

standards, at a stage before these have been turned into international standards. For example, IEC standards on “safety” components now provide a useful addition to the European standards (adopted in ISO) on emergency stop systems and interlocking devices.

Future prospects

One of the most important achievements of the European system is to draw a strict distinction between the obligations applying to designers and those applying to users. In many non-European countries, however, there is considerable vagueness as to these obligations themselves and as to how they are split between designers and users. It is true that the European New Approach standards can only be addressed to designers ; but nothing would prevent an international standard, whose design provisions were entirely in line with the essential requirements of the directive in question, from also including provisions for users, as long as, of course, the latter were clearly distinguished from the former.

The international answer, mentioned earlier, to the New Approach (international agreements replacing the “regional” European legislation), is arousing interest, it is said, more or less throughout the world (in particular among certain European manufacturers who export all over the globe). Be that as it may, Europeans should take care that the

strong points of the New Approach are not left by the wayside.

Apart from the system of “regional exemption clauses”, which should be ruled out, as it runs more or less counter to the desired goal, every effort should be made to develop international standards which meet the European requirements. The imminent success of the revision of EN 292 – a success which, it is worth remembering, was far from a foregone conclusion ! – gives grounds for optimism as to the future prospects of this approach, in most cases. However, if it is unsuccessful, we will have to resign ourselves to living a little while longer with separate international and European standards. ■

International standards for the elimination of barriers to trade : an analysis of the agreements and discussion on standardization policy

Dr. Josef Falke, Universität Bremen (ZERP)

KAN report No. 29, 2002, 46 pages

Mr. Corrado Mattiuzzo, KAN technical officer, gave a presentation on the KAN report to the Conference. The document can be viewed on the website : <http://tutb.etuc.org/uk/newsevents/files/mattiuzzo.pdf>

A GLOBALIZED STANDARDIZATION PROCESS

Ten years of Swedish trade union activity in the national and European standardization process

Sven Bergström

LO – Swedish Trade Union Confederation



Introduction

The overall objective of trade union participation in standardization work is to put trade union experience and knowledge to use to contribute to better standards and thus reduce the risk of occupational diseases and accidents for workers in Sweden and Europe. Good standards should help to create satisfactory working conditions and therefore “better jobs”.

Technical developments constantly give birth to new products, methods and organisation that may bring new risks. Experiences of products such as asbestos and solvents show that trade union vigilance is needed to protect workers' health.

Swedish authorities and social partners have traditionally cooperated in drawing up work environ-

ment regulations on a tripartite basis, so the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, LO, was involved in this area of work long before Sweden joined the EU.

Following the Council of Ministers of the European Communities decision in 1985 to launch a New Approach to harmonising national rules, the Swedish *Riksdag* (parliament) agreed that Sweden should deepen cooperation with its European neighbours, even though it was outside the EC. Sweden was able to influence the common rules even though it could not help to frame directives, and thus the forum for trade unions to exercise influence moved from national tripartite collaboration to European cooperation.

LO set up a working group that, in 1988, called on the government to launch a study of the increasing

This is a summary of a fuller report written by Sven Bergström in collaboration with the joint LO standardization group ASTA and its former chairman Bo Tengberg. English translation by Erica Stempa. Available in English on the TUTB website : <http://tutb.etuc.org/uk/dossiers/files/tu-report-sweden.pdf>.

importance of standardization. In its response to the government's report, LO declared its support for harmonisation of rules and safety regulations in Sweden and the rest of Europe, and noted that standards in Sweden were relatively good, although more needed to be done. It also added :

"It is a clear objective for the EC's integration work that no member state should need to reduce its standards..."

LO considers that it is a basic requisite for the work of harmonisation that work environment questions are determined in collaboration with the trade union organisations...

Sweden has come relatively far in matters concerning our external environment. We also act as a driver nation in this field...

LO considers that education and remuneration, particularly for international work, is a necessary prerequisite to enable the trade unions to provide an effective contribution to the standardization process...

LO considers that the trade union should be able to act on the basis of its own priorities, and therefore funds for education and other standardization work must be provided to the trade union organisations directly."

The Swedish Standards Institute (SIS) was built up by industry and consisted by and large exclusively of paying stakeholders from industry with a small proportion of representatives from government bodies. Since the relevant interest groups financed each standardization project, it was difficult for SIS to carry out work on wider safety rules of general benefit.

