ICT and standardisation

ICT specifications ensure that products can connect and interoperate with each other, boosting innovation, and keeping ICT markets open and competitive.

Standardisation is the process by which specifications are set.

A specification is a document that outlines the agreed properties for a particular product, service, or procedure. In ICT, specifications are primarily used to maximise interoperability – the ability for systems to work together. This is essential to ensure that markets remain open. It gives users the widest possible choice of services and manufacturers the benefit of economies of scale.

The Commission adopted a Communication setting up ICT standardisation priorities (.pdf) as part of the package on 'Digitising European Industry'.

The Communication proposes a plan with 2 strands to prioritise and deliver an efficient and sustainable ICT standard-setting. This standardisation will address the challenges of the digitisation of the economy.

The 2 strands are:

1. to identify a list of priority building blocks where improved ICT standardisation is most urgent, proposing actions with concrete deliverables and a timeline in those domains (5G, Internet of

Things, Cybersecurity, Cloud and Big Data).
2. to propose proposes a high-level political process, to deliver and ensure leadership through standards, fostering a high-level commitment from a broad stakeholder base, including from industry, standard-setting organisations, and the research community, as well as from EU institutions and national administrations.

Why is interoperability so important in ICT?

In modern ICT the service value of a device relies on the ability to communicate with other devices. This is known as the network effect. It is important in almost all areas of ICT. Specifications ensure that products made by different manufacturers are able to interoperate, and that users are offered the chance to pick and mix between different suppliers, products or services.

What is the EU's role in standardisation?

The EU supports an effective and coherent standardisation framework, which ensures that high quality standards are developed in a timely manner.

The European Commission issues standardisation requests and supports financially the work of European Standardisation Organisations: European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI), European Committee for Standardisation (CEN) and European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization (CENELEC). But, it does not interfere with the standardisation setting conducted by industry or National Standardisation Organisations.

EU-funded research and innovation projects make their results available to the standardisation work of several standards-setting organisations. The EU Rolling Plan for ICT Standardisation provides an overview of the activities to be undertaken in support of EU policies.

As part of the ICT standardisation policy, a European Multi-Stakeholders Platform (MSP) on ICT standardisation was setup in 2011.

The MSP plays the role of advisor and guides on matters relating to ICT standardisation policy and to priority-setting in support of legislation and policies. Furthermore, it advises on identification of ICT technical specifications for use in public procurement elaborated by Global ICT Fora and Consortia, and stimulates a better cooperation between the actors.

A Communication with the Guidelines for avoiding technology lock-in by using open standards in public procurement was published in 2013.

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The European Commission has developed a flexible approach to standardisation when identifying new ICT technical specifications.

Rolling plan for ICT standardisation

The EU rolling plan provides an overview of preliminary and complementary ICT standardisation activities undertaken in support of EU policy activities.

European Multi-Stakeholder Platform on ICT Standardisation

An advisory expert group on all matters related to European ICT standardisation.

See Also

Open Internet

EU rules enshrine the principle of open Internet access: internet traffic shall be treated without discrimination, blocking, throttling or prioritisation.

Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications

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Electronic communications laws

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The Connectivity Toolbox

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