



## Introduction

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Almost exactly four years ago, on October 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, it was my pleasure to address the participants attending the European Conference on Standardisation, Testing and Certification – A Contribution to Occupational Safety and Health, now more commonly referred to as the Dresden conference.

On that occasion, I spoke of my awareness of the close link between standardisation and occupational health and safety, at a time when Europe was getting ready for enlargement and globalisation was already well underway.

Our analysis of the situation and the conclusions we reached in Dresden in 2001 remain no less relevant today:

- European enlargement has now become a reality;
- globalisation is continuing, and international standards bodies, in particular ISO and IEC, seem to be overtaking in importance their European counterparts CEN and CENELEC;
- there is daily confirmation of the changes affecting the world of business and work;
- questions are being raised about the future of CE certification in our OSH institutes;
- new standardisation projects are being launched in areas that were hitherto unaffected by standards and which have a direct or indirect impact on occupational health and safety.

Against this background, European occupational health and safety organisations must ensure they have the necessary resources to become more effective and influential and assert their legitimacy. Let us hope that the conference that is about to begin can contribute to the necessary reflection upon these issues.

At the Dresden conference, the idea of a network of OSH experts involved in standardisation, testing, certification and research connected with these activities was given concrete expression through the founding of EUROSHNET.

Four years later, it seemed to us that the time had come to see what this step has achieved, and in the light of this initial phase, to capitalise on the fruits of this experience.

The EUROSHNET network is now up and running. Progressing step by step, it operated at first with a small number of European Union countries, and recently, it too has broadened its frontiers to include the new EU member states and the EFTA countries. Dr. Lambert, Director of the KAN Secretariat, will later report on the events of EUROSHNET's first four years.

Another topic I addressed in Dresden was the need for better co-operation between OSH specialists to bring to the international forefront the best in European thinking and achievements in the field of occupational health and safety. It is no coincidence if our conference here is about to tackle, from an occupational health and safety standpoint,

these two major issues of enlargement and globalisation.

Let us first look at the question of enlargement. The New Approach, as you well know, establishes a strong link between European regulations and standards. It is imbued with many virtues, some of which had perhaps not occurred to its inventors. Regarding the enlargement of the European Union, it has been a channel for the dissemination of community OSH principles, and has thus speeded up new member states' adaptation of their regulations.

The integration of new member states and the spread of a European occupational health and safety culture have also been facilitated by the work of the Bilbao Agency. Its director will give us more details about the Enlargement Action Plan, which is intended to foster the implementation of a European occupational health and safety strategy for the period 2002 to 2006. He will also talk about the role played by the PHARE programmes in pursuing the same objectives.

Speakers from Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia, whom I thank for the interest they have shown in this conference, will give their impressions of this intensive period of co-operation, which did not end on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2005. They will also report on their first experience of "community life", and their expectations.

European standardisation is a wonderful melting pot bringing together individual experiences and ideas. It is also a wonderful tool for transferring the occupational health and safety culture, principles and solutions developed by specialists in Europe to the other stakeholders such as manufacturers, users, national authorities and social partners.

It would be mistaken to believe that European OSH specialists from different backgrounds spontaneously agree on how best to achieve effective occupational health and safety. Even though our national OSH cultures are on the whole quite similar, because of our own experiences, practices and habits we do not always end up with the same technical solutions. This is all the more reason why we must endeavour to build a European OSH culture by mutual sharing and learning. One raison d'être of EUROSHNET is to be an enabler of this process.

Co-operation, improved knowledge of each other, comparing views and experiences on questions of occupational health and safety, both general and specific – these are the basic ideas behind the work we should be doing together in the immediate future. Knowing each other better, to understand each other better; understanding each other better, to make progress together and face up to the challenges of our time. Ladies and Gentlemen the occupational health and safety experts, do not hesitate to make the fullest possible use of EUROSHNET.

Let me now move on to the second major theme of the conference – globalisation.

The New Approach is definitely arousing considerable interest outside the European Union. The European model is seen by some as something to be closely monitored (we all remember "Fortress Europe" ), or even to be resisted. For others, it is an example of progress on a regional level to be imitated, and transposed. China is already thinking along these lines!