In its letter of instruction to SIS in 1990, the government introduced a target-related subsidy for standardization projects relating to safety, the work environment, consumer and environmental protection, which contribute to developing western European harmonisation. Thanks to trade union pressure, tripartite consumer and work environment councils were set up, with responsibility for distributing funds to the Swedish technical committees for work on harmonising standards. The government put aside 5 million Swedish kronor for trade union activity in European standardization, including information and education.

What difficulties do trade unions face in participating in standardization work ?

Trade union influence in European standardization work requires major resources, both financial and human : funds for travel, hotels and charges to the national standardization organisations, as well as people with the required knowledge of technical standardization English and the regulatory codes that are applied within CEN.

Opportunities for LO to participate – thanks to special government funds for travel and educational activities – have been relatively good since the launch of the LO's ASTA network in 1990, compared with the situation for trade union colleagues in the EU and European Economic Area (EEA). But even if the Swedish trade union movement has a relatively large number of people who are knowledgeable in the work environment field, their availability to participate in this work is limited, since other competing duties must often be given priority.

Other difficulties include the accessibility of completed standards. The cost of buying a completed standard and the frequent lack of a Swedish translation means that general awareness of the requirements in standards is too poor.

One of the most severe problems in Sweden is cooperation with the private-law standardization organisations, which has caused problems right from the start. Initially, in 1988, LO was invited to participate in the standardization activities within the ergonomics field at a cost of SEK 100,000/year. When the SIS work environment council was set up in 1990, pressure for the trade union organisations to pay decreased. It was thought that the state funding for the areas of priority could cover the trade union organisations' participation.

However, in 1994 the Swedish Agency for Administrative Development's committee of inquiry¹ criticised the activities of the work environment and consumer councils and proposed their abolition. It also recommended that the grants to SIS for work environment-related and consumer-related standardization projects should be abolished, and that all participants in the work of standardization should contribute to covering the administrative costs.

In its budget proposals for 1995/96 the government also adopted some of these proposals, and the SIS work environment council disappeared, although the SIS consumer council remained. SEK 4.5 million was set aside for SIS work environment projects, but this was to be allocated to the authorities responsible for different areas, in line with their efforts in standardization work.

A Federation of Swedish Industries inquiry in 1993 (*Improving the efficiency of the organisation of standardization in Sweden*), also led to decentralisation of activities. As a result, pressure for the trade unions to help fund the technical committees increased considerably, and some trade union members were excluded from participating.

Taking the view that the government was making it more difficult for trade unions to participate in national technical committees, LO was very critical of the National Board of Trade's inquiry concerning the EU evaluation. It declared :

¹ Standardization and the State – consequences of the new standardization organisation.

“The New Approach model has failed as regards trade union participation in development of common safety rules in Europe. Nor have the national standardization bodies been able to shoulder the wider responsibility this has implied. The fact is that many product standards are more or less developed by the manufacturers themselves – without the users of the products being represented. The consequence is that the quality of the harmonising European standards will not be what it could have been if the stakeholders concerned had had the opportunity to participate.

LO believes that if the intentions concerning trade union participation in standardization are to be realised the financial conditions must be changed. It is not reasonable that trade union organisations in Europe should have to pay for the work of harmonisation via membership dues that are already taxed.”

Government investigates subsidies to standardization

At the beginning of 1997 the Swedish National Audit Office presented its report on *More effective support for standardization*. The assignment was to evaluate the use of the government grant and its appropriateness. The report, which does not deal with trade union participation, proposed that the government should participate more actively and thus have a say in standardization. It recommended that general subsidies to SIS should be abolished and that government authorities should participate to a greater extent in the standardization work.

The positive part of the report was the proposal that the government should support and exercise influence over standardization work involving protection of life, health, the environment etc. It suggested standards that play a legal role should be supplied free, via the Internet, and that translation to Swedish should be made faster.

The LO Congress in 2000

The LO Congress in 2000 approved a motion calling for :

- An increase in funding for participation in the work of standardization
- Economic support to educate the participants

LO pointed out that standardization was increasingly moving towards international criteria, with strong pressure for Europe to adopt similar safety rules as the USA. Education and exchange of experience were vital. LO criticised the growing pressure on trade unions to help finance the technical committees.

Since the late 1980s, the state investment in standardization projects fell from 60% more than the stakeholders to 10-15% more. Demand for an overhaul of the system led to changes to make Swedish standardization organisation more effective in 2001,

with the amalgamation of seven different industry standardization bodies into one organisation controlled by the stakeholders, the SIS. The Swedish Standards Council (SSR) was set up, representing government, local authorities, trade, industry and banking.

