



European legislation in a globalized world

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In the twenty years following its birth, the New Approach has met with increasing recognition since it has demonstrated its ability to ensure a high level of safety within a clear, flexible and efficient regulatory framework and to protect other public interests concerned. The division of tasks between legislation and standardization has allowed to harmonize the technical rules and to guarantee free movement of products in about twenty industrial sectors.

During the successive enlargement, the New Approach served as a vehicle for the dissemination of the Union's principles on protection, health and safety and facilitated the rapid adaptation of the new member states' legislation. It has also facilitated and enhanced the participation of interested parties in the technical discussions of the European standardization committees.

In the context of the Lisbon Agenda, our priority is better legislation. The New Approach turns out to be a reference method in terms of legislation and co-regulation, which ensures favourable conditions for greater competitiveness of the European economy.

The decisions taken by the UN/ECE (United Nations/Economic Commission for Europe), inspired by the New Approach, confirm our perception and provide the opportunity to extend our model to the international level. Europe is ready to share its experience with its partners in order to promote a body of rules and regulations which does not sacrifice safety in favour of free movement of goods and international trade.

The success of the New Approach must however not mask the need for reform, concerning market surveillance and the designation of notified bodies in particular. The revision launched in 2004 should enable us to further strengthen the credibility and application of the regulations throughout the Union.

The shift towards international standardization is to be understood as a means of guaranteeing the compatibility of systems between large economic entities. Close co-operation between the international standardization system and European bodies contributes to the facilitation of global exchange and trade. An international standard identical with a European standard can thus turn out to be an instrument that strengthens competitiveness and facilitates the opening up of new markets beyond the Union borders.

The Commission is willing to step up co-operation with its standardization partners at global level. The shift towards international standardization must however not lead to a decrease in safety requirements. From the perspective of manufacturers and industry in particular, an extension to the global level would not be detrimental to the transparency and clarity in the articulation of roles between standardization and legislation. It goes without saying that this extension would also have to encompass the basic principles of transparency and openness to stakeholders, particularly the users and representatives of the civil society (e.g. consumers, trade unions, NGOs).