Practical Proposals for European ICT Standardisation

Bitkom position accompanying the public consultation for the revision of the Standardisation Regulation (EU) 1025/2012

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At a glance

Revision of Standardisation Regulation (EU) 1025/2012

Initial position

The Standardisation Regulation enables effective cooperation between industry and policymakers to deliver high-quality harmonised standards within the European Standardisation System (ESS). Recent lawsuits and the push to standardise emerging digital technologies create issues in implementing the Regulation.

Bitkom rating

The ESS has proven a well-established and effective system that delivers high-quality standards. Improvements should be driven by industry, with only a few targeted legislative adjustments made by the Commission. This approach preserves stability while ensuring the ESS runs smoothly and adapts to the needs of the digital sector.

The most important takeaway

Our suggestions are addressed to the Commission and to the standardisation bodies:

- **Open source and global consortia can be integrated into the current system**

  Standards from global consortia should enter the ESS after consensus-based validation (e.g. a European PAS), and processes for involving the open-source community must be simplified. We reject open calls, which would scatter resources and weaken coordination.

- **Industry-driven alternatives to common specifications**

  Granting presumption of conformity to alternative deliverables from standardisation bodies enables the industry to develop interim solutions quickly until harmonised standards are available.

- **Leverage free access for easy access**

  Once a system exists that offers free access to legally relevant parts of harmonised standards without undermining the ESOs' financial stability, standards should be accessible within a few clicks, and draft standards should be published early to gather standard user feedback.

- **A Joint IT Standardisation Hub between CEN/CENELEC and ETSI**

  Reduce fragmentation in digital standardisation through a single hub that brings together all horizontal IT work and operates with open, direct and transparent processes welcoming to IT and open-source experts. The IT hub should not be understood as a fourth ESO, but as a coordination platform for existing activities within the ESOs.

Practical Proposals for European ICT Standardisation

The European Standardisation System (ESS), together with the New Legislative Framework (NLF), has proven effective and internationally recognised. Only targeted adjustments are needed to address implementation challenges. Many issues raised in the consultation are non-legislative and should be resolved through coordination and cooperative partnership, not new laws. We therefore urge the Commission to **limit changes to Regulation (EU) No 1025/2012 and address other topics through non-regulatory means**, ensuring flexibility, clarity, and long-term efficiency.

1. Speed and Responsiveness

We welcome the Commission's effort to support a fast and flexible standardisation system. At the same time, we emphasise that the existing Public-Private-Partnership model is well-established, delivers high-quality standards, and is a key pillar of Europe's global competitiveness. Any changes aimed at addressing implementation challenges should therefore reinforce, not undermine, these strengths.

Speed

Scope of the proposal: Outside the 1025 (non-legislative).

Addresses: The EU-Commission.

Bitkom is convinced that significant improvements in speed can be achieved within the current system. We recommend:

- Develop European standards in alignment with international standards to efficiently build on existing work.

- Accelerate the Commission's assessment and listing process, reducing the time between publication of an EN and its citation.

- Involve the ESOs early in the legislative process. Standardisation requests (SReqs) should be developed in parallel with the legal acts and in consultation with the ESOs, to enable them to prepare for the upcoming standardisation work.

Additionally, **involve the Commission early in the standards development process**:

1. As an observer, the unit of the Commission responsible for the regulation can give timely and clear feedback on the suitability of the standard to fulfil the SReq. This will avoid lengthy assessment of the final standards.

2. The Commission's institutions, such as JRC and ENISA, should have their own technical experts working directly in standardisation organisations alongside industry, drafting contributions and negotiating outcomes. Their work should focus on areas of public interest, such as security and resilience. This practice is already established at national level, e.g. the German government institutions BSI and Bundesnetzagentur participating in crucial standardisation work. Similarly, the Commission should build up stronger in-house expertise instead of outsourcing tasks to consultants, by involving standardisation experts at the JRC or at ENISA in SReqs, assessment and standards development.
Instead of the Commission's experts writing common specifications, their participation in standardisation will increase the speed to develops standards in areas of public interest will keep the spirit of public private partnership. It will guarantee that these standards are done in a consensual way involving the industry.

