Standards as a tool aiding the decision processes in market economy

A. Tabor, H. Pawlowska
Cracow University of Technology, Centre of Quality and Quality Organisation Systems, Cracow, Poland

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Abstract

The long–lasting process of adaptation of the Polish standardisation system to the conditions of the European Community has not been completed yet. Its logical consequence is the need to shape the mentality of the entrepreneurs and make them understand the importance of standards and their value in a competitive market. It is the intention of the authors of this study to disclose the main aspects of standardisation at both Polish and European level, explain the model of standardisation system currently functioning in Poland, and against this background highlight the priorities in the standardisation policy adopted by the European Union, especially as regards some specific subjects, including – among others – problems related with environmental protection and occupational safety. In standardisation system, the problems of occupational safety and environmental protection are dealt with by a large group of standards harmonised with the New Approach Directive, which touches on the safety–related issues. Our knowledge of standards speaking the language of business is the challenge of modern times that should not be rejected, as in many cases it determines our competitiveness in the common market. The synthetic knowledge comprised in standards creates conditions for good decisions supporting the process of company development, strengthening its position in the European market, and creating the image of a successful modern enterprise ready to start cooperation with other enterprises, making – moreover – an important contribution to the economic management of products manufactured by various technological processes.

Keywords: standardization, european standardization, national standardization, main aspects of standardisation

1. Introduction

It often happens nowadays that the basic arguments speaking in favour of a voluntary standardisation system proposed by the Polish Committee for Standardisation do not find understanding among the engineers, designers, and/or legislators, who are still convinced that Polish Standards (PN) continue being obligatory, although provisions of the act of standardisation clearly declare the voluntary application of Polish standards by both parties concerned, i.e. by the Polish Committee for Standardisation and all the economic entities who manufacture products and offer services.

The fact that since several years the application of standards has been made an act of good will rather than an obligation still finds heaps of obstacles on its way to being accepted and approved. Even the change of generations taking place nowadays has not managed to change the mentality in an approach to the standardisation process, perhaps on account of the long, because over 30 years lasting, system of a planned economy in which Polish Standards were an obligatory tool in control of product quality, safe use of products and equipment, protection of environment, product responsibility, etc. However, in 1985, the legal matters were separated from the standardisation, the law remained with the lawmakers, while development of standards
became the domain of the European work groups and standardisation committees.

2. Arguments speaking in favour of standards

The legal act currently in force determining the voluntary application of Polish standards, which represent the worldwide, the regional and the domestic level of technical knowledge in a given sector of industry, does by no means signify that standards can be neglected, since they generally constitute:

– an important source from which one can acquire numerous pieces of synthetic information dictated by experts’ experience,

– a model to follow in production and/or services,

– a reference pattern to compare certain operations,

– a good background for the dissemination of technical information and achievements,

– a firm platform for manufacturer/customer contacts,

– a helpful tool in the management processes and supervising activities,

– an important aid in the elimination of technical barriers in trade, and an effective tool in the commodity exchange,

– a warranty of user safety, and a tool to promote quality and reliability,

– a basic tool in introducing the quality management systems and environmental management, as well as the occupational safety and hygiene regulations, all these supported by relevant information,

– a basis for certification,

– a very important element of workers’ education.

One of the most important challenges the modern times are facing is raising in the society the consciousness of the need for standardisation, because standards are this very factor that promotes innovativeness and supports the development of economy. Active participation in the process of creation of a standard brings considerable advantages, among others, due to the fact that as early as at the stage of the elaboration of a draft standard we can have an easy access to the indispensable information on changes anticipated to take place in production, and – more important even – we can have it earlier than our competitors.

The strategic priority of standards in Europe was recognised long ago, when the European Union was striving to achieve the process of technical integration and improved market effectiveness, mainly through the impact of EN standards on business and economy.

3. Main aspects of European standardisation

There are three main European organisations currently functioning in the European Union that are responsible for the standardisation-related activities and hold the Technical Committees which elaborate European Standards (EN) within a specific thematic area. The said organisations are:

European Committee for Standarisation

European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardisation

European Telecommunications Standards Institute

The European Standard is an outcome of the standardisation process carried out within and by the European standardisation structures, and as such it should be treated as a compendium of knowledge on a population of the well–checked and safe solutions obtained through professional activities and research studies. Within the time of 6 months after its approval, every EN must be introduced without any alterations to the set of standards used by a member body, and this act must be accompanied by a withdrawal of national standards conflicting with the EN standard being introduced. Owing to this, a common system of the European solutions is created. It should also be emphasized that the duty of introducing European Standards to the set of national standards does not mean that it is mandatory to use them later on.

