



PLG WORKSHOP 2007
« Accreditation – a tool to develop competence (?) »
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**THE DEVELOPMENT OF EUROPEAN ACCREDITATION
SERVING THE NEEDS OF
EUROPEAN ECONOMY AND SOCIETY**

Lorenzo Thione
Chairman
EA – European co-operation for Accreditation

Accreditation

- Accreditation – as independent and authoritative attestation of the competence, impartiality and integrity of conformity assessment bodies (CABs) and bodies performing related activities and thus of the value and credibility of the corresponding attestations of conformity (calibration certificates, test reports, inspection reports, certifications of management systems, products and personnel, other attestations) – has, in the last two decades, definitely affirmed its major role and attained remarkable achievements in supporting the elimination of technical barriers to trade and contributing to the protection of the fundamental rights of people.

Accreditation

- The unique value of accreditation has been spontaneously acknowledged by the economies and societies of the European countries (as well of the majority of countries in the world) and accreditation, performed by authoritative and recognized Accreditation Bodies (ABs), has been successfully applied as the last level of control of the quality of the conformity assessment services delivered in both voluntary (market driven) and mandatory (law regulated spheres).
- Confidence provided by accreditation has been recognized and valued as equally needed for both purposes of supporting the economic progress and protecting public general interests and any improvement in accreditation, both in Europe and worldwide, is to be brought to the advantage of both voluntary and regulated sectors.
- Thanks to the above recognition, accreditation is having and will have, in Europe and elsewhere, an increasing legislative impact.

The European accreditation EA – European co-operation for accreditation

- The main purpose of EA is to provide Europe with an effective and reliable accreditation infrastructure serving at best the needs of the economy and society. This mission is accomplished, chiefly, by:
 - developing accreditation criteria and guidelines favouring the effective and harmonized operation of national accreditation bodies;
 - operating a peer evaluation system, based on sound and transparent criteria and procedures;
 - managing the related Multilateral Agreement (MLA) and Bilateral Agreements (BLAs), ensuring that the signatory status to the Agreements is an effective attestation of the validity and equivalence of the operation of the signatories and of the reliability of the conformity assessment chains referring to them.
 - cooperating with the EC and other European and international stakeholders and performing all other activities required for the proper accomplishment of its purposes.

The European Accreditation Model

- Within the above context, EA endeavours to promote the proper recognition of the role of accreditation and the adequate exploitation of its function, as a service of general interest, with definite characteristics of public authority, representing the last authoritative level of control of the conformity assessment services delivered in both voluntary and mandatory spheres.
- As such, accreditation must be performed on suitable mandate of the Government, in full compliance with the applicable, evolving, technical requirements, in conditions of independence and impartiality, with accountability towards all the interested parties, with no single interest or group of interests predominating, as non-profit-distributing service activity, without competition at national level and with strict limitations to competition at the international level (principle of subsidiarity).

The development of European Accreditation The main strengths of EA

Main strengths, on which the EA's development could be solidly founded, are:

- EA is internationally recognized.
- EA has a peer evaluation system of tried experience and efficacy.
- Members of EA have a broad and deep technical competence.
- EA is working based on cooperative principles.
- EA is trusted by the EC.

Associated to the above strengths, weaknesses do, of course, exist and improvements are necessary.

The development of European Accreditation The way forward

The key issues for enhancing the value of European Accreditation and its capability of performing its mission at best can be summarized in a few major points:

- Strengthening the effectiveness of the accreditation, by focussing on the quality of the final outputs, and ensuring harmonized and substantial application of best practices at European level.
- Protecting and consolidating the integrity of the system.
- Reinforcing the partnership with the EU.
- Increasing efficiency and effectiveness of operation, by being a continually learning and more professional organization.

The development of European Accreditation The new legislative framework

- The new European legislation on accreditation and market surveillance and on a common framework for the marketing of products – establishing a legal base for accreditation, strengthening its use in the mandatory area and providing for the recognition of EA as the official European Accreditation Infrastructure – does introduce, indeed, a further impellent thrust to the continuous EA's improvement process.

The development of European Accreditation The new legislative framework

- The use of EA MLA accreditation as a basis for notification will provide effective and harmonized criteria for the initial qualification of CABs and for the continuous surveillance of the maintenance of their conformity to the applicable requirements, provided accreditation delivers the necessary added value.
- This represents a major challenge for EA and a unique opportunity that EA should not miss.
- To exploit at best such opportunities, EA shall build on its strengths and overcome its still existing weaknesses.

The development of European accreditation The development strategy and actions

- To strengthen the EA capability of properly performing its function of ensuring the added value of accreditation and its effective use throughout Europe – with particular although not exclusive reference to the new forthcoming role – various improvement actions are needed.
- These are being considered in the frame of an EA Development Plan under preparation and include:
 - strengthening the corporate infrastructure and the organization of the Association, in order for EA to be able to take informed decisions in all respects and circumstances and ensure their prompt and effective implementation;
 - get specifically prepared for the assumption of the new role in the mandatory area by developing and sharing among the members the necessary knowledge and expertise;
 - improving the effectiveness, consistency and transparency of the peer evaluation process, including measures to provide direct confidence to National Regulators and enable proper oversight of the system;

The development of European accreditation The development strategy and actions

- Development actions (cont.)
 - reconsidering the organization and improving the operation of the technical structure of EA (Committees and WGS);
 - enhancing the educational role of EA and its services to the members;
 - strengthening the relations with the European stakeholders, establishing a solid partnership with the EC and reinforcing the cooperation with CABs and National Regulators operating in the mandatory area;
 - reinforcing the international relations by: promoting cooperation with countries falling within the EU Neighbourhood Policy; strengthening the collaboration with other regional accreditation co-operations and enhancing the EA's influence within ILAC and IAF;
 - making available the financial resources needed for running EA in an appropriate professional and effective way, as required to achieve and consolidate the improvement targets, including finding an appropriate balance between the various sources of financing of the EA activities (voluntary performances of members, membership fees, possible financial contribution from the EC).

Conclusions

- A strong, effective and trustable third party conformity assessment infrastructure is needed to support the progress of the European economy and the growth of the prosperity of the European society.
- Many actors are involved in the development, consolidation and optimal exploitation of such infrastructure: the European legislator, the European Standardization Bodies, EA as the European accreditation infrastructure, the conformity assessment bodies, the National Regulators and Authorities, the economical operators using accredited conformity assessment services to assess and ensure the quality of their products, the final users and consumers relying upon such assurances and all other stakeholders. These actors must be capable to properly manage the outstanding challenges they are called to face.
- The key for winning such defiance lays in the commitment of all such parties to work together, united in the pursuance of the common objectives. We know it is not easy but let's try to do our best. Be sure that EA will make its part.