

Revised National Plan – Strategy for Harmonisation of Serbian Quality Infrastructure With EU

Borislava Jakšić

SIQ, Serbia

Abstract: *Every country candidate for European Union has to fulfill a number of criteria for the membership including political (democracy, human rights) and economic (functioning of market economy) as well as to adopt “Acquis communautaire” (the entire European legislation of about 11.000 acts). Preparation for membership to European Union is a process that requires very careful planning and organization. Serbia has to take all necessary steps in order to remove technical barriers to trade and gradually to achieve conformity with Community technical regulations and standards within the National Quality Plan.*

Keywords: *harmonization, quality infrastructure, National Quality Plan*

1. INTRODUCTION

Harmonization with the EU in the field of free trade opens to Serbian manufacturers a chance to become members of *supply chains* jointly with European companies. In return, the demands on consistent quality, security of delivery and safety of products are very high on the EU internal market. Quality of products prepared for European market should fulfill all technical requirements according to the EU legislation, rules and practice.

Serbia entered in the process of technical harmonization with EU, in the field of free trade, through the European project “Strengthening quality management, capabilities and infrastructure in Serbia and Montenegro”, performed in the period from the beginning of 2004 till November 2006. The main aim of this Project, shortly named “SCG – quality“, was to align SCG legislation, institutions and practices to EU legislation and requirements in the field of “quality infrastructure” - covering standardization, certification, accreditation and metrology and to build up capacities of the relevant institutions with the new equipment and education of

employees.

One of the main Project’s recommendations for Serbian beneficiary institutions was to establish a new National quality plan (NQP) as a long-term strategy for developing of national quality infrastructure, which will also comprise the plan for harmonisation of Serbian technical legislation with the European one. Realisation of such National Quality Plan will allow Serbian industry to develop quicker and to compete more efficiently with similar EU structures within the member states and associates, or outside the Community.

2. FORMER NQP IN SERBIA

In the last decade of the 20th century Serbia had the Program for quality improvement, adopted by the Government in 1992. This program respected the actual European trends in the field of quality, especially quality assurance concept, according to the international standards ISO 9000. Quality Councils was established on the level of republic, with representatives of relevant

ministries, national standardisation and metrology bodies and from the industry, as well. The Quality Council gave support to quality in companies and in public systems. National accreditation body – JUAT was established under the influence of two quality councils from Serbia and from Montenegro.

In Serbia, the most significant benefit from these activities were achieved on the company level supported from budget funds through the Ministry of science and technology. Four advertisements for quality improvement in companies according to the ISO 9000 standards were announced in the period from 1993-1997. As for participation to the tender, companies had to prepare the original programs for QS implementation and to bring the decision of the general managers that they will fully support the process of quality improvement. From about 2000 companies that applied - 468 received the budget support for implementation of the ISO 9000 standards.

The Quality Council of Serbia supported also: 40 educational seminars in the field of quality tailored for management in Serbian companies and edition of five publications in the field of quality management. Quality Council also supported the first quality award on the national level “Oscar for Quality” which is now full member of the EFQM - European Foundation for Quality Management.

3. REVISION OF THE NQP

The new EU internal market policy stipulated in the New and the Global Approach, connected to the protection of public interests on the European market (like product safety, environmental and health protection etc.) need changes in the National quality plan/program for Serbia giving priority to the technical harmonisation with EU as well as to the development of national quality infrastructure, which supports quality of products.

Process of integration into EU in the area of liberalization of trade, namely application of so called “EU technical regulation” requires a systematic approach. Some countries have formulated this systematic approach as a *National quality plan (NQP)*. The main elements of such a plan have: a strategic component at governmental level, component on the level of quality infrastructure institutions

and a component devoted to the implementation of the NQP on industrial level.

The analyzes of the European experiences and the real need of Serbia to perform harmonization process in approaching to the EU, as well as to improve the quality of products, were the basis for identification of the main elements for the new National Quality Plan for Serbia, as follows:

- *Support of technical harmonization with EU – adoption of the EU directives, particularly of the New and the Global approach;*
- *Transition of quality infrastructure institutions in Serbia, toward membership of appropriate European associations;*
- *Building capacity in the necessary infrastructure for Conformity assessment;*
- *Quality improvement in companies;*
- *Education/training programs;*
- *Quality promotion.*

Realisation of the mentioned tasks requires adoption of the NQP from the Government of Serbia. This will lead to the accomplishment of the expected results on the level of state, institutions and companies. The main factors for successful creation and implementation of the National quality plan are the Government and the national institutions for standardization, metrology and accreditation.

