
INVOLVEMENT OF CONSUMERS INTO STANDARDIZATION PROCESS

through

the Czech Consumer Association and the Cabinet for Standardization

Position paper at 31.12.2010

Summary

The Czech Consumer Association (SCS) focuses on consumer involvement into technical harmonization on a long term basis with a view to reach a systematic nature and regularity of this process. This could be supported by a number of individual achievements of such involvement throughout 2003-2009. In years 2009-2010¹ were provided financial resources, which facilitated the realization of those projects focused on the development and consequently practical implementation of model for consumer involvement into technical harmonization process. At which time was established the Cabinet for Standardization, a Public Service Company, in order to ensure systemic and permanent consumer participation in the standardization processes. This document states indicatively some achievements made in this area during the last year such as establishment of new and functional contacts as regards the cooperation with the associations of people with disabilities, blind people, seniors, etc. The cooperation has been enhancing as well as the involvement into standardization process at home and abroad. An important issue was the safety of child playgrounds and there were realized concrete outputs (prints, international conferences, safety mark). For more details see the following text.

Starting points

- **Czech Consumer Association** (SCS; see www.konzument.cz) focuses on consumer involvement into technical harmonization on a long term basis with a view to reach a systematic nature and regularity of this process.
- SCS endeavours to explain to the final consumer that the technical standard is an important tool for facilitating the business, removing the internal market obstacles and barriers to the international trade and contributes to the creation of desirable quality environment and accessibility to services particularly in relation to consumers. European harmonized standards simplify the business environment because compliance with the European harmonized standard shall be recognized as compliance with those requirements laid down in technical regulations these standards relate to (See Act. No. 22/1997 Coll. on Technical requirements for Products, Articles 4 and 4a).
- In the process of development and publication of Czech Standards, their amendments and withdrawals, the conditions given in Act No. 22/1997 Coll. on Technical Requirements for Products (Article 6) must be satisfied. In this context we refer particularly to the following conditions:
 - d) application of the justified concern protection;
 - f) discussion of a draft Czech standard, its amendment or withdrawal with every person who

¹ Norway Grants

will report at a place within the period determined in the published announcement or with every person who will submit his opinion on the published motion within the time limit determined in the announcement on its publication.

- Technical harmonization is closely related to the other associated areas – adoption and implementation of technical regulations, market surveillance, performing of the conformity assessment, accreditation, metrology (hereinafter referred to as „standardization“). Thereby the importance of this technical area is increasing. It becomes an important tool for implementation of technical regulations within the EU internal market with direct impact on the competitiveness of European industry and trade, fair competition environment for all economic actors and on safety and quality of products and services.
- EU documents stress the relevance of technical standards and the importance of consumer and SMEs involvement in the whole process of standardization as only a balanced and regular involvement will allow to reach such outcomes of standardization processes which ensure „clear“ market for all interested parties including SMEs and consumers. The need of involving social parties (especially consumers) and weaker economic interested parties (small and medium enterprises) has been stressed for many times. Certain actions have been taken at the European level (funding by ANEC and NORMAPME) but at the national level the members are expected to deal with this matter and it is on them how they managed it and how they will solve the question of consumer involvement (the principle of subsidiarity).
- In this respect there has not been set up any system - especially in „new“ Member States; in „old“ Member States different ways of such a consumer involvement into standardization and its support have been already introduced, nevertheless we can again hardly talk about a fully operational systems (Denmark, possibly Germany or France, the United States on principle, however in fact the situation is not so “rosy”).
- Nowadays is the assistance in consumer involvement into standardization one of the leading topics for subsidies provided by the Czech Ministry of Industry and Trade on a yearly basis in support of consumer associations. However de facto it is the minimum support and it is only the Czech Consumer Association which is pursuing activities in the area of standardization. The reason is an immense technical, professional and also financial intensity of associated activities. Therefore the consumer associations focus on more visible and “attractive” areas of consumer protection.

Former ways of participation and achievements

Activities in preparatory bodies – national level

- SCS was represented in several preparatory and advisory groups and platforms (see the following up-to date list); an example of this is its representation in almost 20 technical standardization committees (formerly under the Czech Standardization Institute, now under the Czech Office for Standards, Metrology and Testing).

International Cooperation

- A representative of SCS has been involved in activities (since 2004) of ad hoc ISO/COPOLCO Working group on Product Safety. Since 2009 SCS has been charged with chairing and coordination of this group following the project financing by the Czech Office for Standards, Metrology and Testing. In this year, SCS participation in ISO/COPOLCO plenary session has been ensured which contribute significantly to the establishment and development of contacts with a positive impact on some further activities (ensuring of participation on international seminars, etc.).
- In 2007 a representative of SCS became a member of ANEC General Assembly and was also voted onto the Steering Committee. Therefore we can influence effectively a policy and positions submitting by

ANEC and we distribute official ANEC positions with the aim of putting through its interests in the decision-making process.

- SCS activity aims at making the question of health unexceptionable children shoes visible. This matter has been already consulted in ANEC and discussed with Ms. Roithova, a member of European Parliament.

