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**EA's APPROACH TO ACCREDITATION
AND ACCREDITED CERTIFICATION**

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EA – European co-operation for Accreditation

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The European accreditation
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- EA is the Association of the national European accreditation bodies (ABs) providing accreditation of all conformity assessment activities in both voluntary and regulated spheres.
- EA was operationally formed in 1997, following the progressive merge of pre-existing European accreditation co-operations dating back to 1976 and was established as a legal entity in 2000.
- The organizational structure of EA consists of an Advisory Board (gathering all stakeholders categories), a General Assembly, an Executive Committee, 5 Committees, among which the MAC Committee ruling the EA Multilateral and Bilateral Agreements (MLA, BLAs), and of a permanent Secretariat.

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The European accreditation

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- EA has, at present, **35 full members**, these being accreditation bodies (or systems) of countries member of EU and EFTA or candidate to join them. Among these, there are **32 Bodies signatories** to the EA MLA out of which **18** have signed for all accreditation activities currently covered by the MLA.
- EA has currently **17 contracts of cooperation** with ABs of European countries not yet fulfilling the requisites for full membership and of non European countries.
- **9** of such contracts have developed into **Bilateral Agreements** (BLAs) that convey the same benefits, in terms of mutual recognition, as the EA MLA.

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The European accreditation

The “EA accreditation model”

- 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, based on the vision of accreditation as “public authority activity” representing the last level of control of the conformity assessment services in both voluntary and mandatory areas.
- As such, EA accreditation must be performed on suitable mandate of the Governments, in compliance with the applicable technical requirements, in conditions of independence and impartiality, with accountability towards all the interested parties, as a non-profit activity, without competition at national level and with strict limitations to competition at the international level (“cross frontier” accreditation activity being essentially based on the principles of cooperation and subsidiarity, according to the policy recently established by EA).

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The European Accreditation The “EA accreditation model”

- EA accreditation is aiming at being, as much as possible, “output focussed”, namely at assuring the quality of the final output of the conformity assessment chain, i.e. the value and credibility of the results which are delivered to the “marketplace”.
- For example, accreditation shall ensure that organizations owning quality management system certifications issued by accredited conformity assessment bodies (CABs) are really able to deliver, consistently, products and services complying with the applicable requirements and that products certified by such CABs do really constantly meet the pertinent constructional and performance requisites.
- To be really effective, this “output focussed” approach must be based on specific sectoral knowledge and expertise; the sectoral competence represents, therefore, a primary requisite for a “good” accreditation.

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The European accreditation The performance of the EA mission

- The EA mission is accomplished chiefly by:
 - developing accreditation criteria and guidelines favouring the effective and harmonized operation of national ABs;
 - operating a peer evaluation system of member ABs founded on solid and transparent criteria and procedures and managing the related Multilateral Agreement (MLA) and Bilateral Agreements (BLAs);
 - cooperating with the European Commission with which EA has signed a Memorandum of Understanding;
 - cooperating with the European conformity assessment community, National Regulators and industry, and with all other European and international stakeholders;
 - performing all other activities (educational, communication, etc.) required for the effective pursuance of its purposes.

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The European accreditation The role of the EA MLA and BLAs

- The peer evaluation system managed by EA – leading to the establishment of the EA MLA and BLAs – ensures that the ABs signatory to the agreements are properly following the applicable rules and duly enforcing their observance by the accredited CABs.
- These agreements thus guarantee that the signatories ABs operate accreditation systems that are equivalent, in terms of adequacy and effectiveness, and such to grant that the attestations of conformity, issued under the respective accreditations, are equally reliable and can be trusted by the direct and indirect users of them (the “marketplace” in its broader meaning).

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The European accreditation The role of the EA MLA and BLAs

- The EA MLA and BLAs are thus the basis for:
 - reinforcing the credibility of accreditation vis-à-vis the interested parties, by ensuring the proper operation of signatories ABs subject to rigorous evaluations;
 - facilitating the free circulation of products and services, by ensuring the equal trustworthiness of the attestations of conformity issued in any country and under any of the signatory's accreditations, regarding the ability of such products and services of fulfilling the applicable requirements, either defined by voluntary norms and specifications or established by mandatory regulations.
- The new European legislation – on accreditation and market surveillance and on a common framework for the marketing of products – recently approved by the European Parliament, is essentially founded on the above values and principles.

