

ANEC/GA Open Session – 11 June 2009, Secretary-General's statement

Last year's meeting of the General Assembly adopted a new Strategy for ANEC, one covering the period 2008 to 2013. It gives me pleasure to report to this meeting on the progress made in realising the Strategy and to review what still has to be done.

Building partnerships is key to the Strategy. Whether it be with the Parliament, with societal representatives or the representatives of economic interests, ANEC must build alliances in order to achieve its mission of improving consumer protection and welfare. We have to recognise that we do not have the resources - either in terms of money or people - to go it alone. We literally cannot afford to be a lone voice.

Thanks to the European Commission and EFTA, we do have the funds to support over 200 volunteer experts in the technical committees and working groups of the European standards organisations and elsewhere (UNECE, W3C). We also have the funds to ensure our participation - as far as it is allowed - in the governance bodies of these organisations. And we have the funds to support a Secretariat team which leads our lobbying of the European Institutions. But we must not expect more.

DG SANCO has no more than 20M€ available to support consumer actions annually. That is more or less what it had available in 2003, in support of a European Union of 15 countries and not 27, and before co-funding of the European Consumer Centres became one of its strategic priorities. We cannot look to EFTA for greater financial support. Nor can we look to national consumer

organisations for membership fees. If there had been the possibility to support the participation of the consumer interest in standardisation back in 1995, ANEC would never have been created on a foundation of complete public funding. As it is, we have calculated that the contribution of our volunteer experts in 2007 was no less than 260.000€, adding almost 20% in value to our public funding that year of 1,4M€.

We know that some companies fund NGOs through their own social responsibility initiatives. But here are three problems. The first is that many NGOs are chasing this cash; the second is that this little oasis in the desert is becoming ever smaller as we all continue to feel the heat of economic recession; and the third - and most difficult - is that these companies do not want to know ANEC. They see consumer participation in the setting of European laws and development of semi-legal European standards as something that should continue to be ensured by the European public authorities.

In fact, we believe that the only field in which ANEC can abandon its dependence on public funding is in the field of Research & Testing. Here we trust we can pursue at least some ventures with other partners in establishing the scientific evidence needed to support the consumer position in the standards development organisations. This is a task we intend to tackle in the next 12 months. We have already decided to expand the use of our Research & Testing budget to address matters of policy where research will help determine the direction of proposals in the consumer interest. Such a study is helping us to define a new ANEC policy on the use of third-party certification in assuring consumer protection. With this in mind, it is a pleasure to welcome here the Chair of the CEN Certification Board, Enda McDonnell.

Why does all this matter? Well, some big news last year was the adoption of the New Legislative Framework for products (alias the revision of the New Approach; alias the Internal Market Package). The NLF (at is also known) will extend the principles of the New Approach to almost all product areas from January 2010. It will not be an overnight change; it will be something gradual. But a certain consequence of the NLF is that more and more European product legislation will rely on supporting European standards to provide the easiest means of achieving compliance with the law.

Hence there will be even greater demands on ANEC to be effective in promoting and defending the consumer interest, not only in the development of European standards but also in the shaping of legislation.

That is why ANEC needs partners. It is why in April of this year, ANEC developed a position with ORGALIME - the European engineering industries association - calling for the development of a European framework for market surveillance activities.

One long-standing Commission official admitted he could not imagine two stranger bed-fellows than ANEC and ORGALIME. Indeed, we have not been traditional allies and - with respect to Adrian Harris who is here this afternoon - it is not so likely that we will achieve a common view on so many topics (CE Marking and energy efficiency labelling are two other issues on which we have agreed to disagree).

But we recognise that ORGALIME - an association which represents industries that account for 27% of total manufacturing output in the EU with a value of almost two billion Euros - has far greater clout in the corridors of Brussels and

Strasbourg than little old ANEC. For its part, I like to think ORGALIME welcomes its partnership with an organisation that can bring the moral certitude of over 500 million consumers to its cause, although I am sure Adrian will talk a little about their motivation later.

And partnership is why we have signed agreements over the past 12 months with the European Disability Forum (EDF) and ECOS, the European Environmental Citizens Organisation for Standardisation, represented here today by Carlotta Besozzi and Ralf Lottes among others. A further agreement with the European Child Safety Alliance will soon follow. And we will formalise our long-standing - and sometimes intimate - relationship with BEUC too in the coming weeks. To this we must add the agreement we have with Consumers International to defend the consumer interest in ISO, IEC and UNECE.

Of course, the New Legislative Framework will place new demands on the European Standardisation System. We know CEN and CENELEC in particular are taking steps to address both the convergence of technologies and a common political challenge.

Gaston Michaud, the CEN Secretary-General but here today as Secretary to the Joint Presidents' Group of CEN, CENELEC and ETSI, will tell us more about that.

But although the ANEC Strategy sees the three European Standards Organisations as remaining our principal partners in the development of standards in the consumer interest, we should not be closed to other paths of collaboration. Not all European standards meet the consumer need as well as they should, despite the best efforts of ANEC. For example, the European standard - EN 131 - sets the

lowest requirements of all standards for the safety of ladders. And it remains our very great regret that the European partners of both CEN and CENELEC do not have the same status in the organisations as the national delegations, despite the reforms of the past years.

As the recently-published European Commission study on Access to Standardisation underlined, with very few exceptions (Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom among them), consumers involved at the national level in standardisation have both a low commitment to the process and insufficient knowledge. And, as the report goes on to state, consumer interests are “only marginally represented in many countries”. Of course, none of this comes as a surprise to ANEC as they are reasons behind the creation of the association back in the mid-nineties.

Hence it is difficult for us to accept that the consumer voice in CEN and CENELEC is represented through national delegations. And so we urge CEN and CENELEC in their continued reform to establish a truly effective platform of European interests alongside the traditional platform of national delegations. We make no secret of this wish having proposed it in the Access Study and the EXPRESS group, established by the Commission to consider the role and structure of European standardisation in the year 2020 and beyond. Of course we are also concerned about the weakness of the consumer voice in ETSI, but in all frankness, it is on the European standards of CEN and CENELEC that the success of the New Legislative Framework will depend.

Bearing in mind the globalisation of markets - and the deepening inter-relationships between ISO and CEN on the one hand and IEC and CENELEC on the other - it is also important that ANEC influences the development of the International standards destined to become European standards. In this, we will enhance our collaboration with Consumers International and seek to establish a political relationship with IEC. We hope in this latter task that IEC can be convinced that consumers do have a role to play in setting its standardisation strategy and not only the industry representatives who make up its recently-established Market Strategy Board.

The ANEC Strategy seeks to strengthen partnerships with the newer members of the European Union and in those countries less well-represented in our Working Groups. This year, we have held two very successful outreach events: the first in Helsinki and the second in Prague. We look to increase the number of such events in the coming years. We also seek to build relationships with consumer organisations in the future accession countries and to offer them a head-start in their memberships of the Union.

Despite the merits of all the organisations I have mentioned, they are not our most important partners, nor can they be. Our most important partners are without doubt our members at the national level and the volunteers who participate in our Working Groups and in the technical bodies of the standards development organisations. It is essential we strengthen the links between Brussels and the 30 countries of the ANEC membership. We intend to do so by identifying membership care as a key task in the Secretariat and by introducing an up-to-date and sustainable training programme, one based on the new distance-learning modules introduced by ISO and to which ANEC made a notable contribution.



It is all about partnership. Which is why we have invited representatives of some of our key stakeholders here this afternoon to learn about their expectations of ANEC. Only by listening can we learn. And only through learning can we grow.