Publications, professional activities and outcomes

- For many years have been SCS professional activities focused on making a relation between consumer and technical harmonization visible. The example of above mentioned activities are editorial works e.g. publication „Risks and Trickiness of Household Appliances (Rizika a záludnosti domácích spot ebi)” - VI ek. Under the annual plans adopted by the Czech Office for Standards, Metrology and Testing on standardization support have been elaborated some parts of educational publications intended for technical public – Graphical Symbols on Articles (Selection of electrotechnical symbols from IEC 60417DB database), namely Symbols for General-purpose Use, Symbols for Electric Household Appliances and for Similar Use, Symbols on Audiovisual equipment, Symbols on Telecommunication and IT Equipment and finally Symbols on Medical Devices. The other example of SCS professional activities could be a publication of ISO IEC guidelines translations relating to standardization of products intended for safe use by children, elderly and disabled people. The other topic on which the activity of SCS has been focused is standardization of hotels and other accommodation marking.
- SCS fulfilled executive tasks within the annual plans on standardization support (under the Czech Office for Standards, Metrology and Testing), for example Study on health unexceptionable children shoes or furniture quality in relation to standards;

Seminars, Workshops

- Over the years SCS managed to ensure several fruitful seminars and similar events, some of them with international participation. The main topics were health unexceptionable children shoes, a relationship between metrology and consumers, implementation of New legislative framework for placing of products on the market or ensuring of consumer expectation as regards standards development.

Is it sufficient? Why this is not the right „way“?

- In spite of this apparently wide list of activities, which are appreciated by partners at home and abroad, SCS feels that did not manage to ensure permanent participation in standardization processes under the former conditions.
- For example, even though SCS was represented in almost 20 technical standardization committees, this representation based particularly on a voluntary approach was not fully operational; the aim will be to make changes (to revive and to restructure).
- In general, there was a lack of capacity for involvement into standardization processes on a permanent base. New Member States are not represented in ANEC working groups and that is certainly alarming.
- There is no doubt that the Czech Office for Standards, Metrology and Testing and Ministry of Industry and Trade² encouraged significantly the implementation of outlined initiatives and enabled SCS to start on “a challenging journey” of partial involvement into standardization processes - we have to express them our thanks. „Path may be the target“. However, SCS realised that if we want to reach a level which would correspond to trend of technical harmonization in this country, as we can see and compare with situation in some european countries, it is necessary to take some actions in order to ensure such a development.

² But also for example the Czech Accreditation Institute and other partners.

- That is why SCS has taken the opportunity which has occurred in the last two years as regards financing and developed and implemented the model which is mentioned below.

Current situation: 2010

- In 2009 SCS realized a project focused on developing model on enhancing participation of consumers in standardization. This project was funded from EEA/EHP grant (Norway). Within this project the above model was developed and **the Cabinet for Standardization, a Public Service Company**, (hereinafter referred to as “Cabinet”; <http://www.top-normy.cz/kabinet-pro-standardizaci.php>) was established. SCS managed to obtain subsidies for 2010 from the same provider for purpose of development of consumer involvement into standardization and could have started its activities. For this purpose have been also used partial projects financing by the Czech Office for Standards, Metrology and Testing or by Ministry of Industry and Trade.
- Introduced model takes into account a need of expertness of consumer representation in standardization processes based on gradual building of professional team which will ensure various form of involvement into the normalization process. The model should improve communication between consumers and other interested parties, namely small and medium entrepreneurs, including seeking for common positions on standardization. The mandate for the Cabinet includes:
 - o To influence standardization work from the point of view the importance for Czech consumer interests at national, european and global level; this could be achieved for example by distribution of information on standardization and on technical harmonization level in given areas and by coordination of consumer involvement into standardization, standards development (with the aim to promote using of technical standards); SCS coordinates the consumer involvement into standardization and preparation of positions and suggestions, including the direct involvement into the technical standardization;
 - o To communicate with national, regional and local bodies and institutions and industry representatives, especially with SMEs, and with other public and private bodies, associations and the like, which are interested in standardization, with a view to foster a clear business environment which is easy on consumers interests;
 - o To provide educational, edifying, editorial, publishing and advisory activities in relation to particular standardization areas.
- During the development of the model (2009), the approach and procedure was consulted with the Czech Office for Standards, Metrology and Testing³, Czech Chamber of Commerce, consumer associations⁴ and with other potential partners, was presented in Consumer Advisory Committee and in the Quality Council of the Czech Republic under the Ministry of Industry and Trade. The model became one of the priorities of specialized section for quality in standardization within the National Quality Policy. All consulted subjects supported the approach taken.
- At the beginning of 2010 **the Steering Committee of the Cabinet** was set up; the committee is composed of representatives of consumer associations, the Czech Office for Standards, Metrology and Testing, Czech standardization society, Czech accreditation institute, Eurolab, Association of Accredited and Authorized Organizations (AAAO-observer). The main committee’s role is to discuss the priorities of the Cabinet and to discuss and consult some documents and positions as necessary.

³ During the meeting (26. 11 .2009) between Mr. Holek (President of the Office) and representatives of consumer associations full support to activities and role of the Cabinet was expressed.

