



**ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 2/WG 3
7-bit and 8-bit codes and their extension
SECRETARIAT : ELOT**

DOC TYPE :	Officer contribution
TITLE :	WG3 Comments on the document SC2 N 3144 “Contribution from Netherlands to JTC 1 on the functioning of ISO/IEC/JTC 1/SC 2/WG 3, Coded character set (JTC 1 N 5449)”
SOURCE :	WG3 , Evangelos E. Melagrakis, WG3 Convener
PROJECT:	----
STATUS :	National Body Contribution
ACTION ID :	COM
DUE DATE :	----
DISTRIBUTION :	P, O and L Members of ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 2
MEDIUM :	P, Def
NO OF PAGES :	3

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ISO/IEC/JTC1/SC2/WG3 Comments on SC2 N 3144.

“Contribution from the Netherlands to JTC1 on the Functioning of ISO/IEC/JTC1/SC2, Coded Character Set (JTC1 N 5449)

These comments concentrate on those aspects that deal with the works of WG3.

"It is with considerable regret that SC 2 WG 3 notes that the Netherlands NB has found it necessary to complain to JTC 1 as regards the SC 2 working procedures. This is particularly regrettable since the Netherlands SC 2 representative has for a great number of years provided so much valuable input to the WG work, and is expected to continue to do so.

The Netherlands contribution in general merits careful study, and some parts of it should be considered further within WG 3. However, the majority of WG 3 members is unable to agree with the contribution's concluding four requests, since they are not seen as firmly founded in facts. The WG 3 majority is, namely, of the opinion that

1. The functioning of SC 2 does indeed conform to regular JTC 1 practice as formulated in its Directives, within the latitude necessary to achieve the timely development of user-needed standards and other documents;
2. The WG 3 part of the present program of work is the result of expert consensus on what work is required to satisfy the needs of the user community;
3. The issue of some special national characters has been properly addressed in repeated discussions, aimed at achieving a consensus opinion; and
4. The changes introduced in stage 5 of the ISO/IEC 8859 revision do not, in the consensus opinion of the WG, constitute technical changes, only editorial ones. (Note: The Foreword to the 8859 parts, provided by ITTF, contains the wording '... has been technically revised.' This was not considered correct by the editors, but was accepted to avoid changes to the finished camera-ready text, which would have further delayed the publication.)

The WG 3 opinions stated in the preceding are based on the following facts:"

SC2/WG3 has been a veteran in Character Sets Standards. It maintains Standards like the well-known ISO 646 (the International Standard for Character Information Interchange) or the equally widely used ISO/IEC 8859 series of Standards (8-bit coding of characters). These standards enjoy a high implementation rate within the IT industry and stability that make them a necessity for the everyday work of the average user.

It was in 1994, shortly after the adoption of the first edition of ISO/IEC 10646-1, that a decision was taken within SC2 to align the 8859 series of Standards with ISO/IEC 10646-1. That task mainly involved aligning the names of the characters included in the 8859 series of Standards to those of ISO/IEC 10646. This work was entrusted to several project editors, one of which was the representative of the Netherlands.

Building consensus amongst the various project editors, on the way the revision of the various parts of the 8859 Standard should progress, proved to be a time consuming and difficult issue. A meeting between the project editors was considered necessary and was held in Crete (1997-07-04 and 07), in parallel with the WG3 meeting. A broad consensus (but unfortunately not unanimity) was achieved during this meeting, and it was expressed later in relevant WG3 and SC2 resolutions. Any change decided was in fact discussed thoroughly and decided either unanimously or by a vast majority of the WG3 and SC2 members.

By that time, the official comments from the NBs were known to the meeting, as well as the results of the voting, thanks to the kind cooperation of the ISO/CS and the representatives of the NBs present in the meeting. Thus, the decisions of the WG3 and SC2 meetings were also reflecting the necessary responses to the NBs's comments and requests.

Every attempt was made to accommodate the concerns and comments of the Netherlands' editor. It was found, though, impractical to bring processing to a halt for the sake of an argument that forbids any change to the layout of the code tables, merely because these tables should be designed according to ISO 2375. It was understood that the code tables of the Standards and those of the registration procedure were identical in technical terms but not necessarily identical in the layout. The registration procedure requested that the code tables should always be presented in a 7-bit format, even though they may be used in other coding environments (like 8-bit in the case of 8859). Useful additions to the layout of the revised tables, like the introduction of a hexadecimal notation for the code positions, in addition to the existing notation, had nothing to do with the maintenance of the technical equivalence.

WG3 found no cause to change any existing registration or Standard, because of the changes in the layout of the revised ISO/IEC 8859 code tables. It was understood that any changes, requested by the NBs and decided through well-supported resolutions, could only be considered in future registrations or future editions of other relevant Standards.

Finally, the editorial issues of the revision of the various parts of ISO/IEC 8859 were openly discussed, and a transparent way of working was adopted. An editors' mailing list was setup to resolve the revision issues, and well over a hundred messages were exchanged between the editors, before the finalization of the parts. Another editors' meeting, with the participation of the Netherlands editor, was held in the next WG3 meeting (Redmond, USA, 1998). That particular meeting was considered highly successful because of its unanimous agreements, especially on the particular issues raised in attachment B, of the Netherlands paper SC2 N 3144. The agreement is reflected in the text of the relevant parts of ISO/IEC 8859 and was considered as satisfactory by the Romanians and the Netherlands editor.

On the other hand it was disappointing that the Netherlands editor abstained from any work during all this time, despite the consensus built within the committee and despite the directives given to him through the WG3 and SC2 resolutions. Any project editor is working on a purely international capacity and should differentiate himself, when acting in this international capacity, from his own personal or country's opinions. That rule was, regretfully, not respected fully by the Netherlands editor, who did not produced his own part of the work causing embarrassment and delays.

WG3 strongly believes that the representative of the Netherlands has always been given much more than a fair chance to represent his opinion either in formal or informal meetings, in email discussion lists etc. And, as said in the beginning, we do expect fruitful co-operation with him in the future and hope to further benefit from his contributions.