Responsiveness

The following proposals are complementary and should not be considered mutually exclusive.

Proposal 1: Use non-formal standards after consensus-based legitimisation for faster standard development

Scope of the proposal: Outside the 1025 (non-legislative).

Addresses: The EU-Commission and European Standardisation Bodies.

Relevant standards from global SDOs (fora and consortia) should be integrated into the ESS, as they provide state-of-the-art high-quality references, especially in IT. However, instead of being listed by the commission directly, the standards should pass i) the scrutiny of technical experts in established and experienced standardisation committees and ii) be legitimised via a broad consensus provided by the ESS. We see two ways of achieving this integration:

1. The Commission continuing the good practice of allowing **direct referencing** of non-formal standards in harmonised ENs in justified cases, such as under the CRA.

2. A European **Publicly Available Specification (PAS)-Submission process** could integrate non-formal standards into the formal system. Consequently, the Commission should allow the European Standardisation Organisations (ESOs) to **respond to standardisation request directly with PAS-submitted standards**, thus utilising these specifications with consensus-driven legitimisation.

Proposal 2: Grant presumption of conformity for alternative types of standardisation deliverables from the ESOs as interim solution instead of common specifications

Scope of the proposal: Inside the 1025 (legislative).

Addresses: The EU-Commission.

Bitkom opposes the development of common specifications as a solution until harmonised standards are available, as these risk fragmenting expert resources and will be published with delay. Common specification should be considered the last option under clear and restricted prerequisites. Instead, alternative deliverables, e.g. developed by the ESOs, should grant presumption of conformity during periods when no harmonised standards are yet available. As an interim solution, this is acceptable even without broad consensus achieved through the National Vote and Public Enquiry procedures.

The specific form of the deliverable (Technical Specifications, CEN/CENELEC Workshop Agreements or European Agile Specifications) is secondary, provided that three fundamental principles are respected:

- **Open and ideally direct participation**: all interested stakeholders must be able to contribute to the development process;

- **International alignment**: ESOs and experts should make every effort to ensure coherence with international standards;

- **Continuity**: the deliverable should either be further developed into a harmonised standard or withdrawn once such a standard becomes available.

Proposal 3: Name already recognized standards as orientation to bridge time until listing

Scope of the proposal: Outside the 1025 (non-legislative).

Addresses: The EU-Commission.

In cases where harmonised standards are not yet available when new legislation enters into force, companies and market surveillance bodies require clear and practical guidance. If neither harmonised standards nor alternatives by the ESOs as in Proposal 2 are available, we propose that the European Commission publish a list of relevant and already recognised consensus standards. By publishing these e.g. in the C-series of the Official Journal, instead of the L-series, they do not take on legal character and would not grant presumption of conformity. Instead, the list would serve as a voluntary reference for the state-of-the-art, supporting companies and conformity assessment bodies in applying consistent, high-quality practices until harmonised standards (or alternatives) become available. The formal harmonisation processes of these standards can be coordinated in parallel. This practice has already been employed by ENISA for the CRA in the «Cyber Resilience Act Requirements Standards Mapping» and has provided valuable reassurance to industry.

Rejection: DON'T do Open Calls and «Shopping for Standards"

Scope of the rejection: Inside the 1025 (legislative).

Addresses: The EU-Commission.

Opening the ESS by addressing SReqs to non-ESOs or through open call procedures would create significant negative side effects:

- Misallocation of Commission resources, as substantial effort would be required to design open call criteria, review applications, and monitor compliance.

- Higher costs for industry, due to additional membership fees and the need to coordinate experts across multiple institutions.

- Reduction of real consensus by representation, since fewer relevant stakeholders will participate, especially early in the drafting process, due to additional membership costs, and the difficulty of keeping track of where relevant work occurs.

