

Comments on the proposed Swedish standard SS 662241:2000/Tillägg 1:
"Information technology equipment – Alphanumeric keyboard for Swedish use,
Amendment 1 – Swedish keyboard layout for name-writing with Latin Characters",
SIS-remiss 3867.

Helsinki, September 20, 2005

On behalf of the Finnish Standards Association, SFS, I would like to thank SIS for giving us the opportunity to comment on this proposed Swedish standard.

Our position is that this proposal should not be approved as a Swedish standard. Instead, we propose a positive way forward.

Background:

Finland and Sweden have traditionally shared the keyboard layout for input of their main languages (Swedish and Finnish), due to both economic and cultural reasons. As a rule, when considering the standardisation of a new keyboard layout, continuity is very important and therefore any disturbing changes should be minimized. In the present situation, adding a large number of new capabilities is necessary, but the new layout should be based on principles that are easy to understand and thus intuitively familiar to the users, at the very minimum after a short introductory period.

The layout in this proposal is an extension of the one that was the subject of the public inquiry issued in 2002 by the Sámi Parliamentary Council on "Requirements for support of Sami languages in data processing." The draft had been prepared by a consultant in great secrecy, to the extent that at least one of those aware of the project had been forbidden from informing any of the Nordic standards people of this development.

After the consultant had prepared an incomplete and most irregular disposition of comments, the requirements were published in November 2002 (as Sámediggi ref. 01/850-51). The requirements document was later followed by a recommendation-type document for the keyboard layouts (01/850-86) and another one for information on IT "cultural elements" (04/560-1).

We respect the Sámi Parliamentary Council defining the keyboard layout for use by the speakers of the Sámi languages. We feel, however, that the criteria for the layout for use by the speakers of the majority language(s) should be based on independent criteria, taking into consideration a wider spectrum of languages, while specifically providing an easy to use interface for the Sámi languages. This aspect was brought up already in 2002, but all criticism was discarded at the time with the justification of it being too late to meet an implementation schedule.

Comments in support of our NO position:

The proposed keyboard layout includes a very high number of preallocated characters. In fact, it is interesting to note that the picture of the full layout that was used as the basis for this proposal (in document LWP Consulting R 04/0-3) has been omitted from the final proposal, in spite of its highly informative content. This full layout clearly shows that many of the characters with diacritics have been positioned at keycaps used for totally unrelated base characters. In addition to not providing for an intuitively easy to learn-and-use arrangement, this approach also prevents the provision for related characters on the same keycaps.

For the above reasons, although this standard may be intended for a highly limited usage only, by the Swedish government for inputting the official language (Swedish), minority languages (Finnish, Sámi), and European Latin-based languages in official use, an alternative layout would appear to serve even this user community much better than the proposed one. In any case, it is hard to imagine that this layout would be suitable for the much more common business and cultural usage, both of which also require the possibility to enter a very wide selection of characters, essentially those Latin characters that are used in the (official) languages of the EU and Europe as a whole (and also Vietnamese, due to the high number of immigrants resulting from the refugee period).

Specifically, e.g., the characters that have been positioned on the same keycap as Q, W, R, Y, F, X, V, and B have no apparent relation with these characters. On the other hand, having a preallocated related character with diacritics on a keycap may prevent the use of it for another related character, e.g. in the case of S, D, and Z.

It is our understanding that an intuitively easy-to-learn-and-use keyboard layout should have a minimum number of characters with diacritics allocated on the keycaps, namely Å, Ä and Ö. Thus, most of the characters with diacritics would be produced as a combination of the diacritic as a dead-letter key, followed by the base letter. Such a method is easy to comprehend and does not necessarily even require more keystrokes than using the Alt Gr key together with the base letter. It should be noted that whether the resulting character is encoded as precomposed or decomposed by the keyboard driver is independent from the actual keystrokes.

Furthermore, in discussions with representatives of the industry, it has become clear that e.g. a stroke, although not a diacritic (for which reason the stroke cannot be separated from the character for decomposition), could be handled by the keyboard driver in a similar manner. The discussions have further revealed that entering multiple diacritics to combine with a letter (or to form a double diacritic, e.g. in the case of acute or grave) is not a particular problem either (although this is not currently supported by e.g., MSKLC, the MS tool for creating keyboard layouts).

In such an approach, only a few letters would need to be included using the Alt Gr key (or equivalent). Therefore, these letters could be placed in keys in a manner that looks natural and is easy to remember even without an engraving.

Way forward:

It is our recommendation that rather than Sweden pushing for the current proposal, Sweden and Norway urgently join Finland in investing in defining a solution for use by the general public in all these countries.

The Finnish national group on localization is committed to having a proposal utilizing these open-ended, easy-to-use-and-learn principles prepared for public scrutiny on our open web site in mid-October. Given a one-month review time, the layout could be finalized in December, which would facilitate at least some timely implementations.

Sincerely,

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