Europeans are well aware that the European model can only survive if it is exported.

They therefore have to work skilfully and intelligently on exporting this model beyond Europe's frontiers. But how is this to be done? This is one of the major challenges we face today in the process generally referred to as globalisation.

This is a process which is viewed by WTO and the markets as an essential factor of world economic growth. It is not up to me to say whether that is true or not, but what happens to occupational health and safety in all this? The grand underlying concept of the New Approach is certainly to ensure free circulation of products within the European Union, but also (as is sometimes forgotten) to guarantee a high level of protection for the users of those products. European safety standards, harmonised under a New Approach directive, whether on machinery or personal protective equipment, provide for this high safety level as of the design stage.

There are two factors that guarantee that this requirement is met.

Firstly, OSH experts from the European Union are very much involved in the drafting of standards by the European Technical Committees.

Secondly, these standards are backed by the New Approach system, which is unique in the world:

- European standards-setters take as their benchmark the essential health and safety requirements written into European directives;
- in addition to this, quality control is provided by independent experts in the form of CEN Consultants, who are tasked with checking that the standard complies with the essential health and safety requirements it is meant to cover.

The challenge for European OSH experts working in standardisation is a big one: future international safety standards, mainly ISO standards, must, when compared with current harmonised European standards, be of **equivalent or higher** level as regards the protection afforded to the users of a product.

Wherever this is not the case, the ISO standard will not be felt to be acceptable as the European standard.

This situation will occur in particular wherever the technological state of the art is very different from one part of the world to another.

But in any case, European OSH experts will have to be especially vigilant, skilful and convincing if they want their requirements to prevail vis-à-vis non-European partners. It is a heavy responsibility and a difficult task that they will have.

In order to accomplish this task with the greatest chances of success, European OSH specialists have to get organised. To do so, it will be necessary for them to do more in the area of exchanging national experience and practices, just as it is necessary in the framework of enlargement to strengthen the bonds between OSH practitioners from the old and the new EU member states. EUROSHNET's internet fora are the place where European OSH specialists can – or should I say, *must* – confront each others' views and build the common standpoints that they will take to the international scene.

There are a great many obstacles to be overcome. OSH experts working in European standardisation feel comfortable there because they contribute inputs supporting common rules set by European directives.

But what of ISO, given that there are no equivalent international regulations? Some feel more out of place and fear that they are doomed to irrelevance.

It is true that in the ISO system, OSH experts can no longer refer to any common regulatory base. Faced with powerful business interests, they are afraid of becoming isolated and lacking the necessary clout to influence decisions.

A confidence boost is called for, and I have every reason to believe that it is possible because the desire for occupational health and safety is not only to be found in Europe. EUROSHNET can and must make its contribution.

I have no intention here of embarking upon, and dragging you into, a political and philosophical debate on global governance, that some would view as merely rhetorical. I will simply say that globalisation has much to gain by including an occupational health and safety approach. This viewpoint provides total justification, if any were felt necessary, of the OSH input in international standardisation activities.

One cannot overlook the financial aspects connected with international work, sometimes involving lengthy trips. Pooling our resources, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of our actions and optimising management of our experts in a context of limited means are all issues that we need to address as well.

But you might well say that in order to speak with one voice in Europe there would have to emerge a shared stance on occupational health and safety... And we know that, because of differences that can exist between their cultures and practices, OSH specialists themselves do not always see eye to eye. Clashes of opinion within European standardisation groups – which always happen and are in themselves positive - can sometimes be counterproductive on the international scene. It is therefore vital that these differences of opinion be identified and analysed at the earliest possible stage with a view to reducing, or even better, eliminating them, without sacrificing the quality of the OSH solutions adopted.

Forging our beliefs into a consensus, organising things whenever possible and reasonable so that one OSH expert, and not twenty five, with twenty five different opinions, goes to an international working group to make the case for a position agreed among European OSH specialists, are the objectives we must seek to achieve. The conference which is about to begin provides us with the opportunity to debate such questions openly with all those whose presence here today I very much welcome.