- Loss of ESS-specific expertise, particularly regarding key processes such as the drafting of Annex Z.

We therefore strongly oppose these proposals.

In Section 5, we propose the creation of a Joint IT Standardisation Hub between CEN/CENELEC and ETSI, which is not a fourth ESO, but a coordination group and platform to improve efficiency and increase the speed of IT standard development in the EU single market. This proposal, as well as the establishment of a European PAS process, would enable closer collaboration with standardisation organisations and leverage on available core competencies and expertise in such organisations while preserving the highest level of transparency and a focal point in Europe for this work.

2. Inclusiveness

The Standardisation Regulation has been highly effective in ensuring balanced stakeholder representation. Today, industry, researchers, and organisations representing consumers and civil society are well integrated into standardisation work wherever their expertise is relevant. Further efforts to strengthen inclusiveness should therefore focus on groups that remain underrepresented: SMEs and, in the IT sector in particular, open-source communities.

Goal 1: Improve inclusion of open-source experts and standardisation fora

Scope: Outside the 1025 (non-legislative).

Addresses: The EU-Commission and European Standardisation Bodies.

Open-source communities provide essential technical expertise. To ensure their balanced participation, we encourage the Commission to continue naming them as a distinct stakeholder group in standardisation requests, such as under the CRA.

Additionally, the ESOs should simplify collaboration mechanisms, such as liaison procedures, to improve coordination with relevant fora and consortia.

Goal 2: Lower barriers to participation for SMEs and newcomers

Scope: Outside the 1025 (non-legislative).

Addresses: The European Standardisation Bodies.

The biggest barrier for SMEs participation in standardisation work is not a lack of financial compensations, but the limited time of their experts. To increase participation of small businesses, all parts of standardisation need to be designed efficiently:

1. **Before – Thorough information:** A significant hurdle is the complexity of the standardisation system to outsiders. ESOs could offer clear information on how they operate. They should also provide regularly updated information on the SReqs under development including the relevant standards and expected timelines. This would significantly improve companies' ability to identify and join relevant work.

2. **Entry – Unbureaucratic Joining:** ESOs should enable fast and fully digital applications for membership. The bureaucratic processes should be simple, such as allowing lump-sum payments for membership instead of individual invoices for participating experts.

3. **Participation – Asynchronous work culture.** The ESOs should reduce reliance on full-day or in-person meetings and establish a text-based work culture. This would make participation more accessible for SMEs, organisations with limited resources, and individuals facing additional hurdles, such as limited spoken English proficiency or physical constraints.

Goal 3: Improve legitimacy and accountability through transparency

Scope: Outside the 1025 (non-legislative).

Addresses: The EU-Commission and European Standardisation Bodies.

Transparency of participating actors is an essential tool to build trust among political stakeholders and standard users in the legitimacy of the agreed consensus. This requires action on both sides:

- The ESOs should **make companies involved in standardisation public on working group level**. This allows companies to identify gaps in the representation of their sectors in certain standardisation work and encourages participation.

- The Commission should follow non-discriminatory guidelines and allow many stakeholders to participate. IT, more so than other industries, is internationally oriented and needs expertise from outside the EU, such as UK. Excluding companies and ESO members from standardisation work should be strictly exceptional and under a **clear set of criteria like security issues or European sovereignty in sensitive technology areas. Any deviation from the applicable rules should be communicated**

transparently and justified latest at the same time as SREq is submitted in discussion with the ESOs.

Rejection: DON'T introduce an obligatory minimum share of specific stakeholders and strengthen representatives instead.

Scope: Outside the 1025 (non-legislative).

Addresses: The EU-Commission.

Bitkom observes that societal stakeholders are already well represented where their contributions are relevant. The more pressing challenge is a shortage of technical experts, sometimes even within large companies. ESOs will not be able to fill every committee with experts directly from all stakeholder groups (e.g., SMEs), and enforcing quotas would slow down standardisation unnecessarily.

