



## Faces of Standardization

INTERVIEW WITH

### JEAN-LUC DETREZ

Standardization expert and Secretary of CLC/TC 100X

'Faces of standardization' is a series of monthly interviews to celebrate the 60th anniversary of CEN and CENELEC's collaboration. The objective is to give an overview of European standardization's successes through the people who made it possible.

This month's interview is with **Jean-Luc DETREZ**, standardization expert and Secretary of CLC/TC 100X 'Audio, video and multimedia systems and equipment and related sub-systems'.

#### 1. Please, present yourself. To what extent are you involved in standardization?

I graduated in 1978 as civil engineer, specialising in electronics and computer science. Then I spent 6 years (interrupted by my military service at the Royal Military School) as teaching assistant at the Brussels University (Electrical engineering department), where my main research topics were Computer-Based Education and Digital protection of power systems - this one in cooperation with Virginia Tech (VA) and Cornell University (NY), where I spent some time. During all those years I did not hear about standardization...

At the end of my 6-year term as a teaching assistant, I joined the International Telecommunication Research Centre (ITRC) of Wang Labs, at that time the leader in word processing and office automation, as certification engineer.

In this position, my first standardization meeting was within Ecma TC12. At that time, Ecma, the European Computer Manufacturers Association, was proactive in standard development and provided the bases for CISPR 22 and IEC 950, two key standards for IT products. The concept of Hazard Based Safety Design, developed in EN/IEC 62368-1, also originated in Ecma TC12.

After Wang ITRC, I joined Dialogic Telecom Europe, a subsidiary and the European headquarter of Dialogic Corporation (NJ), which was acquired in 1999 by Intel Corporation. From 1991 to 2006, I was involved in both product development and standardization with, over the years, an increasing focus on standardization. In 2006, after Intel decided to sell Dialogic, I remained with Intel, as part

of the Corporate Product Regulation and Standards, and spent nearly 100% of my time on standards at the Belgian, European and International levels.

I retired from Intel at the end of 2016, but I am still providing consultancy services in the field of standardization to a few companies.

Throughout my career, I have been (and still am) active in standardization in many areas, such as EMC/EMF, Safety, Ecodesign in general and of IT, and alarm systems, as Secretary, Chairman, Convenor or Member of a variety of TCs at the Belgian, European and International levels.

#### 2. What are, according to you, the benefits of European standardization?

European standards are beneficial when they prevent countries from developing national standards incompatible with each other. They are also beneficial when they help promoting solutions, technologies, and requirements that are clearly superior to what the rest of the world can offer.

Nevertheless, the main and most visible benefit of European standardization is the concept of "harmonised standards", which is key to the effective working of the European Single Market. The idea of linking each Directive or Regulation to a set of harmonised standards giving presumption of conformity to its essential requirements constituted a major step in the provision of customers with compliant products, while minimising the burden on manufacturers. For many years, it has been a model for the world.

At the moment, however, this successful model is endangered by administrative delays and obstacles, before and after standard development:

- Long delays between the issuance of a new Directive or Regulation and related Standardization Request prevent standards bodies from delivering standards on time for the moment a Directive or Regulation becomes mandatory
- Difficulties and delays in the citation of candidate hENs create legal uncertainties; moreover, when the hENs is based on an International standard, such delays increase the gap between European and International standardization, which is especially detrimental for fast evolving technologies.

### 3. Which are the main evolutions and milestones that you saw happen in the European Standardization System over the years?

During my 11 years spent at the University, I had never heard about standardization. When I joined Wang ITRC, IT products were largely proprietary, and were tested and certified against local PTT agencies specifications, with many national deviations and additional requirements. The creation of ETSI helped create some harmonisation in European telephone network requirements, but only for new services (e.g. ISDN).

This changed when the European Commission, through the EMC and Low Voltage Directives, introduced two major innovations:

- Single market approach
  - Presumption of conformity based on harmonised standards
- Enforcement of those two Directives changed the view of the most reluctant manufacturers on European and International standardization. In particular, the introduction of harmonised standards, as discussed in the answer above, was a fundamental moment in the development of the European Standardization System as it is today.

### 4. How do you believe standardization will evolve in the next 60 years?

60 years is very long for something which is just a bit more than 100 years old!

Based on what I could observe during the last 10 years, I can only say that it seems more and more difficult for European standardization to play a leading role in front of US and Asia. This is partly a result of the global market and the economic trends to push most manufacturing industries to the Far East. Such a trend may be reversed as a result of the sanitary crisis, which highlighted even more Europe's dependency upon foreign manufacturing and supplying capabilities.

But the threat is not only external. Several NGOs and the European Commission itself are undermining standardization, claiming it is for the sole benefit of industry, and looking suspiciously at standards as ways to work around legislation, rather than as ways to comply with it. Experts should be very concerned about such a trend and realise there is no future without restoring trust between all players.

### 5. Could you please tell us an anecdote from your career in standardization that you believe is indicative?

My first standardization meeting was within Ecma TC12 in the mid-80s. At that time, Ecma was proactive in standard development, and – as it is still the case – experts in Ecma's TCs were very involved in other committees too, so most of the attendees presented themselves as chairman, secretary, convenor, editor, rapporteur of something else. I was impressed, but I came back home with the feeling that I did not want to finish like those "old men" ... and now I am one of them.

This kind of story is less likely to happen these days, except for some traditional areas like EMC or safety. The emergence of new standardization areas (environment, alternative mobility, and so on) has brought younger experts into standardization, which is a very good thing.

### 6. What advice would you like to share with new generations interested in standardization?

New generations of engineers should be aware of standardization as early as possible, ideally during their studies. Very few universities or high school professors have such awareness themselves, but fortunately, this is now changing.

It is important that standardization experts are also deeply involved in development and manufacturing; when it is not possible (for example in large companies), there should be a strong link between the people who develop the standards and the ones who will have to apply them in the future.

Furthermore, one should avoid situations (which is still unfortunately too frequent) where future users of the standard claim they do not have time to read and review a draft, only to have them, a few years later, claim that such a standard should have never been approved...