⁴ In addition to a number of bilateral meetings with associations interested in participation on model creating was the model presented during the meeting of Consumer Advisory Committee 9.12. 2009.

- Communication, distribution of information and its collection etc. are key factors and conditions of consumer involvement and thus the Cabinet activities. The indicative list of SCS/Cabinet engagement in some working and advisory groups and platforms is as follows:
 - o ANEC General Assembly
 - o ANEC Steering Committee
 - o TC 243 ISO – Safety of Products
 - o TNK 137 for Child Articles
 - o Standardization committee (Czech Office for Standards, Metrology and Testing)
 - o Technical Committees for toys and construction products (Czech Office for Standards, Metrology and Testing)
 - o Working Group on General Product Safety (Ministry of Industry and Trade)
 - o Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (Ministry of Industry and Trade/ Czech Office for Standards, Metrology and Testing)
 - o Sub-committee 98/34 (Czech Office for Standards, Metrology and Testing)
 - o Accreditation Board (Czech Accreditation Institute)
 - o Working Group on Prevention of Children’s Injuries (Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic)
 - o Quality Council of the Czech Republic (Ministry of Industry and Trade)
 - o Section for Quality in consumer protection (Quality Council of the Czech Republic)
 - o Section for Quality in Standardization (...) – Quality Council of the Czech Republic
 - o ISO COPOLCO Working Group
 - o Coordination Group on Food Safety (Ministry of Agriculture)
 - o Working Group “Food and Consumer” technological platform for food
 - o National Coordination Board for implementation of SEPA (Czech Banking Association)
 - o etc..
- In 2010 the priority was given to products respecting vulnerable groups (children, elderly people, persons with limited mobility and orientation) in term of their safety and availability/usability for all. The important part of such activities was ensuring of cooperation at european level (ANEC) and coordination of consumer involvement into ISO COPOLCO activities and development of cooperation at european level.
- SCS, which could substantially finance the activities, in close cooperation with the Cabinet, which was able to ensure systematic expert work for most of the year, had a share in performing the individual activities and tasks. It is clear that the cooperation with many other partners at bilateral level and within the other platforms (see above the list) is used. At bilateral level it is necessary to highlight establishing links with the specific consumers groups (Czech National Disability Council, Czech Blind United, Czech Retirement Association, etc.).

Examples of particular outcomes and achievements in 2010

- Information on the Czech model of consumers involvement into standardization and its function and information on certain projects and outcomes in ISO Newsletters (2x), ANEC Newsletter (under preparation – publication foreseen early in 2011);
- Strengthening of regularly and systematic cooperation with ANEC;
- Extending of cooperation at bilateral level with the specific consumer groups and under the working groups and platforms (see above);
- Developing of the quality label for safe child playgrounds (Child playgrounds – Sports Field – Gym – VERIFIED PREMISES). Creating websites for safe child playgrounds (www.overenehriste.cz);
- Realization of international seminar on safety of child playgrounds and standards; editing specialized prints for founders and operators;
- Communication of information on websites www.top-normy.cz, and also with the support of National Quality Policy (NPK – promotion of Section for Quality in Standardization);
- Processing of documentation on proposal for solution and on the way to proceed (e.g. through the Quality Council of the Czech Republic) concerning
 - o health unexceptionable children shoes,
 - o child playgrounds;
- Activation and revitalization of some working groups and platforms immediately after the taking over of auspices (Section for Quality in consumer protection under the Quality Council of the Czech Republic, Working Group “Food and Consumer” technological platform for food);
- Special attention and capacity is drawn to food and consumer relation to food quality (editing of GMO relating publications, labelling of meat products, using of radiofrequency technologies for food identification and treatment of food by ionization);
- Commentating and discussions on tens of documents, proposals etc. (standards, mandates, reports) at european and national level. Most recently for example mandate on safety of window shutters and blinds, standards on toys and aquatic equipment, etc.;
- Presentation at the World Standards Day Conference 2010 in Prague focused on the development of accessibility standards – “Accessibility for All”;
- The Future of European Standardization – cooperation and consultation with Mr. Edvard Kožušník – Rapporteur of Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) in the matter of IMCO Report for EP Plenary Session.

Financial policy, perspective

- In 2010 the Cabinet managed to obtain financial resources also from provided services, in addition to grant resources of SCS (Cabinet annual turnover was approximately 800 000 CZK, after annual accounts 400 000 CZK will be transferred to risk fund);
- Therefore the Cabinet can between 2010 and 2011 pursue work to ensure its beneficial public activities, i.e. systematic involvement into the consultation process on documents, proposals etc. (standards, mandates, reports) at european and national level, distribution of information and its collection, educational activities, etc.

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- If the resources needed for realization of some specific projects (Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Czech Office for Standards, Metrology and Testing) cannot be found, the above mentioned activities will have been phased down over the year.
 - Stabilization of Cabinet activities and its role, including enhancing expert participation in the activities of Technical Committees under the Czech Office for Standards, Metrology and Testing and eventually in the ANEC Working Groups activities, remains the main objective.

The Czech Consumer Association and the Cabinet for Standardization wish to thank to all present and future partners. We believe in future fruitful cooperation.

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