

ROADMAP

TITLE OF THE INITIATIVE	Standardisation strategy
LEAD DG – RESPONSIBLE UNIT	GROW H.3
LIKELY TYPE OF INITIATIVE	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions
INDICATIVE PLANNING	Q3 2021
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	DG DEFIS/DG CNECT associated

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A. Context, Problem definition and Subsidiarity Check

Context

As stated by President von der Leyen, the EU must ensure its technological sovereignty and be a global standard setter. Indeed, while technical by nature, standardisation is a highly strategic activity. In an increasingly competitive global environment, standardisation must support EU strategic autonomy and fundamental EU policy objectives, taking account of the European Green Deal, adapting the European single market to the digital age and improving innovation and the competitive position of EU industry – all while respecting EU values. The importance of standards is highlighted in the European Commission initiatives [‘Updating the 2020 New Industrial Strategy: building a stronger Single Market for Europe’s recovery’](#), the [‘Action Plan on synergies between civil, defence and space industries’](#) or [‘Shaping Europe’s digital future’](#).

At the Competitiveness Council of 27 May 2021, a joint [non-paper](#) of 17 EU Member States was presented for discussion, highlighting concerns on systemic issues related to the functioning of the European standardisation system.

Problem the initiative aims to tackle

The European standardisation system (ESS) has been a success story over the last decades, being a cornerstone to today’s single market and supporting the overall competitiveness of EU industries. In an ever-changing global environment, the European standardisation system has to operate in an agile and efficient way to ensure that European and global standards are set in line with EU strategic interests and values.

In recent years, the Commission has undertaken significant legislative reviews of sectorial legislation, making use of harmonised European standards and adopting new legislative initiatives that include legal provisions on harmonised European standards. In this context, the Commission has received significant feedback from stakeholders and gained insights into the challenges the European standardisation system is facing.

- (1) The ESS is currently not sufficiently equipped to **anticipate future standardisation needs**, especially when it comes to supporting the EU’s goals on the European Green Deal and the Digital Decade.
- (2) The ESS delivers on roughly 3 600 harmonised European standards, which ensure the functioning of the single market. It is built on core principles like transparency, inclusiveness and consensus building. But the system is challenged in striking the right **balance between speed and quality**: ever faster changing innovation cycles require timely delivery to support EU policy and regulatory needs, including the deployment of emerging technologies (e.g. quantum technology, cloud, data, platforms, hydrogen, batteries, space or civil/defence). At the same time, **stakeholders perceive new standardisation requests as too prescriptive, development processes take too long**, and many standardisation deliverables do not fulfil the quality requirements of EU legislation, thus leading to delayed citation. This has led to blockages and discontent, requiring efforts from all participating stakeholders.
- (3) The ESS’s strength is its **inclusiveness** and broad stakeholder participation (including civil society, vertical sectors, SMEs), and **this approach should also be consolidated at international level**.
- (4) Setting international standards is critical for the EU’s competitiveness. The geopolitical landscape has significantly changed in recent years, with increasingly complex value chains and more assertive actions by trading partners in setting standards for which we need a more strategic approach. This has led to a

situation where the respect for core European values and freedoms, in particular in the setting of internet standards and new technologies like artificial intelligence, blockchain, data or online platforms, is being challenged. At the same time, **setting international standards is key to promoting the EU's strategic capacity** in areas like raw materials, space data, batteries, hydrogen or microchips. The coordination of EU stakeholders and available resources should be improved to ensure that standards are set in line with EU values.

- (5) The importance of standards is growing, while at European (and national) level there is almost no formal **education** on or vocational training in standardisation.
- (6) While **services account for about 70% of the EU's GDP, they only represent a mere 2% of standardisation activities at EU level.** In particular, for business services, standards can be a solution to removing barriers in the single market.

