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“Quality Initiative on Construction Standardisation”

Input by the construction sector for the JOINT INITIATIVE ON STANDARDISATION (PACT)

SBS Position paper

Preliminary remarks and presentation

Small Business Standards SBS is the European stakeholder organisation representing SMEs in the European standardisation process. Many SBS members have direct or indirect connections with the construction sector and close to a third of the SBS experts work in TCs relating to harmonised construction standardisation. For this reason, within its sectoral policy work, SBS decided to launch this initiative, fully inscribed in the process of preparation and subsequent implementation of the EU Joint Initiative on Standardisation (PACT), included in the Single Market Strategy published on 28th October.

Introduction and Background

Considering the predominant position the construction sector has in the Single Market Strategy and the sectoral approach that the Joint Initiative on Standardisation wishes to cover, it is important that the focus of this initiative is also on the adequacy and applicability of standards supporting the activity of the construction sector and its companies.

The ESS plays a central role in harmonising certain aspects of the EU Members States in particular with regard to the single market. In that it provides the tools and expertise to set an appropriate state of the art for companies. However, there is also a sometimes difficult interplay between mandatory EU-legislation and voluntary EU-standards. In most countries not only harmonised (semi-mandatory) standards but also all voluntary standards are implemented by the national standardisation organisation.

The construction sector is by definition a predominantly local sector. Building regulations are a national competence. Therefore national construction markets tend to have individual requirements and focus. European harmonised standards do not go through a national filter before they become applicable. This means that standards will directly impact the companies and must be adequate to their needs. Procedures such as the Formal Objection route only provide solutions to an already existing problem, which could have been avoided in the first place.

Unfortunately where new EU requirements have to be followed, additional work is created to which construction companies, most of which are SMEs have to adjust. Furthermore, EU standards have sometimes experienced challenges and issues of quality and excessive complexity. When such documents replace functioning and applicable national standards they can create animosity, with unwanted impacts that need to be ironed out by exchange and collaboration.

Certain recent examples in particular fall into that category, such as Eurocodes and some construction products standards.

Construction companies that are **construction product users** and **construction standards users** are particularly affected. When European standards are unfit for purpose it is often they who have to bear the costs and the contractual responsibility.

For this reason, SBS wants to gather all relevant actors around a newly-launched Quality Initiative for Construction Standardisation to be launched at the beginning of 2016, in order to contribute with concrete input to the Joint Standardisation Initiative (PACT), thus strengthening the European standardisation.

Aim of the Initiative

The overall aim of the Quality Initiative for Construction Standardisation is to strengthen the competitiveness of construction companies, ensure legal certainty and consumer protection through improving the normative working environment.

The Initiative seeks to bring committed partners around the table to identify specific and horizontal issues in the application of European Construction Standardisation. Once identified a strategy should be devised on how to address them. In particular the responsibility and contribution of each partner will need to be identified.

For the initiative three steps have been identified: Phase 1: identifying issues and problems; Phase 2: proposing solutions and identifying actors; Phase 3: implementation. Phase 2 and 3 are optional and depend on the outcome of Phase 1.

Scope and discussion points of the Initiative

1. Completeness of harmonised Construction Product Standards in regards to national requirements
2. Coherence of European Standardisation in the Construction sector
3. Applicability of CE Marking for construction companies
4. Role of CEN New Approach consultants in construction standardization
5. Interplay between Annex ZA and the rest of the European standard

Partners of the Initiative

- Regulators: European Commission/Members States authorities
- Standardisers: CEN/CENELEC /National Standardisation Organisations
- Construction Product Manufacturers: CPE/SBS
- Construction Product Users: SBS/EBC/FIEC

Preconditions to join the initiative

During the last few months, SBS took part in several meetings – both public and private – during which a counterproductive confrontational state of mind dominated the discussions. This is why, SBS

believes it is fundamental to set a number of voluntary commitments as preconditions to participate, to which SBS itself will abide.

- commitment to first jointly identify issues; before proposing remedies and solutions in a second step limited only to the issues identified
- engagement by the partners to only communicate about the debate content at the end of the initiative
- willingness and collaborative state of mind beyond established positions and demands
- active involvement of practitioners & professionals
- No subject shall be taboo, but preference shall be given to issues that can be solved