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The development of European accreditation Generals

- Improving its capability of properly performing its function of ensuring the added value of accreditation and its effective use throughout Europe is a permanent target of EA.
- To this purpose, accreditation is to be ever more focused on the quality of the final outputs of the conformity assessment chain and the uniformity and effectiveness of the operation of the ABs members of EA are to be continuously improved.
- Within this development strategy, consideration is also being given to how accreditation can fulfil at best the needs of the modern economy and society, either expanding into new spheres of application (particularly when protection of fundamental public rights is involved) or staying and consolidating within the traditional boundaries.

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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 – that establishes a legal base and defines the principle rules for accreditation, strengthens the use of accreditation in the mandatory area and provides for the recognition of EA as the official European Accreditation Infrastructure – although being engrafted on a European accreditation system already substantially complying with the related requirements, does introduce, indeed, a further thrust to the continuous EA's improvement process.

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The development of European Accreditation The new legislative framework

- The use of EA MLA accreditation as a basis for notification (or recognition in general by the competent Public Authorities) will provide effective and harmonized criteria for the initial qualification of CABs and for the surveillance of the maintenance of their conformity to the applicable requirements.
- To this purpose, accreditation must be able to ascertain and confirm in depth that CABs have the specialist knowledge and expertise required to operate in the different technical sectors and that such know-how is properly and consistently applied to the assessments.

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The development of European Accreditation Improving the effectiveness of accreditation and of accredited certifications

- Besides the developments at European level – aiming at the continuous improvement of accreditation rules and practices with special regard to assumption of the new role in the mandatory area – EA members do remarkably contribute to the pursuance of the above objectives by playing a very active role in the IAF context.
- Worth being mentioned, among others, is the contribution provided by EA representatives to the activities of important groups, such as:
 - the IAF TF on “Improving credibility of accredited management system certifications”;
 - the IAF/ISO joint WGs on “Audit Practices Group” (APG) and “Accreditation Assessment Practices Group” (AAPG).

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The development of European accreditation Towards an “output focussed” accreditation

- The principle inspiring EA activities is “**moving from the culture of procedures to the culture of results**”.
- Major elements, on which improvement efforts are to be concentrated, include:
 - the competence of AB assessors;
 - the conduct and reporting of the assessment;
 - the surveillance mechanisms;
 - the sanction measures;
 - the control of cross-frontier accreditations;
 - the feedback mechanisms;
 - the harmonization of the behaviour of ABs.

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The development of European accreditation Toward “performance based” accredited certifications

- Based on the principle above mentioned, key factors being considered comprise:
 - the competence of Certification Bodies (CBs) auditors and the effective use of auditors by the CBs;
 - the conduct of the audit (preparation, execution, reporting);
 - the contrast to “price” competition among CBs;
 - the lifting up of the conditions for obtaining and maintaining accreditation;
 - the “metrics” to be used by CBs to measure initially and to keep under continuous monitoring the performance of certified organizations;
 - the joint operation by ABs and CBs of market surveillance facilities.

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Conclusions

- A robust and trustworthy third party conformity assessment infrastructure, delivering credible certifications of conformity to mandatory regulations and voluntary standards, is needed for both purposes of protecting public general interests and supporting the progress of the economy.
- Accreditation has proved to be an essential tool for the development, consolidation and optimal exploitation of such infrastructure.

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Conclusions

- EA is committed to contribute to the continuous improvement of the effectiveness of accreditation and of accredited certifications – both at European and international level – working in strict cooperation with:
 - the European Commission, the European standardization bodies, the conformity assessment bodies and all European stakeholders;
 - the other regional accreditation co-operations;
 - the International standardization bodies and the international accreditation organizations IAF and ILAC, promoting the strengthening of the relations between these two associations in order to build up a unified front of the worldwide accreditation, this being a key factor for enhancing the effectiveness of accreditation and the value and credibility of accredited certifications.

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