The communication tools that can help us progress in this direction exist. We will see them presented during this conference. They are the tools provided by the Bilbao Agency for occupational health and safety, networks such as Workingonsafety.net and PEROSH, the Co-ordination of Notified Bodies and last but not least EUROSHNET. I very much hope that we can build bridges between these different communication structures which all have their own specific function and acknowledged usefulness.

The conference beginning now will give us a chance to hear from some of the top people in the field and to exchange views on the subject of globalisation and its many different facets. Tomorrow morning, Mr. Ayrat, a Director from the Enterprise and Industry DG of the European Commission, and Mr. Peyrat, Director General of AFNOR, both of whom are leading figures in the political landscape of standardisation, will address the question

of standardisation in the face of globalisation better and in more detail than I could myself.

Mr. Boy, from ETUI-REHS, better known under its former acronym of TUTB (Trade Union Technical Board) will give the trade union view. Mr. Gourtsoyannis, from NORMAPME, will speak on behalf of small and medium-sized enterprises, and Mr. Wolff, from the German Central Federation of Berufsgenossenschaften, will represent the opinion of German OSH bodies.

Lastly, I would like to address three important topics that are also affected by the changes in Europe's social and economic landscape.

To start with, CE certification. Along with standardisation, it is one of the few harmonisation systems designed to maintain high safety levels for the products entering the European market.

The OSH organisations in some of the new member states have launched enthusiastically into notified body activity. Others however among the older member states are questioning the desirability of continuing with this CE certification activity.

The important thing will be to strengthen collaboration among us and to make it more effective still, in particular through the structures for co-operation and co-ordination already existing in Europe.

Then there is research. We all know how essential a driver of long-term progress it is. However, leveraging the results of research work via standards does not happen spontaneously. Efforts are required to make it happen, support and facilitate it. We must ensure that we combine the expertise and resources of our European OSH institutes in the field of research, co-ordinate research activities and guarantee a better transfer of research results into standardisation. There are three avenues that need to be explored in this respect: decision-makers and researchers must be made aware of standardisation's leverage capability on a European and international scale, potentially transferable results must be identified and action must be taken to improve communication for a better mutual understanding between those in research and standardisation.

And finally, market surveillance. All those involved are saying the time has come for effective enforcement and many accuse it of being the weak link. I am sure that Mr. Etienne, from the Labour Relations department of the French ministry with responsibility for labour, will present a more subtle picture and report on the actions in progress to strengthen European provisions in this area.

Many other questions remain, which I will not attempt to address in full here. I will simply mention some of them:

- how can we better share with European designers and manufacturers our determination to defend a European conception of including safety as of the design stage?
- the evolution of the New Approach in the future, as there seems to be a desire to extend it to issues previously considered off-limits and which can have implications and consequences for occupational health and safety;
- sustainable development and corporate social responsibility: what are the links with and the effects on occupational health and safety?

- standardisation in occupational health and safety management; several member states, supported by their OSH experts, are trying to block the attempts by some to introduce standards into this field, while others are not against it.

I know that these difficult issues are in the minds of a good many of you, and I have no doubt they will be addressed here.

The time has now come to wind up this introductory speech with a personal wish: that this conference should see EUROSHNET become the network par excellence for European OSH specialists. That it should evolve from the forum for discussion and co-operation that it is today into a body proposing initiatives and promoting OSH values in standardisation bodies and the European co-ordination of notified bodies.

This conference has been designed to allow representatives of European authorities, of new and old EU member states, existing European networks and all the stakeholders in standardisation and certification affecting occupational health and safety to give their views on these subjects.

Two round tables have been scheduled, where I am sure you will have open and fruitful discussions, not forgetting of course mealtimes and coffee breaks. According to the standardisation people, that is often when the trickiest problems are solved...

I would like to wish the Second European Conference the greatest success, and now I hand the floor over to David Buchanan, from HSL in the UK, who will chair the first session on co-operation structures in an enlarged Europe.

Thank you.