offered to businesses in Europe.

(2) The objective of introducing a European normative document in the field of business support services is threefold:

- to improve the transparency of service provision for businesses in the internal market and the free provision of services,

¹ http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/enterprise_policy/charter/index.htm

- to give service providers a reference framework enabling them to gauge, assess and constantly improve their level of performance and allow their skills and know-how to be recognised;
- to promote cooperation between service providers using a common reference framework based on meeting customer's (i.e. the enterprise) needs;
- to provide the public authorities with an efficient system at local, regional, national and European levels which allows them to identify support services and the providers of high-quality support services in the implementation of their enterprise and/or economic development policies.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE MANDATE

In view of the points set out above and the main principles defined by the CEN Workshop Agreement², CEN and CENELEC are asked to draw up a normative document. The document should include the following principles:

1. the customer approach
2. the obligation for the provision of service to be clear and transparent
3. the matching of supply with customer needs
4. a fair price for the service
5. reciprocal commitment of the parties – service providers/business
6. constant improvement of the service for the business

This standardisation work should lead to a **European normative** document. The purpose of the work will be to establish the general elements of a high-quality service, as delivered to the customer, whatever the technical part of the activity and whoever delivers it. The service is described in response to the expectations of small enterprises. The work should concentrate on the service provided rather than the internal organisation involved in providing it.

The standardisation work should examine, *inter alia*:

- the quality reference framework developed by the FFCGEA³ ;
- existing approaches to ensure the quality of support services (e.g. the standards published by AFNOR, those developed by SFEDI⁴ in the UK, and the system for accrediting business advisors in Finland, Poland, etc.);
- national (e.g. France, EICs⁵) and international guides and quality charters to ensure quality of services;
- the existence of less formal approaches by SMEs, in particular those identified as good practices in the BEST report⁶ and the Commission's recommendations on top quality support services;

² CEN Workshop Agreement – description of the types of advice and support for small enterprises in Europe. CWA 14523 : 2002 (F)

³ Document available at <http://www.ffcgea.fr>

⁴ www.sfedi.co.uk

⁵ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/networks/eic/eic.html>

⁶ The final report on the BEST project can be found at

http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/environment/events/sme_conference/presentations/best_report.pdf

Rue de la Loi 200, B-1049 Brussels - Belgium. Telephone: (32-2)299 11 11.

Office SC 27 4/38. Telephone: direct line (32-2)295.39.42. Fax: (32-2)295.45.90.

E-mail: entr-craft-small-business@cec.eu.int

- the existing specifications and standards at national, European and international levels, if appropriate;
- any other initiatives, including non-normative ones, likely to be of benefit to the standardisation work.

3. ORGANISATIONS TO BE INVOLVED

- (1) The work programme will be drawn up and carried out in cooperation with the largest possible proportion of competent parties concerned. They should include representatives of businesses, including SMEs, national standardisation bodies, European industrial associations including UNICE and UEAPME, EUROCHAMBRES, EURADA, business advisors' organisations, non-governmental organisations and the European Commission. They should be actively involved – at both national and European levels – in the standardisation work by having access to regular activity reports and, if necessary, they should participate in the technical committees of CEN and CENELEC. Cooperation with NORMAPME representatives in particular is considered essential.
- (2) The European standardisation bodies will establish appropriate cooperation so that the normative document can cover all the sectors concerned.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MANDATE AND WORK SCHEDULE

- (1) The standardisation work will be carried out in accordance with the needs set out in point 2 above. The European standardisation bodies will provide the Commission with a detailed work programme within three months of accepting the mandate.
- (2) The normative document is to be approved by 30 June 2007. On that date the document will be available in the three working languages (FR, EN, DE) of CEN/CENELEC/ETSI, and its title will be available in all twenty Community languages.
- (3) The status quo clause of Article 7.1 of Directive 98/34/EC (OJ L 204 of 21.7.1998 p.37) will apply from the date of adoption of the mandate by the European standardisation bodies.