Government is responsible for strategy- it has to prepare the policy and ensure the mechanisms for its implementation. Good planning and organization are essential for the success of the process. Assistance (technical, financial) from the EU could be always available, but its quality and absorption capacity depends largely on receiving country.

The main task for competent *ministries* dealing with the National quality plan is harmonization of national technical legislation with the European one. This is a very complex process that countries have to carry out before becoming members of the European Union. It is recommended, according to the experience of some new EU members, to establish a particular project or program on the level of state which will comprise all necessary steps in transposition of EU technical regulation. This program could also be the part of an overall National quality plan because it is closely connected with the development of national quality infrastructure.

Support of technical harmonization with

EU is usually a process that could take several years. Questions that have to be answered, during this process, are not only legal but also technical, regarding necessary infrastructure. For instance, legislation on electrical products, machinery, lifts, pressure equipment and other products that are covered by New Approach directives can not be properly implemented if all harmonized standards for each particular directive are not adopted to national standardization. The most important question is the capability of industry to implement new legislation in practice.

Usually steps in harmonization of legislation in accession country are as follows (see fig. 1):

- Assign a responsibility for transposition of a particular directive;
- Translate the directive;
- Get a list of existing legislation for the same scope as covered by the directive;
- Make transposition using Table of Correspondence to see how each article of a directive is transposed to national legislation;
- Use agreed terminology and provide a list of new terms from this directive;
- Prepare a regulatory impact assessment in order to determine transitional periods;
- Make public hearing by involving all interested parties;
- Get professional opinion from EU experts.

Only those articles from a directive that refer to obligations of the Commission are not transposed to national legislation. All other articles, for instance articles on obligations of the Member States regarding market surveillance, safeguard clause, CE marking etc. have to be fully transposed. Table of Correspondence is an excellent tool to be used to identify the correctness of transposition.

It is important that interested parties have a possibility to participate in the process of harmonization, as well as in its implementation. The most important parties that have to be involved are usually:

- Ministry responsible for the legislation,
- Other ministries that might be effected,
- Industry (chamber of industry and commerce),
- Conformity assessment bodies,
- Market inspectorate and other relevant inspectorates,
- Non-government consumer associations,

- Standardization body,
- Others (case by case).

These interested parties participate in working groups. Objective of each working group is usually only the scope that is covered by a particular directive. Working groups are usually managed by the responsible ministry. They are professional and not political associations.

Transition of quality infrastructure institutions towards European associations

The key element for proper functioning of the EU internal market is building of confidence through competence and transparency. The basic principles for the European policy on conformity assessment have been defined in the Council Resolution of 1989 on the Global Approach to conformity assessment (90/C 10/01). These principles are implemented in the New Approach directives as well as in some directives that make use of conformity assessment. One of the most important guiding principles of this resolution is: TO MINIMISE DIFFERENCES IN QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE in all member states. In fact, nowadays, the differences of existing quality infrastructures (such as calibration and metrology systems, testing laboratories, certification and inspection bodies, and accreditation bodies) between EU Member States and between industrial sectors are minimized. This is also very important requirement for the candidate countries, because harmonized infrastructure is precondition for efficient functioning of the EU internal market.

The main goals that have to be achieved in developing institutions in the field of national quality infrastructure in Serbia, according to the European rules and practice are described in the following text.

Standardization

Almost 23.000 European standards (CEN – 13.087, CENELEC – 5452 and ETSI 4235) have to be transposed to the national standardization and all conflicting standards are to be removed. National standardization body has to become a full member of European standardization organizations (CEN, CENELEC, ETSI).

Accreditation

National accreditation body has to become a member of EA (European co-operation for Accreditation) and a signatory of MLA

(Multilateral Agreement) and should work together with accreditation bodies in other countries to promote the international acceptance of accredited conformity assessment.

Metrology

National institutions for metrology establish and lead the national metrology system in the corresponding international organizations. National institutions for metrology usually cover the following key activities:

- scientific metrology ensuring traceability of measurements in the EU Member State to the international level;

- legal metrology planning and establishing national system ensuring accurate and reliable measurements in the fields of :

- protection of the human & animal health;
- protection of the environment, and general technical safety;
- transactions in goods and services.