Instead, the Annex III organisations representing SMEs should be further strengthened to compensate for the fact that SMEs cannot always participate directly. Bitkom notes that these organisations are not currently present in all technical committees relevant to our smaller members. They require additional technical expertise and should place a stronger emphasis on the practical implementability of standards for SMEs.

3. Access to Standards

In addition to fulfilling the European Court of Justice's judgement, if implemented carefully, the European Standardisation System can leverage free access to legally relevant content of harmonised European standards to their advantage.

Step 1: Increase usability through short and modular standards.

Scope of the step: Outside the 1025 (non-legislative).

Addresses: The European Standardisation Bodies.

Harmonised European standards should be short, modular, and limited to what is necessary to meet essential requirements. This approach is more effective and less confusing than splitting standards into «legally relevant" and «non-relevant" parts while achieving the same effect.

Additionally, Bitkom is concerned that standards increasingly exceed the requirements set out in legislation. For example, while the CRA stipulates in Annex I, Part II (1) that a software bill of materials should cover at the very least the top-level dependencies of a product, the standard requires the effort to fully construct all dependencies. This type of industry-driven «gold-plating" creates unnecessary burdens and makes implementtation significantly more difficult for SMEs with limited resources.

Step 2: Legally relevant content of harmonised European standards should be freely accessible.

Scope of the step: Inside the 1025 (legislative).

Addresses: The EU-Commission and European Standardisation Bodies.

Harmonised standards should be freely accessible. The Commission should endorse efforts at ISO and IEC, as well as at national institutes to modernise their business models and support the search for structures of financing this change without endangering the financial security of the standardisation bodies. A funding mechanism to remunerate ISO and IEC for the use of international standards should be carried by all beneficiaries, including the Commission and the member states, and could be designed like the universal service fund in telecommunications. Free access to harmonised standards does not change the ownership of the IP right of the standardisation bodies. In the long run, the ESOs and NSO should modernise their business models to make all standards freely available.

Step 3: Leverage free access to provide easy access.

Scope of the step: Outside the 1025 (non-legislative).

Addresses: The European Standardisation Bodies.

Easy access will increase practical use of harmonised standards. It additionally allows more public scrutiny through easier participation, which will raise the quality of standards in the long run.

- **Harmonised European standards should be accessible in a few clicks.** Engineers should be able to identify and consult relevant standards directly in their daily work environment, without complex purchasing or research processes. CEN and CENELEC's current read-only platform lacks this usability by missing e.g. a search function.

- **ESOs should make draft documents openly accessible from the beginning.** Early insight enables standard users to prepare, contribute more effectively, and provide higher-quality feedback during public consultations.

4. EU's role in global standard-setting

Scope of the proposals: Outside the 1025 (legislative and non-legislative).

Addresses: The EU-Commission.

Bitkom recognises the growing importance of global standardisation amid shifting geoeconomic and technological landscapes. However, through the unique benefits of the Vienna and Frankfurt agreements, European nations still play a strong role internationally – for example, Germany holds 54 of 228 chair positions at IEC. We therefore recommend:

- **Avoid reversing cause and effect**: International influence follows industrial strength and expertise. Rather than mandating more European participation, the EU should address root causes — such as regulatory burdens and barriers to innovation — that weaken Europe's industrial and technological leadership in the first place.

- **Tackle strategic questions in strategic bodies such as the HLF**: The Commission should not address international representation within the Standardisation Regulation, which defines processes and sets the legal framework. Strategic questions on Europe's global role should instead be tackled through strengthened activities under the High-Level Forum on Standardisation (HLF).

- **Drive standardisation directly**: EU national members directly support their industries through governmental or semi-governmental institutions that actively contribute to technical standards. Institutions such as the BSI or Bundesnetzagentur participate in standards like on the CRA at JTC 13 on equal footing with private companies. The European Commission's institutions, such as JRC and ENISA, should likewise deploy its own experts to drive standardisation work internationally, especially in areas of public interest.