Government funds for participating in Swedish technical committees

The state subsidy to standardization activities in 2002 included SEK 1 million allocated to SSR for promoting the users' interests. The money was aimed at non-profit consumer, employee and environmental organisations to cover fees for participation in Swedish standardization work.

LO's standardization group, which has been trying to solve the problem of the fees to the Swedish technical committees for many years, is now looking forward to improved cooperation with the standardization organisations. Thanks to the government funds trade union members can also expect to be important stakeholders in standardization.

Examples of successful trade union influence in improving standards

Broad experience has shown that trade union participation is necessary to safeguard the members' health and safety. Although trade union representatives can feel something of an oddity in these circles, it is often clear that none of the other participants have practical experience of the equipment in question. Experts in the working groups frequently come from manufacturing companies or testing institutes oriented towards the products in question. Far too often there is no one to speak for users' experiences and wishes.

By and large, all trade union participation is always positive, since trade union influence in the working groups often leads to better standards. Below are some positive examples :

■ CEN/TC 122 Ergonomics

The standard deals with ergonomic principles for designing machines and working equipment. Already at the first meeting in 1988, the matter of musculoskeletal injuries, which is important for LO, was brought up. The trade union objective has been to make designers avoid building machinery that necessitates short-cycled repetitive movements. This led to a new standard called EN 614-2.

Another demand the trade unions have pursued vigorously is that machines and equipment should be designed for both women and men. Within the working group, strong voices have pressed for separate specifications for women and men. Despite this, the standard EN 614-1 means that designers do not have to make “pink” and “blue” machines.

■ CEN/TC 160 Safety belts and lines

Trade unions have taken part in five working groups to protect people working at heights. Different working methods in the Nordic countries and the rest of Europe have led, with the help of trade union involvement, to the framing of a standard for long connecting lines.

■ CEN/TC 128 Roof covering products

Swedish trade unions have aimed at removing products containing asbestos from product standards, and worked in cooperation with the EFBWW (European Federation of Building and Wood Workers) and the TUTB (Trade Union Technical Bureau).

■ CEN/TC 128 SC 9 Anchorage devices for roofing

A proposal for the standardization of anchorage devices for safety lines on buildings, already sent out for comment and approved as a preliminary European standard, was so deficient from a Swedish trade union point of view that it would have led to a considerable deterioration in safety. Through trade union action in cooperation with other Nordic countries, the proposal was sent back to the working group for revision.

■ CEN/TC 161 Foot and leg protectors

Swedish trade union participation has mainly contributed to improving slip protection, through acceptance by the working group of Swedish testing methods.

■ CEN/TC 53 WG 1 Scaffolding

Swedish scaffolds are broad enough to allow two people to pass each other, while other European scaffolds are usually considerably narrower. On the instigation of Swedish trade unionists, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland have supported a resolution demanding a debate on scaffolding width of 1.8 to 2.4 metres.

■ CEN/TC 158 Head protection

On the initiative of the Swedish trade unions, testing of safety helmets' heat resistance has been carried out in cooperation with the Danes. The trade union contribution has meant that Swedish firemen do not risk getting worse head protection because of harmonisation.

■ CEN/TC 239 Ambulance medical care

Swedish trade union efforts have contributed to the lift height for stretchers being reduced, so that it is not necessary to bend the arms when putting stretchers into a vehicle.

■ CEN/TC 144 Tractors and machinery for agriculture and forestry

The working group deals with such things as the highest allowed force when driving agricultural and forestry machines. Swedish trade union have called for the values to be reduced, since the present levels in practice mean that women are excluded from this type of work.

■ CEN/TC 143 Machine tools - safety

Because there are many accidents in this area, many of the working groups include Swedish trade union participants, who have used their experience to argue for improvements.

■ CEN/TC 98 Lifting platforms

In WG 4, the design of the emergency shutdown has been a controversial question. Swedish trade unions have demanded that the emergency shutdown should stop the entire platform and not just the lifting device in question, and should be in the form of a button, not a switch. Other demands have been that the instructions should be in the form of pictures instead of text.

■ CENELEC/TC 112 High-tension switch gear

Trade union participation has secured reference to "short disconnection times" and requirements concerning the longest time allowed for disconnection of switchgear.