- Efficient functioning of National metrology institute, which is already member of the EUROMET, is very important for the national industry to get their products accepted at European market.

Building capacity in the necessary infrastructure for Conformity assessment

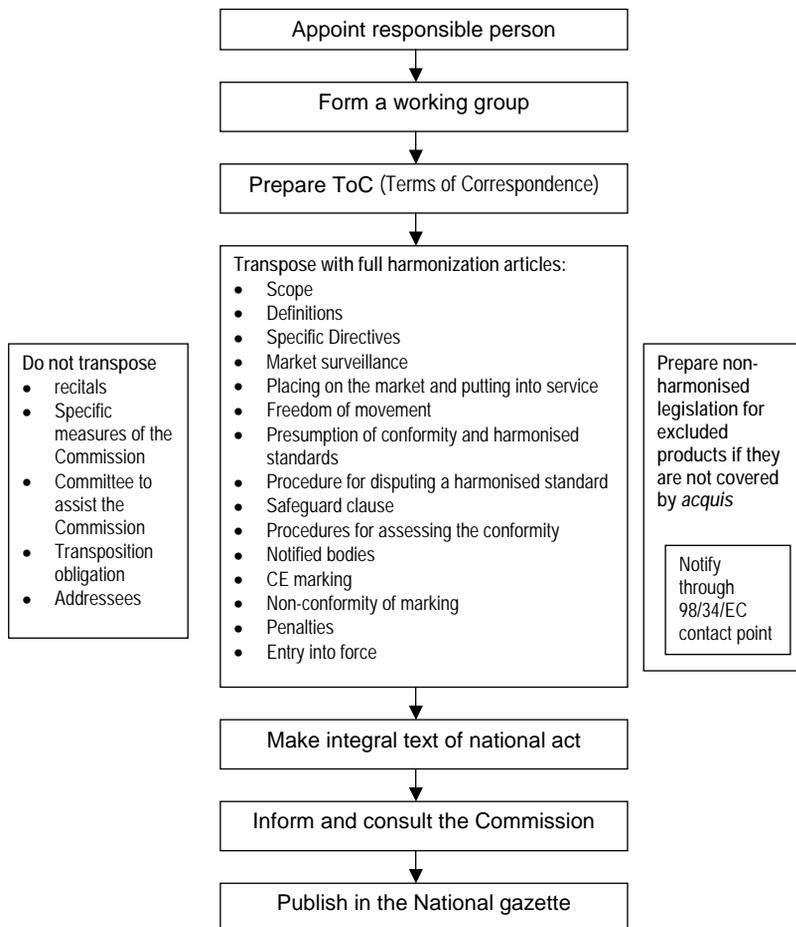


Figure 1. Activities in the process of harmonization of legislation

Conformity Assessment Bodies – CABs are a service for industry. Most Member States in EU have followed the recommendation by the European Commission that accreditation according to the EN 45000 and EN ISO/IEC 17000 series of standards is an important and privileged instrument for evaluating the competence, impartiality and integrity of the CABs. In EU Member States are responsible for the bodies that they notify and their certificates are accepted everywhere in the internal market.

Market surveillance

Market surveillance is essential for efficient functioning of the internal market. With enforcement of legislation it contributes to safe products at the market and prevents unfair competition so that all companies have to fulfill the same requirements to put their products on the market. Market surveillance has to get sufficient technical knowledge on products and use the principle of proportionality at their work.

Quality improvement in companies

It is oriented to the companies that intend to prepare their products for the EU internal market. The wider objective is to help companies in Serbia

to meet the technical requirements (on CE marking) for entering the EU Internal Market.

Specific objective is to assist companies in the field of technical legislation of industrial products related to the New Approach directives. This task is very important for the Serbian export-oriented industry aiming at entering the EU common market before the Serbian national legislation has been completely harmonized with that of the EU.

Three phases are foreseen as a part of National quality plan:

- General awareness-raising seminars for the industry that will treat the following subjects: EU technical legislation (CE marking), EN standards and technical requirements in the EU directives, market surveillance and responsibility Quality improvement in companies, product liability.
- Quality training programs.
- Specific in-company consultancy - working sessions in selected company on

drawing-up the technical constructing file (TCF) required for CE marking; practical cases.

