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EXPERT CONTRIBUTION ON INTRODUCTION OF THE EURO SIGN IN SC 2 STANDARDS

This document expresses personal opinions.

Recent discussions, especially by e-mail, appear to indicate a need for an SC 2/WG 3 initiative to prepare for the possible introduction of the Euro sign in a number of standards within SC 2 responsibility; in particular the ISO/IEC 8859. The recent CEN/TC304 workshop underlined this need.

Since uncertainty exists about to what extent the Euro sign will actually find large use in IT, it is at the moment not possible to decide that e.g. the ISO/IEC 8859 parts should actually be modified to accept the character. On the other hand, if a rapid commercial acceptance of the sign occurs, there will very quickly arise a need for a standardized coding of the sign, and the normal working procedures within JTC 1 may then prove too slow for the actual demand.

The on-going discussions about the inclusion of the sign in keyboard standards also necessitates SC 2 activity, or it will appear there is as lack of coordination within ISO/IEC JTC 1.

The present proposal for a "Latin-0" part of 8859 includes the Euro sign, in a Latin-1-derivative or the scheme. Processing this proposal is however, in my opinion, not sufficient. That scheme, although with many merits in itself, can not provide an over-all solution, because:

- a) Some language areas at present using Latin-1 (and the corresponding PC and mainframe repertoires) may be reluctant to exchange not only the character needed to accommodate the Euro sign, but also seven additional characters for French and Finnish letters; and
- b) The "Latin-0" scheme is not acceptable for Central European use. Even though this area will not initially form part of the EMU its needs in trading will certainly necessitate IT inclusion of the sign if it becomes generally used within EMU. This should apply in particular to the EU candidate nations.

It therefore appears that rapid action is needed to investigate how the Euro sign could best be accommodated in at least ISO/IEC 6937 and 8859, in anticipation of the possible (although not at all certain) need for as future revision of the standards; and that the results are then documented in an authoritative way. It shall be noted, namely, that the IT industry is in early need of such an SC 2 position to prepare for possible modifications of vendor-specific coding schemes.

Starting a formal new project according to JTC 1 rules for this work would obviously mean too much delay. There is, however, a much quicker way to achieve the desired results; namely to start voluntary expert work to prepare for registration, according to ISO/IEC 2375, of new Euro-including G1 code pages. Such registration can be performed quickly (within four months) after the actual layouts of the new G1 sets are decided on.

It is therefore hereby proposed, that the experts of SC 2/WG 3 start an e-mail discussion to decide the layout of new code tables corresponding to the G1 sets of the relevant 8859 parts, with precisely one character in each set exchanged for the Euro sign. An additional condition should be that, as far as possible, a common positioning (coding) of the sign is desirable. At least the following 2375 registrations are therefore involved:

- 100 - Latin-1
- 101 - Latin-2
- 109 - Latin-3
- 110 - Latin-4
- 126 - Latin/Greek
- 148 - Latin-5
- 157 - Latin-6

179 - Latin-7 ("Baltic Rim")

The following registrations, although possibly not candidates for Euro inclusion, should also be considered:

127 - Latin/Arabic

138 - Latin/Hebrew

144 - Latin/Cyrillic

199 - Latin-8 ("Celtic")

It needs also be discussed what NBs should become sponsors for the respective parts, in the cases that formal registrations will actually be performed. For all the present Latin parts ECMA was sponsor, with the exceptions of Latin-6 (which was submitted by the Swedish NB, as was the Latin-7 "Baltic Rim"). Since ECMA's activities in SC 2 have diminished, the responsibility for new registrations corresponding to the original ECMA ones should obviously be taken by volunteer NBs.

Provided expert consensus can be reached about the bests positioning of the Euro sign in the relevant tables, documents for registration should then be prepared. The actual application for registration must however be further discussed, considering the general progress of the Euro work. For instance, the CEN/TC304 project "Coordination of the Euro in IT standards" should provide some input in the matter.

Activities according to this plan should make it possible to have an ISO/IEC position regarding the Euro inclusion in 8859-type coding formalized, if needed, before mid-1998 (and in practice determined before that). If it is decided to actually register the new code pages, they could then be referred to e.g. in procurements, if necessary. It would also facilitate a quick revision of the relevant 8859 parts if so is decided; or they could form the basis for new parts intended to eventually replace the original ones.

Some additional input on this matter has been give in the Swedish comments to the voting on the "Latin-0" subdivision.