Strategies, methods, and cooperation with other institutions

LO's overall strategy is based on the premise that good, harmonising European standards are in the public interest, and that trade unions contribute to raising their quality and helping the state to reduce costs by cutting the risk of occupational injuries. The state should therefore make a financial contribution to trade union participation. State funding towards the costs of travel and hotels, and for education and information has been a basic condition for the Swedish involvement.

Tasks are allocated and coordinated by LO's joint union working group, ASTA, set up in November 1990. The group, which is still active, met regularly every fortnight during the 1990s, reflecting the interest and enthusiasm of members from affiliate organisations and the need for inter-union discussion on standardization strategy. In all, the group has held about 160 meetings. It has also run regular courses for union officers on standardization questions and technical English. Union representatives are appointed according to who has most experience and knowledge in the area in question, and their aim is to achieve the best possible standard from the broad LO perspective, not only with regard to individual union interests.

The works covers :

- allocating monitoring areas among affiliates ;
- drawing up education programmes ;
- acting as a reference group for the SIS work environment council ;
- developing cooperation with authorities and organisations in the field, both nationally and internationally ;
- helping to ensure that harmonised standards reflect members' interests.

In order to make the best use of resources, LO has set priorities for its activities :

1. direct participation in the European standardization group, especially on projects mandated by the machinery and personal protective equipment directives ;
2. participation in the Swedish "mirror" groups ;
3. following preparation of standards through contacts with official representatives.

Government funding reflects the increased cost of participation in European-level standardization work. It goes to four main areas : participation (travel etc), education, language (technical English) teaching, and coordination and administration.

The figure shows that the cost of LO's participation went down in the 1990s. The reason for this was not a direct shortage of funds, but rather the retirement of active members and lack of new blood.

However, many new people indicated their interest in 2002, so this trend is likely to be reversed.

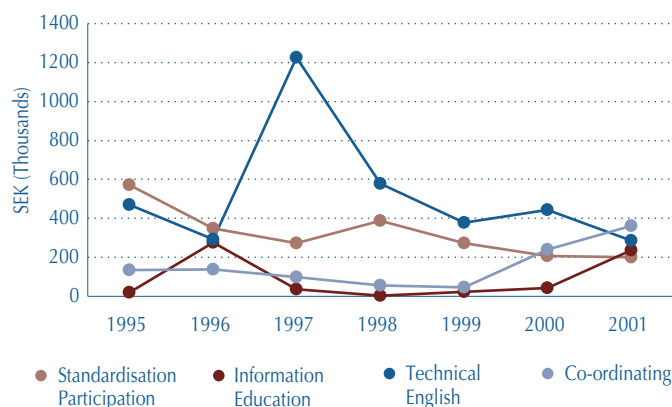
Information and education

LO and its affiliates have published and distributed several publications on European standardization. In 1991, 1993, 1996 and 2000, training was organised, in cooperation with the TCO, on rules and systems in the standardization process, which helped to recruit new participants. Further courses have taken place in Brussels in cooperation with the TUTB, the European Commission and local offices of the LO/TCO and Swedish EU delegation.

In recent years, TCO has not taken part in coordinating standardization activities or applying for government funding for participation.

The first trial study course on technical standardization English was held in 1991, followed by a series of residential sessions that covered 248-person weeks between 1992 and 2001. Residential weeks also took place in Lancaster, UK, in 1992 and 1993, attended by trade unionists from 13 different LO affiliates. January 1997 saw the launch of a new two-year programme aimed at recruiting new experts to replace those who had left or retired, and language training continues in the UK and Sweden.

Use of the ASTA group's standardisation funds 1995-2001



Cooperation

Extensive cooperation in preparing standards takes place with the Work Environment Authority, especially in the framework of the Swedish mirror committees. In specific cases, such as scaffolding and ladders, common Nordic strategies are devised. The Nordic Council has set up a working group, and there is also cooperation in various industry sectors.

Sweden has participated actively in the TUTB's European network for standardization since 1990, and the LO hosted its meeting in Stockholm in autumn 2001.

Cooperation with standardization bodies, apart from the problems of fees to the technical committees, has functioned well. As well as participation in the SIS work environment council, trade unions were involved in two of the earlier standardization organisations, BST (the Swedish Building Standards Institution) and IKH (the Swedish Crane Standards Commission).

In cooperation with the former General Standardization Group, STG, the Swedish LO acted as host when TC 122 Ergonomics met in Stockholm in 1989, coupled with several working group meetings. Trade union hosting of a meeting at TC level in European standardization was seen then as unique and attracted some attention. ■