Common standards to improve competitiveness of construction industry

10 European standards for design of construction works will provide a common approach for the design of buildings and other civil engineering works as of 2010. These "Eurocodes" will boost business in this sector by removing technical barriers to trade with construction products and services within the European Union. They will improve quality of products and services, and will create new job opportunities in the construction sector, which currently covers 28% of industrial employment in the EU. To foster the widespread use of Eurocodes in all Member States, the European Commission is organizing a conference in Brussels, 18-20 February, bringing together more than 300 delegates from Member States. The aim of the conference is to provide national trainers with appropriate knowledge and expertise.

"The new standardization environment, European standards for design and construction works, provides a framework for a successful market uptake of high quality products, services and innovation and will thus strengthen the worldwide competitive advantage of the European construction industry, which is a leading source of employment," says Günter Verheugen, European Commissioner for Enterprise and Industry.

"Enhanced competition on a European level playing field will enhance cost savings, quality improvement and technological innovation. That is why the European Commission has supported the Eurocodes from the very beginning including through active research at its European Laboratory for Structural Assessment in the Joint Research Centre," says Janez Potočnik, European Commissioner for Science and Research.

The Eurocodes have been published by the European Committee for Standardization (CEN) in 2007, and will be used in all EU Member States from 2010. They consist of 10 European Standards, each containing several parts that cover particular technical aspects, e.g. fire resistance, bridge design, safety, serviceability, robustness, durability etc.

The Eurocodes establish a set of common technical rules for the design of construction works in the Member States. However, the determination of safety level of construction works including aspects of durability and economy remains within the competence of the Member States. A system of nationally determined parameters provides flexibility in national implementation. They take into account differences in geographical, geological or climatic conditions (e.g. wind, snow and seismic maps), allow the Member States to decide the level of safety. The nationally determined parameters of individual Member States will be included in the National Annexes to each Eurocode standard.

Eurocodes are the recommended means of giving a presumption of conformity with the essential requirements of the Construction Products Directive for construction works and products that bear the CE Marking, as well as the preferred
reference for technical specifications in public contracts. They are built on best European practice, expertise and research achievements. They provide for the highest technical quality in construction design and will also create job opportunities enabling engineers, contractors, designers and product manufacturers to offer freely their services in any EU Member State.

Organised by the European Commission with the support of CEN and Member States, the Workshop “Eurocodes: Background and applications” will take place in Brussels from 18 to 20 February 2008. It will enhance the training potential of the Member States by providing state-of-the-art training material and background information. It will also facilitate the exchange of views, networking and cooperation between the representatives of institutions, industry and technical associations involved in training on the Eurocodes in Member States. The session in the morning of 18 February covers the major issues and priorities related to national implementation and use of the Eurocodes, to their further development and associated challenges. The lectures on the afternoon of 18, and on 19 and 20 February focus on individual Eurocodes in a comprehensive manner. They are organised by the CEN/TC250 Sub-Committees and the Horizontal Group on fire design.

The next goal of the European Union is to extend the scope of the Eurocodes to sustainability aspects such as the protection of environment, resources, energy saving, health protection and security.

More information about the Eurocodes can be found at:

http://eurocodes.jrc.ec.europa.eu
http://elsa.jrc.it