



## **An enlarged Europe in a globalized world from an occupational safety and health perspective**

(2<sup>nd</sup> Panel discussion, 21 October 2005, 11:00–12:30)

### **Chair**

Walter EICHENDORF, HVBG, Germany

### **Participants**

Stefano BOY, ETUI-REHS

Loucas GOURTSOYANNIS, NORMAPME

Vassilios MAKROPOULOS, ELINYAE, Greece

Jacques McMILLAN, European Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry

Olivier PEYRAT, AFNOR, France

Hans-Joachim WOLFF, HVBG, Germany

The participants in this round table were speakers in the two previous sessions of the conference: "Occupational safety and health – Cooperation in a globalized world" and "Standardization, testing and certification – Practical experiences".

The chairperson summarized that a well-balanced system of legislation and standardization exists in Europe. From an occupational health and safety perspective, legislation and standardization complement each other and contribute to greater safety at the workplace - thanks to the New Approach.

But standardization activities are increasingly shifting from the European to the international level, a development which is well in the interest of companies that operate worldwide and whose production is based on division of labour. Markets are growing ever closer together and products are developed through global cooperation, so that international standards seem to be the only way to success.

However, increasing internationalization must not jeopardise the safety of employees and consumers. It is important to bear in mind that apart from the UN/ECE approach, no equivalent to the New Approach exists at global level since standards are not rooted in legislation as they are in Europe.

The Chairperson conducted the discussion around one major question:

### **How can occupational health and safety influence standardization?**

#### **1 - Are the existing structures in Europe suitable to ensure representation of legitimate users' interests in international standardization activity?**

- **Do the various groups of stakeholders see difficulties in presenting their concerns to the international standardization process?**
- **Can those who represent common interests at European level, such as NORMAPME or ETUI-REHS, also be effective at international level?**

- **Does the occupational health and safety community have suitable structures at hand at European or international level to efficiently influence European or international standardization work?**

*Trade unions' perspective:*

The involvement of social partners is still too limited in Europe today, and users generally have too little say in standardization work. Moving from CEN to ISO heavily affects the balance of the different interest groups in committees. For European trade unions in particular, moving the process up to the international level significantly adds to the costs and therefore steadily reduces their involvement.

*Perspective of SMEs:*

NORMAPME is the only body in charge of defending SMEs' interests. There is no equivalent body in other countries. It would be necessary to join forces at global level. NORMAPME can serve as a model for an international body, but this will take a long time.

*Perspective of OSH institutions:*

It is very important to participate in international standardization, with the agreement of the social partners, but energies must not be dissipated by only representing national positions. National positions must be focussed within the EU and be transported into ISO as one "national" position. Joining the European OSH efforts is necessary. Cooperation between OSH institutions, SMEs and Trade Unions must be improved on a step-by-step basis.

The difference between the views of the European Union and the United States of America concerning ISO standards was emphasized. The US considers standards as tools to sell products. They do not see problems with different specifications for different countries, whereas the European Union perceives a danger in European standards on the one hand and ISO standards on the other hand potentially laying down different requirements. Owing to the involvement of all stakeholders, European standards are no longer "industrial" standards. The European voice in ISO should be reinforced, making use of the 28 European votes.

## **2 - How can it be guaranteed that the protection objectives as defined in European directives are taken into account in international standardization?**

- **Can the approach recommended by UN/ECE also be applied to other product areas?**
- **Does the WTO-TBT Agreement provide a sufficient legal basis for giving international standards priority even when they do not implement European legislation in an appropriate way?**
- **What advantages and disadvantages do you see in the "Global relevance" approach promoted by ISO and IEC?**

*Perspective of the European Commission:*

The UN/ECE approach was considered as being a straight copy of the New Approach in UN language. Many countries, particularly in the developing world, wish to follow this approach. The New Approach concept, even if not perfect, is well-received. There is no need to adopt an ISO standard if it is less safe, but ISO standards should be integrated whenever there is no good reason not to do so. ISO has global relevance – it tries to ensure equal trade access worldwide. It has

to be examined why differences in standards exist: are these differences technology-based or safety-based? Deviations tend to come from local legal or commercial pressures that must be identified.

*Perspective of standards organization:*

WTO gives primacy to safety. To defend the European position, it must be argued for the European approaches to safety to be incorporated into ISO standards. Developing countries will tend to collaborate with Europe via twinning projects, which increases our potential influence and is a good means to promote the European approach.

Europe has many votes in ISO but must show responsibility by not dominating proceedings. Globalisation should be favoured but not abused. Approaches to international standardization with national options are of little use or benefit. Options may be considered in the first version of a standard, but convergence must happen over time.

Communication between the parties involved is another important factor in standardization work. Before going to ISO level, a common European position should be developed. The work should be done at two levels: the European level to forge a harmonized position and the national level from which to defend the European position.

*Trade unions' perspective:*

ETUI-REHS values international standardization as it helps exchange views and knowledge in a wider context, thus benefiting the technical input to the drafting process. Despite the undeniable advantages enjoyed by market players through the adoption of global standards, trade unions raise the question of how international standards can preserve the delicate balance between the economic pressure of free trade and the social commitment to protect workers and consumers. In particular, ETUI-REHS remains vigilant when harmonized standards are revised under ISO 'lead' according to the Vienna Agreement, since experience has shown that this can result in international standards not in line with the requirements of the Machinery Directive.

*Perspective of SMEs:*

SMEs tend to operate at a very local level, so that global standardization might be less relevant. Globalisation of products is leading to strong competition. Conditions of work and production need to be harmonized worldwide in order to give SMEs a better position.

## **Conclusion**

Over the last 30 years the New Approach has opened up the debate from specific items of equipment to general safety. A coherent system has now to be built up, including market surveillance in its broadest sense. It will take time to move from the "industrial" approach to this more holistic approach. To pursue this course, support is needed at political, social and technical level.