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- We welcome the initiatives aimed at upgrading the Single Market to meet new challenges but note the focus of the Single Market Strategy on the supply side to make “business easier for business”. Without confident consumers, the demand for the products & services of business will not be optimised.
 - We welcome "modernisation" of the European Standardisation System (ESS). Consumers have gained from a Single Market that owes much to the New Approach and use of European standards to support legislation. The ESS needs to ensure future needs of consumers can be met, with those of business. It would gain from enabling the more effective representation of consumers (and other underrepresented stakeholders), while respecting a system built (mostly) on the national delegation principle.
 - Some sectors of European business now express preference for international (ISO/IEC) standards over European standards. However, the (European) societal voice is (even) weaker in ISO/IEC and the ESS needs to be ensure the appropriateness of international standards for the European political framework.
 - We welcome the wish to use European standards for services in order to build consumer trust. But the lack of an overarching European legal framework for the quality, safety & liability of services is critical. Without a harmonising framework, European standards will not be able to provide a level playing field as national regulations (where they exist) will take precedence, leading to legal uncertainty as well as producer and consumer detriment.
 - The convergence of technologies and digitalisation of society, business and public services blur the old divide between more general standardisation and ICT standardisation. Nevertheless, there are different legal & policy instruments and EC strategies. The risk is multiple discussion and incoherent approach.
 - We believe the updating of the Single Market should be the occasion to free the impasse in Council on the Market Surveillance Regulation. We see an opportunity missed.
 - Without the participation of underrepresented stakeholders in the writing of standards, products will not be as safe, as interoperable, as accessible or as sustainable as they should be. It is not the interests of business to ignore the needs of consumers, but our experience is that business focuses on meeting the needs of the “average consumer”, sometimes to the exclusion of those who are young, old or disabled. When European standards are used to support legislation or public policy objectives, they need to take into account the needs of all consumers and other weaker stakeholders. And that needs public funding.

Stephen RUSSELL

Lunch debate: Joint Initiative on European Standardization

hosted by Lara Comi MEP (EPP) and Catherine Stihler MEP (S&D), IMCO Vice-Chair

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