



Concluding Remarks

Ulrich Bamberg

Kommission Arbeitsschutz und Normung (KAN)

Alte Heerstrasse 111, D-53757 Sankt Augustin

Ladies and gentlemen,

I'm afraid I have to disappoint you if you were looking forward to hearing my colleague Marina Schröder at this point, as announced in the programme. Ms Schröder is unfortunately unable to be with us and so I have been given the honourable though difficult task, at the end of two conference days with over 20 papers and two panel discussions, of formulating the concluding remarks. I therefore ask for your forgiveness should I not cover all of the speakers in detail. Fortunately, Marie-Chantal Blandin provided us with a summary of the first day's events last night so I can use that as my basis.

As the title of this conference suggests, the current political framework is marked by two challenges:

- the enlargement of the European Union to 25 member states and
- market globalisation.

Both of these trends are having a significant impact on occupational safety and health as well as on standardization. But, in principle, we in Europe are well-positioned to address those challenges, as Jean-Luc Marié and Frank Gambelli clearly expressed in their opening speeches yesterday. And we can tackle the tasks of the future in a confident manner.

- The enlargement is now reality and the OSH sphere is actively involved in establishing a pan-European OSH culture.
Where a uniform level has not been immediately possible (due to the different national traditions and experiences), the wide range of cooperation tools and projects have helped us learn from each other, exchange opinions and understand our different approaches.
- Standardization is also considered an "excellent melting pot" in this respect.
- And the New Approach, despite the criticism of certain details, has now achieved such wide recognition that it has already become an "export model" and is prompting others, even outside Europe, to consider imitating it.

Nevertheless, the New Approach needs to be reviewed and revised.

"One key point lies in better harmonization of the accreditation and notification procedures. This is partly the member states' problem. However, the success we are striving for in this field will not be achieved if there is no overarching harmonization, controlled by Europe. Different levels of testing and certification quality will shake people's confidence in the system.

The much-discussed and demanded concept of market surveillance needs to be coordinated on a pan-European scale. This is also one of the main demands voiced by European manufacturers who make products in line with the European rules and standards. They are faced with the fact that other vendors are forcing their way onto the market with products which bear the CE mark but do not meet the safety requirements. The task of identifying such products at an early stage should be performed by a functioning, coordinated market surveillance structure."

I imagine you will not remember that these two chief criticisms of the New Approach in practice were made during the concluding remarks at the Dresden conference four years ago. I have quoted them not to mislead you but to illustrate how lengthy and difficult these processes are. And, as you heard in the papers given by Pascal Etienne and Karl-Heinz Noetel yesterday, these problems are still waiting to be solved.

The new member states were confronted with the two challenges mentioned in the conference title in immediate succession. They had only just adapted their OSH and standardization systems to that of the EU when they had to deal with the new situation arising from the fact that market globalization had shifted the focus of standardization activity from the European to the international level.

I was very pleased to see the matter-of-factness with which Milan Srna from the Slovenian Institute of Occupational Safety described the difference in the significance of regulations and standards relating to occupational safety and health as opposed to those concerned with product safety. It seems to me that this distinction between directives governing social policy and those dealing with the internal market, a distinction also underlined by Christina Fogelquist from the EU Commission, has not yet found universal acceptance in all EU member states, not even in the old member states.

This is one of the many reasons why it is so important to cooperate and coordinate if OSH players want to assert their point of view in dealings with the sphere of standardization in general and international standardization in particular.

Even though, as Europeans, we may be flattered that the New Approach has become an export article, the real challenges are of a more fundamental nature. The principles and the level of occupational safety and health in Europe must not be undermined by international standards. To prevent that from happening, it is essential that OSH advocates take a common stance and promote a "common European standpoint", as J.-L. Marié put it.

That brings me to the second main component of this conference – the papers dealing with cooperation projects and networks. I have to admit, this time last week I had no idea that there were already so many networks.

As we saw, the radical proposal that all of the OSH-related networks could be merged was met with unequivocal protest. So it's safe to say that each one has its *raison d'être*, its own focus, rules and structures as well as its own users.

Having said that, the discussions also indicated that there are overlaps between some of the information and database content. So one of the suggestions born of this conference is that such information of general interest should be made available to other networks and/or the public too.

The networks presented have a wide range of structures:

- some have a defined, monitored user group; others are open to everyone;
- some primarily *supply* information and others explicitly request their users to react and respond.

I think it was a good idea to set aside so much time at this conference for a detailed

presentation of existing networks. It gave everyone the opportunity to learn from one another and to pick up some pointers on how to optimize their own networks.

One of the premises for all of these optimization activities is, of course, that cooperation and networks should not be an end in themselves. The main aim of such tools is to formulate common OSH positions.

And there's a second point I should like to reiterate at the end of my summary – electronic information exchange cannot replace human contact. To develop a reliable working relationship, it's important to have the chance to meet the person you've been exchanging e-mails with. From this point of view alone, this conference was a resounding success.

Before we have to say "au revoir" in a few minutes' time, I would like to say "thank you",

- first and foremost to the speakers and delegates. We will be taking away with us a great deal of valuable information and suggestions, which we will draw on for quite some time to come as we work to improve the conditions for cooperating, forming opinions and exerting influence on the field of standardization.

I am therefore grateful to the organizers for their announcement that we will soon be able to read about everything again in detail on the EUROSHNET website.

- I would also like to thank the interpreters, who had to cope with our technical "mumbo jumbo". Their work has enabled us to cater for a small portion of Europe's linguistic diversity over the past two days.
- Extra special thanks goes to the INRS and its director, J.-L. Marié, for the Institute's hospitality and its excellent supervision of this conference. The building provided a very pleasant setting and I am sure the superb culinary delights played a considerable part in making this conference a success.
- I have deliberately chosen to save this next "thank you" until the end: I believe I speak on behalf of everyone present when I thank Jocelyne Jolly and her German-French team for their excellent organization of this conference. And I think they deserve a special round of applause.

Once again, thank you to everyone! Have a safe journey home!
Auf Wiedersehen!