The implementation of EU technical legislation on a company level should be focused on the managerial staff level. The participating companies will learn the importance of complying with EU technical legislation on a company level in a broader context of company management and competitiveness, including promotion, market penetration, cooperation, subcontracting and other related relevant topics. All three mentioned activities have to be elaborated and performed in cooperation with the Serbian Chamber of commerce, as well as the regional chambers.

For small and medium sized companies very significant support could be «in-company consulting» supported by the local authorities and the relevant ministries, so called *Quality Quick Scan Analysis*.

Industrial companies should be offered a Quality Quick Scan Analysis as a means to get a quick overview of their situation - as far as quality management concerns. This will include mainly performance excellence criteria based on ISO 9000 and other management standards the EFQM model, and Serbian national quality award.

Quality Quick Scan analysis provides to manufacturing companies an overview concerning their readiness to enter into international competition, where quality is a first precondition and customer satisfaction a high priority. It could contain a prioritized action plan for quality improvement.

Education/training programs

The backbone of the training programme are EU legislation and standards management systems having in mind eight Quality Management Principles:

- Customer focus
- Leadership
- People involvement
- Process approach
- System approach to management
- Continual improvements
- Decision making on facts
- Mutually beneficial supplier relationship.

Each participating company may be represented in the training programme by a small group of managers between six and ten companies. In this process, the company has to have opportunity to access to the trainer, who assists in the work. At the end of the Quality Focused Training Programme participating companies will obtain:

- An understanding of concepts of leadership and managing of organisation based on the eight principles of Quality Management;
- A deep focus on customer requirements and satisfaction;
- A deep focus on supplier relationships;
- Staff members, who are trained to maintain and gradually update the QMS;
- A description of work procedures, as a good basis for future process of re-engineering and rationalisations in companies;
- Distribution of responsibilities in the organisation;
- Improved and more clear management of documents and better overview of human resources and their skills.

Quality promotion

This is very important activity for success of the main goals of the NQP, especially in the

process of Serbian association with the EU. Main values of the European society like safety of products in use, environmental protection and consumer protection sublimated in the European directives on New and Global approach and quality management systems are the corner stones of equal conditions for internal European market. This also could be developed in a particular program or project. It will promote the main European values within the quality concept in a wider sense.

A Quality Awareness Campaign aims at creating an understanding of the need for quality improvement in the industrial society as well as among Serbian consumers. At the same time, it constitutes a sustained effort and a vehicle to communicate institutional and legislative changes to all stakeholders and to facilitate a dialog among these stakeholders about how to define and implement these changes. The main elements of the Quality Awareness Campaign are shown in the Figure 2. This Campaign should have two phases. In the initial phase, activity level is high, comprising activities such as the creation of an information network and an information package, establishing of databases, development of an Internet web site etc, while in the continuation, the information network is used in the day-to-day interaction with the users group.



Figure 2. Main Elements of the Quality Awareness Campaign - Communication Means and Potential Target Groups

4. CONCLUSION

National Quality Plan is an interdisciplinary package of activities, measures and tasks that have to be well coordinated to give the optimal results. At the same time, if accepted from all interested parties, it could be the best Strategy for harmonization of Serbian quality infrastructure with European rules and a great help to Serbian economy towards European integration. It is also possible to develop some specific projects to support the realization of the National Quality Plan and to demand some technical help from the EU.

A number of institutional reforms and technical assistance might speed up the process of building capacity of national quality infrastructure in Serbia. It is important to develop efficient conformity assessment infrastructure in Serbia in order to enable proper functioning of the Internal Market of the EU and free movement of goods. It is believed that further development of institutions has to be balanced with implementation and use of conformity assessment in economy.

The "SCG-Quality" project has provided

assistance in the areas of standardization, accreditation, metrology and conformity assessment. Further development of quality infrastructure is necessary. The government, quality infrastructure institutions, enforcement authorities and economic operators have to get prepared for implementation of principles and EU legislation of the internal market. For the purpose of coordination, adoption and implementation of a revised or new National Quality Plan, it is necessary to establish:

- a) New Quality Council, as an interdisciplinary expert's body on the Government level, which will coordinate quality policy and its implementation, as well as
- b) The Department for quality in the responsible ministry, mainly in charge with technical harmonization with EU.

If all stakeholders, which are involved in creation and realisation of National Quality Plan for Serbia, wish to obtain best effects of such a strategic document, they have to be involved in all phases of its creation and implementation.

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