Everyone interested in the subject of standardisation can participate in the process of the creation of a standard, expressing one’s opinions and sharing viewpoints in a questionnaire prepared for each draft standard and circulated among the member bodies. All activities related with the elaboration of a standard are based on the principle of consensus: experts are working until this consensus is achieved. In Western Europe, the representatives of industry make nearly 90% of the Technical Committee personal constitution; consumer organisations also have a majority.

The development of EN standards is never directly related with an obligation to use them in practice, similarly as a translation of the standard into the language of a member body of the European Union and introducing it into a set of national standards does not automatically mean the need for its immediate use. The truth is, however, that the practical application of EN standards brings a number of undeniable advantages, to mention as an example easier access to the market, mainly due to the right to use the CE marking, i.e. the mark of consistency with the essential requirements of the EU Directive (satisfying the requirements of the EN standard related with the Directive automatically presumes that the requirements of this Directive are satisfied, too).

Of particular importance are the European standards harmonised with the New Approach Directives (dealing mainly with the problems of safety, health and property), elaborated under a mandate of the European Commission by CEN/CENELEC/ETSI. Their contents are consistent with the
requirements approved by EC and satisfy the CEN/CENELEC/ETSI regulations. After approval, these standards are submitted as official documents to the Commission. Harmonised standards can be used only after their titles and numbers have been cited in the Official Journal of the European Communities under that Directive and have been implemented as a national standard in at least one Member State. In spite of a voluntary character of the standards harmonised with the New Approach Directives (generally considered standards supporting these directives), they are recommended for use, if available, as the easiest, most reliable and cheapest means of demonstrating product consistency with the essential requirements.

Within the area of foundry industry, especially in the field of foundry machines and equipment, a group of standards has been elaborated which support the machinery directive. The provisions of these standards define the requirements for the manufacturers of machines and equipment as regards the foreseeable significant hazards related with the design, construction, installation, commissioning, operation, maintenance, and decommissioning. The standards describe typical hazardous situations and indicate the safety means.

4. Main aspects of national standardisation

Polish Committee for Standardisation, supported in its activities by the Standardisation Board – an opinion–forming and advisory body, is responsible for the standardisation activities in Poland, acts as Poland’s representative in the European and international arena, elaborates and approves Polish Standards (PN), and takes care of their dissemination and promotion, rendering accessible the information on standards and organisation of training courses.

In Poland, the national bodies responsible for the elaboration of standards and for their substantive contents are the Technical Committees (KT), operating within the Polish Committee for Standardisation. These are the deliberative bodies, established to carry out the standardisation activities in respective areas assigned to them previously. The personal constitution of the committees includes experts in different areas of activity, e.g. industry, science, economy; the circles of employers and consumers are represented as well. Another task of the Technical Committees is ensuring the high quality level of the Polish Standards and updating them along with an interpretation of their provisions.

For years, the Polish Committee for Standardisation has been trying to encourage the enterprises in Poland to active participation in the standardisation activities, since the operativeness of Polish industry in this particular area is still more than insufficient. Among the specialists acting in Technical Committees, there are still too few representatives of the industry. This means that our industry is not mature enough to perceive the advantages that can follow from its active involvement in the standardisation activities. Therefore, one of the tasks the Polish Committee for Standardisation is currently facing is promotion of the standardisation activities among members of the national industry, aiming mainly at the presentation of advantages and profits that can result not only from the application of standards but also from active participation in the process of their creation.

The priority of the Polish standardisation system is to implement the European Standards in the set of national standards. In the future, Polish Standards will be elaborated mostly by the European standardisation bodies. Therefore, it is strongly recommended to get actively involved in the works concerning preparation of these standards, mainly to have our own share in final shaping of the resolutions that quite soon we shall have to use in our everyday professional activities. Everybody has the right to participate in the process of the creation of a standard. The standard is not an outcome of individual actions, but a result of collective effort, where all the divergences of opinions are resolved by consensus, which means reaching an agreement in the matters of dispute through consultations leading to adoption of a common viewpoint.

