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STANDARDISATION MANDATE TO CEN IN RELATION TO CUSTOMER CONTACT CENTRES

BACKGROUND

Policy Framework

As identified in the recent Commission Communication on the role of European standardisation in the framework of European policies and legislation:¹

‘The service sectors (e.g. business services, transport, energy, telecommunication, tourism and leisure) account for a large percentage of total employment (70% of overall employment is in market services)² in the market economy of the European Union.’

Of this figure, business-related services (defined as ‘the wide range of market services directly affecting the competitiveness of enterprises, both manufacturers and other services providers) make up the majority, as can be seen from the 2003 Commission Communication.³

The European standardisation system, whereby all interested parties transparently and openly develop standards on a consensus basis with which compliance is voluntary, could contribute to the single market in services. This contribution would take the form of **breaking down barriers to trade** and thus **fostering competitiveness**. At present, however, the uptake of standards in the service sector lags considerably behind its importance in the economy. The Council Conclusions on European standardisation of 21-22 December 2004⁴ stressed the need to seek to extend the use of European standardisation to other areas, including services, and called upon European service industries to increase the use of voluntary standardisation.

¹ COM (2004) 674 final

² Market services comprise all services with the exception of services of public authorities

³ ‘The competitiveness of business-related services and their contribution to the performance of European enterprises’ COM (2003) 747 Final

⁴ Document 14790/2/04 REV 2

DG Enterprise and Industry, in conjunction with DG Internal Market and Services (having assumed the responsibility for business-related services), closely monitor the future development of standards for the service sector.

Mandate M340

European Commission programming Mandate M340, addressed to CEN, CENELEC and ETSI and transmitted in October 2003, identified possibilities for European standardisation in the service sector. It requested the delivery of a programme of standardisation work to support the internal market for services, giving priority to areas where intra-community trade already existed or was desirable. The mandate also foresaw the issuing of subsequent standardisation mandates.

CEN response to mandate M340

DG Enterprise and Industry and DG Internal Market and Services received CEN's Final Report in response to the programming mandate in February 2005. This report highlighted CEN's strategic approach to service standardisation, whereby it plans to utilise all available resources to develop service standardisation. This includes a 'bottom up' approach – through which the National Standards Bodies bring standardisation projects forward to the European level as the market need arises – and a more 'top down' approach. The 'top down' approach involves CEN scrutinising various service sectors in depth in order to draw out the standardisation needs.

Outcome and further actions

In July 2005, the Commission issued a second programming mandate to CEN in the field of services (M371) to follow on from its strategy on service standardisation, in order to continue the unlocking of the potential of standardisation for services.

In addition, standardisation mandates will be issued to CEN for work where a clear and current standardisation need has been identified under the first programming mandate through the 'bottom up' approach.

One such area is customer contact centres. The CEN programme developed in response to the first mandate showed that this area has a need for European standardisation, that financial support is necessary to launch the activity, that work on a standard can begin immediately and that there is sufficient stakeholder engagement.

Customer contact centres have developed over recent years to be a business sector of global importance, with significant outsourcing both in Europe and third countries. A European standard would offer the possibility to set a quality level for the provision of the service, and for purchasers of the service to make informed choices in their contracting.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MANDATED WORK

CEN is mandated to develop a European standard (EN) in relation to customer contact centres.

The goal of the standard is to provide quality of service requirements for customer contact centres, common to all centres, which exist independent of service provider, service sector or

technical approach to the provision of the service. The standard would be applicable both to customer contact centres that are internal to a business and those that have been outsourced.

Key elements of the standard to be developed are:

1. Terminology:

- Setting a clear field of application for the standard, with appropriate definitions (including ‘customer contact centre’).

2. Contract management:

- Agreement between client and service provider (if necessary);
- Information to be provided to the client;
- Giving appropriate information on charges for the service;
- Dealing with complaints;

3. Service and performance management:

- Setting out the means of accessing the service;
- Identification the service provider (as necessary);
- Traceability of the contacts made;
- Ensuring that the contact centre will respond to contact requests within a reasonable timeframe, both in real time (e.g. telephone) and in deferred time (e.g. by letter or e-mail);
- Managing the contact made;
- Ensuring that confidentiality requirements are met;
- Conclusion of the contact.

The mandated work shall include the consideration of whether the standard should include requirements for assessing customer satisfaction or requirements for training and/or qualification of call centre operatives.

ORGANISATIONS TO BE ASSOCIATED

Representatives of the customer contact centre sector, across as wide a possible range, should be included in the development of the standard, as should businesses that outsource the work of customer contact. Public administrations and bodies involved in the technical aspects of customer contact centres should also be associated.

The representative bodies in standardisation at the European level – ANEC, ECOS, NORMAPME and ETUI-REHS – should also be involved in the mandated work as necessary.

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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MANDATE

In developing the standard, other relevant standardisation work should be taken into account, at national, European and international level, in particular the AFNOR standard NF X50-798 of July 2003 and the ÖN standards D 1020, D 1021, D 1024-1, -2, -3 and D 1025-1, -2, -3 (all of December 2001).

As provided for by Directive 98/34/EC⁵, the standstill provision shall apply from the time of the acceptance of the mandate by CEN.

A progress report is to be provided to the Commission 12 months after acceptance of the mandate. The European standard is to be delivered within 36 months of acceptance, at which time the text of the standard will be available in the three working languages of CEN (DE, EN, FR).

Follow-up

The progress of work under this mandate will be followed closely by the Commission DG Enterprise and Industry C/2 and DG Internal Market and Services E/3.

⁵ 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