5. Two Birds, One Nest: A Joint IT Standardisation Hub of CEN/CENELEC and ETSI

Scope of the proposals: Outside the 1025 (non-legislative).

Addresses: The European Standardisation Bodies.

Focusing and centralising standardisation efforts is an efficient use of resources for businesses: It reduces financial overhead by avoiding duplication of institutional structures and makes optimal use of limited expert capacity. However, the current standardisation practices in the digital sector for standardisation in support of EU regulation and EU policy objectives do not resemble this ideal scenario. Instead, and due to the horizontal nature of digital technologies, standards for digital technologies are developed at the European Standardisation Organisations, CEN, CENELEC, and ETSI, many times with some level of competition between them. There is no clear place for the IT sector and there is a need for processes which accommodate better the way of working in IT standardisation, including the need to consider open source software development.

In its consultation, the European Commission suggests several options to better adapt the system to the needs of the digital sector – such as open calls, additional ESOs, or fast-track procedures for priority standards. Instead of these legislative-driven changes, Bitkom proposes an **industry-driven, structural solution: the creation of a *Joint IT Standardisation Hub* operated by CEN, CENELEC, and ETSI** modelled on the international cooperation between ISO and IEC in ISO-IEC JTC 1. This should not be understood as a new ESO, which would require unnecessary resources, but as a collaboration platform between the existing ESOs to pool expertise and coordinate work.

Key elements of the proposal:

- **A single hub for all horizontal IT standardisation projects:** Pool all expertise in one place, avoiding competing initiatives and simplifying coordination. Activities comparable to those under ISO/IEC JTC 1 should be brought together in this European equivalent, such that over time, horizontal work on IT should be unified within the hub. Sector-specific vertical work, however, should remain within the relevant sectoral bodies, e.g. CEN and ETSI, respectively, where domain experts develop them.

- **Processes tailored to the IT sector – open, direct, and transparent:** Enable direct participation of all interested parties within the framework of the European standardisation system and transparency of drafting processes to facilitate cooperation with open-source communities and global SDOs (fora/consortia like OASIS, W3C, Ecma, etc.).

- **Freely available IT-standards:** Make IT-standards freely and easily available to ensure smooth integration into open-source and industrial IT-projects, and to adapt to the habits and expectations of the IT world. Use this broad availability to gather more expertise and input by standard users, essential for rapidly evolving technologies.

- **Building on existing structures and expertise:** Use the institutional and financial frameworks of CEN/CENELEC and ETSI, allowing established experts to collaborate without joining new entities, and leverage the ESOs' existing organisational experience to establish the joint hub efficiently.

- **Strong embedding into international and national standardisation structures**: Preserve coordination with ISO/IEC JTC 1 and with national standardisation bodies. Build strong, unbureaucratic modes of cooperation with global IT fora and consortia.

This *Joint IT Standardisation Hub* would combine speed, responsiveness, and long-term stability. Bitkom will continue to refine the proposal and would be pleased to provide further input upon request.

Bitkom represents more than 2,300 companies from the digital economy. They generate an annual turnover of 200 billion euros in Germany and employ more than 2 million people. Among the members are 1,000 small and medium-sized businesses, over 500 start-ups and almost all global players. These companies provide services in software, IT, telecommunications or the internet, produce hardware and consumer electronics, work in digital media, create content, operate platforms or are in other ways affiliated with the digital economy. 82 percent of the members' headquarters are in Germany, 8 percent in the rest of the EU and 7 percent in the US. 3 percent are from other regions of the world. Bitkom promotes and drives the digital transformation of the German economy and advocates for citizens to participate in and benefit from digitalisation. At the heart of Bitkom's concerns are ensuring a strong European digital policy and a fully integrated digital single market, as well as making Germany a key driver of digital change in Europe and the world.

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