Members of Technical Committees are the only entities in Poland to have access to the Draft European and International Standards, which means that they can submit their remarks, and in this way influence directly the contents of these standards – the factor very important and additionally supporting the idea that an active participation in the process of standards elaboration is a must of the modern times. Participating in the activities of the Technical Committees brings numerous advantages to the parties concerned, as it would be really difficult to overestimate the possibility of getting information on the draft documents of, e.g., new European standards, which members of the Technical Committees have with a few years anticipation, long before these documents have the chance of being included into the set of Polish Standards (PN).

Standardisation in Poland is now entering more and more actively various areas of the human activities other than production and services. This is particularly true in the areas like management systems, safety of the citizens and countries, social responsibility, or the development of information society, including also new technologies, e.g. nanotechnology. Future standards in these fields should allow better organisation of social life and economic activities. This explains the great popularity that, among others, the PN–EN ISO standards related with the quality and environmental management currently enjoy. They are considered basis for modern management systems operating at small, medium and large enterprises. The advantages resulting from the application of Polish Standards (PN) in the domestic economy are not to be overestimated. Owing to these standards, the economy has chances to become more competitive, its image is greatly improved, there are more options to get new orders in the market – national, European and global, and to make successful decisions and take successful actions.

Currently, works are continued on a new draft project concerning standardisation. It is expected to create better environment and get a more serious than up to now response from
the representatives of Polish industry in all matters concerning the standardisation activities. The draft project of the new law anticipates changing the so far existing status of the Polish Committee for Standardisation from the budget–financed body to an association of legal persons, institutions and companies (similar as in the highly developed countries). The Committee will be given a legal personality; it will sustain itself from its own resources and only its members will have the right to delegate their representatives to work in Technical Committees; the policy of the Committee will be established by a General Board composed of the Committee members.

5. The significance of standards in market economy

Standardisation serves the market interests of the economy operators; it plays an important role in the unrestrained flow of goods and correct market functioning. Though it requires certain costs, the advantages resulting from its practical application are indisputable. The lack of knowledge in what direction changes in a standard are going can be quite disastrous. The unexpected appearance of a new standard can shake the existence of many enterprises and put in question the future of, e.g. the stock stored in a way inconsistent with the provisions of a new standard. The industry in Europe knows too well these risks and actively supports the process of standardisation.

Standardisation is no longer a technical activity only; executed by engineers and experts it should become a part of the strategy of enterprises and governmental institutions, where every effort should be made to promote it (e.g. in the United Kingdom there is a document on the development strategy, which discusses relations between the governmental centres, business centres and standardisation). Real becomes nowadays the need to improve various models of the industry and get businessmen involvement in standardisation. What provisions the standards will comprise to protect the manufacturers in Poland depends on the manufacturers themselves and on their attitude towards the question of standardisation.

Standards create good opportunities for the risk–free project development, giving access to the information on optimum solutions, up–to–date recommendations and possible threats in production, trade and scientific–technical thought; they promote new technologies and support progress in economy. The knowledge comprised in standards is indispensable for producers, businessmen and institutions operating in all areas of the economic life.

Standards speak the technical language that the business world uses while making products and rendering services, but both products and services „based” on this language should have the same quality, irrespective of the place where they have been made and rendered accessible. Active participation in the creation of standards and professional attitude towards the work of the Technical Committees give the following advantages:

- allow presentation of arguments with chances that they will be heard by the whole nation,
- create opportunities for enrichment of our professional knowledge in a given area,
- enable us to use more strategic tools against our competitors,
- make relations with customers simpler,
- provide us with a reference document of great economic significance, recognised in the national and world market, and allow us to effectively plan the production process,
- serve as a proof of consistency with regulations (e.g. standards harmonised with the New Approach Directives – CE mark).

In the age of rapidly developing technique and technology, early acquisition of information from standards is indispensable for the development of a best marketing strategy and enables us to act more quickly and more efficiently than our competitors do, raising – as a consequence –our market share.

Standards can effect a multi–million growth of market demand, e.g. for the machines and equipment that a standard proposes for use; they constitute a background for investments, reduce the risk, and make us well–prepared for the market activities and proper decisions

References