

U.S.-E.C. Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Standards Dialogue

The U.S.-E.C. ICT Standards Dialogue seeks to minimize bilateral trade frictions and facilitate a better understanding of U.S. and EU goals. The Dialogue allows both parties to discuss their ICT regulations and policies and the methods they use to develop technical regulations.

The Dialogue, originally launched with a video conference in March 2004, is currently focusing on e-accessibility. It was reinvigorated as part of the U.S.-EU Innovation Initiative recently proposed by Commerce Secretary Gutierrez and EC Vice President Verheugen (also Commissioner of Enterprise and Industry). Through an exchange of letters, Secretary Gutierrez and Vice President Verheugen identified three areas of cooperation for the coming year, in which e-accessibility, under the Dialogue, is one of them.

The European Commission (EC) has stated that it will utilize several policy instruments that fall within the existing legal framework (e.g. public procurement, product certification, and specific legislative provisions), to remove barriers stemming from the inappropriate design of ICT products and services and achieve voluntary harmonization of Member States' e-accessibility policies, which are fragmented and inconsistent throughout the EU. In addition, the EC released a Communication in September 2005 that proposes supplemental voluntary measures to foster the development of technical standards enhancing e-accessibility, teach e-skills, enhance web accessibility implementation, encourage EU Member States to share best practices, and stimulate research and technological development in the ICT field. Additional legislation at the EU level will be considered in approximately two years, depending on the progress and impact the Communication's non-mandatory measures will have on improving e-accessibility in Europe.

One goal of the U.S-EC ICT Standards Dialogue on e-accessibility is to encourage the EC to avoid mandating technical specifications and regulations that may stifle accessibility innovation and technology to the detriment of both suppliers and end-users. The Department of Commerce will continue to advocate a more general performance-based approach for requirements that are helpful in guiding the development of new accessibility technologies.

Bilateral meetings held on e-accessibility

March 29, 2006 in Brussels

February 27-28, 2006 in Washington, D.C.

December 13, 2005 in Brussels