Basis for EU intervention (legal basis and subsidiarity check)

The legal framework under which the Commission acts on European standardisation, while fully respecting the distribution of competences between the Union and the Member States as laid down in the Treaties, concerns in particular **Articles 14, 151, 152, 153, 165, 166 and 168 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and Protocol (No 26) on Services of General Interest annexed to the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and to the TFEU.**



B. What does the initiative aim to achieve and how

This initiative's overarching goal is to **consolidate and improve the EU standardisation system**, so that it continues to support a well-functioning single market and the competitiveness of EU industries and protects EU citizens and the environment. The strategy will seek to do the following:

- (1) **Modernise and consolidate** the European standardisation system, ensuring it is **better oriented towards meeting the EU's main interests**, policy priorities, core principles and values, notably the green/digital industrial transition, in a timely manner. This could mean:
 - finding ways to anticipate and **define standardisation priorities at political level** and with European stakeholders.
 - **addressing bottlenecks** within the standardisation system, including procedural aspects and working on the delivery mechanisms to ensure speed and quality. A **joint task force** between the Commission and the European Standardisation Organisations (CEN/CENELEC and ETSI) has been set up for this purpose, as a follow-up to the update of the industrial strategy.
 - introducing more **agile working methods** and developing closer cooperation between national standardisation bodies, the European industry, European Standardisation Organisations and the European Commission and further improvements of governance and funding mechanisms of the European Standardisation Organisations, while preserving the inclusiveness of the European standardisation system (role of SMEs, civil society organisations and 'vertical' industries).
 - finding ways to incentivise coordination, efficiency and flexibility in the timely delivery of European standards.
- (2) Develop a more **strategic and coordinated approach to global standards-setting** in areas of strategic EU interest, including through Member States, the European Parliament and European stakeholders, and fostering strategic partnerships with like-minded trading partners.
- (3) Make full use of EU industrial resources to **contribute to (pre-) standardisation** activities, including research and innovation activities.
- (4) Address standards-related **education, skills and expertise**, both in the public and private sector.

As a follow-up to the **updated industrial strategy**, the Commission will assess whether **amendments to the Standardisation Regulation are required to achieve the objectives outlined above.** Complementary to the Commission's announcement on an initiative for business services standards, the strategy will look at further developing services standardisation activities.

C. Better regulation

Consultation of citizens and stakeholders

Feedback is sought particularly on: 1) whether the current European standardisation system is fit for purpose to support European strategic interests; 2) how the EU can leverage and promote global leadership in standards-setting; 3) whether changes in governance and working methods are required to improve the performance of the European standardisation system. The main stakeholders of the consultation activities are EU industries, civil society organisations, academia, trade unions and SMEs, Member States, European/national parliaments, European/national standardisation bodies.

The Commission will undertake **several targeted consultations** to ensure that all key stakeholders have an opportunity to express their views: pro-active outreach (including through bilateral meetings) to industrial, civil society and stakeholder organisations, in-depth discussions in relevant Commission sectoral expert groups and committees, including the Committee on Standards and the European Multi-Stakeholder Platform on ICT Standardisation, pro-active outreach to the European standardisation organisations and national standardisation bodies via the European policy hub.

Evidence base and data collection

In recent years, the Commission has undertaken significant legislative reviews of sectorial legislation that make use of harmonised European standards for technical harmonisation requirements. It has also adopted new legislative initiatives that include legal provisions on harmonised European standards. In this context, large-scale stakeholder consultations were undertaken and analysed. This initiative will take stock of the evidence gathered in these exercises, including the impact assessments of the [Medical Devices Regulations](#), the [evaluation and impact assessment](#) of the Machinery Safety Directive, the impact assessment of the [Artificial Intelligence Regulation](#), the impact assessment of the [Batteries Regulation](#); as well as ongoing reviews, like the evaluation of the [Construction Products Regulation](#) and stakeholder feedback on the [General Product Safety Directive](#).

Further data sources will include reports, workshops and meetings with academic and industry experts with the help of the EU-funded International Digital Cooperation project on ICT standardisation.

Any measures or proposals that may result from this initiative will comply with the Better Regulation principles, as appropriate.