

WHY TEST INSTITUTES & CENTRES FOR WOOD PRODUCTS ARE IMPORTANT ISSUE FOR WOOD PROCESSING SECTOR IN B&H

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ABSTRACT

Most countries in the European Union have their own institute or 'centre' for the Wood & Wood Products Industry. They have mainly evolved from scientific institutes tasked with researching into the improvement of materials and manufacture of building and furniture related products over the last 60 years. Most of these were originally supported and often founded by government or regional states and have over time developed their own test facilities.

Forests and forestland cover almost 50 percent of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The role of products from the forest and the companies that process and sell them in BiH is enormous. Nevertheless majority of companies have started to exploit the vast forest resources that region poses. Significant number of companies does have possibility to produce (CNC machines and high quality materials) but lack the assistance and even if they do have high quality products there is no possibility to get the certification for it. Closest centers for certification of wood products in compliance with EU regulation are in EU countries. Necessity of product certification is more than evident and therefore the existence of laboratories or other provider of certification centre is more than necessary. Current situation in B&H and the same conclusion could be drawn for whole Western Balkan limits producers from further expansion. Access to foreign markets is multistage process and requires gaining of numerous certificates and achieving standards and other preconditions required by foreign markets. This article presents short information about role of Test Institutes & Centers for wood processing in EU countries and importance of this issue for wood processing industry in B&H with regard to EU market access requirements and directives, and technical trade barriers and accreditation of labs.

Key words: Test Institute, wood product, EU directive, technical trade barrier, B&H.

1. INTRODUCTION

Most countries in the European Union have their own institute or 'centre' for the Wood & Wood Products Industry. Separate centres often operated for 'upstream' timber and wood items, mainly divided into forestry, building, construction and structures, alongside those centres researching into furniture and board materials. Recent mergers have seen many centres within countries coming together to make sensible industry-based commercial entities, often known as Technology Institutes or Centres. An opening up of government and the change in funding priorities in the last 20 years has required these original centres to reach out and follow a commercial route to supplement, even to fund their on-going research activities. The benefits of this changing sourcing of funds have allowed an infrastructure to develop that underpins industry. It also ensures credibility in activities that are commercially viable and found to be effective as an insurance umbrella when products fail, against an increasingly litigious society.

It is however vital that developing and emerging countries become fully aware of these conformity needs for wood and wood products and are able to respond to the requisite standards that apply in each country.

2. BACKGROUND OF WOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRY IN B&H

The role of products from the forest and the companies that process and sell them in BiH is enormous. The value of these goods as well as the services and domestic employment provided is important and internationally recognized. The wood processing sector represents today about 20% of the country's exports, 10% of the GDP and 15% of total employment.

Majority of SMEs in Central BiH region have turned towards either wood or metal processing business. At present stage production orientated companies do not have business techniques and required knowledge for expanding to foreign markets. Second disadvantage of the companies in the region is standardizing of quality of their products with demands of foreign markets. Significant number of companies does have possibility to produce (CNC machines and high quality materials) but lack the assistance and even if they do have high quality products there is no possibility to get the certification for it. Closest center for certification of wood products (furniture and joinery mainly) is in Slavonski Brod, Republic of Croatia. Nevertheless this center has the ability to certify the products for placing solely on Croatian market. The sole possibility for our producers to penetrate the foreign markets is to close the deals with foreign partner that performs certification in their respective country and than the placement of product is possible. This scheme retards local producers since it reduces the profit (foreign partner takes major part of the gained profit) and often excludes brand development (usually foreign partner claims it as its own product).

3. EU MARKET ACCESS REQUIREMENTS AND DIRECTIVES

Certification, product and material testing, accreditation and quality criteria are a feature of trading within the EU and the EEA. They can be mandatory, as from the EC, or opportunistic, as from trade and business intent on meeting perceived consumer demands. Both routes result in commercial success. These two processes are said to offer a measure of conformity of supply and support a level playing field open to any that can meet these demands in commercial and consumer products and services. The nature of this particular industry encourages a series of Tests to be put in place and implemented. Many of these tests are really in the nature of 'checks and balances' as a result of requirements for sustainability, environmental, safety, quality and fitness for purpose demands, essentially from interested pressure groups and governmental initiatives to the marketplace. In essence 2 prime directives have been issued by the European Commission for activation across all 27 EU countries. These apply to wood & wood products as with any other goods and products within their confines. It is worth understanding the comprehensive nature of these directives. The CPD Directive is for construction and GPS Directive is for consumer goods. The CE Mark, shown within the first directive is also used for Nursery Furniture.

The Construction Products Directive (CPD) prescribes that construction products put on the market shall be of such nature that they enable the construction in which they are incorporated to comply with the following six essential requirements:

- Mechanical Resistance and Stability
- Safety in Case of Fire
- Hygiene, Health and the Environment
- Safety in Use
- Protection against Noise
- Energy Economy and Heat Retention

Compliance with these requirements will have to be demonstrated by means of the CE-mark..

The exact requirements for the CE marking are defined in so-called 'harmonised standards', adopted by CEN, on 'mandates' given by the European Commission after consultation of the Standing Committee on Construction, a body of representatives of the EU Member States that is responsible for the implementation of the CPD.

Wood and wood-based products are covered by the following mandates:

- M 101 "Doors, windows and related products"
- M 108 "Curtain walling systems"
- M 112 "Structural timber products and ancillaries"
- M 113 "Wood-based panels"
- M 119 "Flooring"

These mandates determine which (parts of) the standards developed in the CEN technical committee will become mandatory under the CPD. Once a reference to a harmonized standard is published in the official journal, manufacturers can start putting CE-marked products on the market. So far, only one harmonized standard, EN 13986 on wood-based panels has been officially approved and the reference published. It implies that, as from 1 April 2004, only CE-marked particleboard, MDF, OSB, plywood, fibreboards ... will be allowed on the EU market for construction purposes. Non CE-marked products can still be sold, but then only for other purposes (non-constructional applications such as e.g. furniture).

4. BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT TECHNICAL TRADE BARRIERS

Technical trade barrier (TBT) means: Through trade agreements between countries, governments set out procedures for ensuring that technical regulations and standards do not create ‘unnecessary obstacles to international trade’. However, in establishing technical requirements to protect health and safety of domestic consumers and to establish product-quality conformity among producers, there exists the potential to create barriers to market access. Requirements that have the potential to be TBTs include product standards, product quality and grading requirements, building codes and other technical regulations and arrangements.

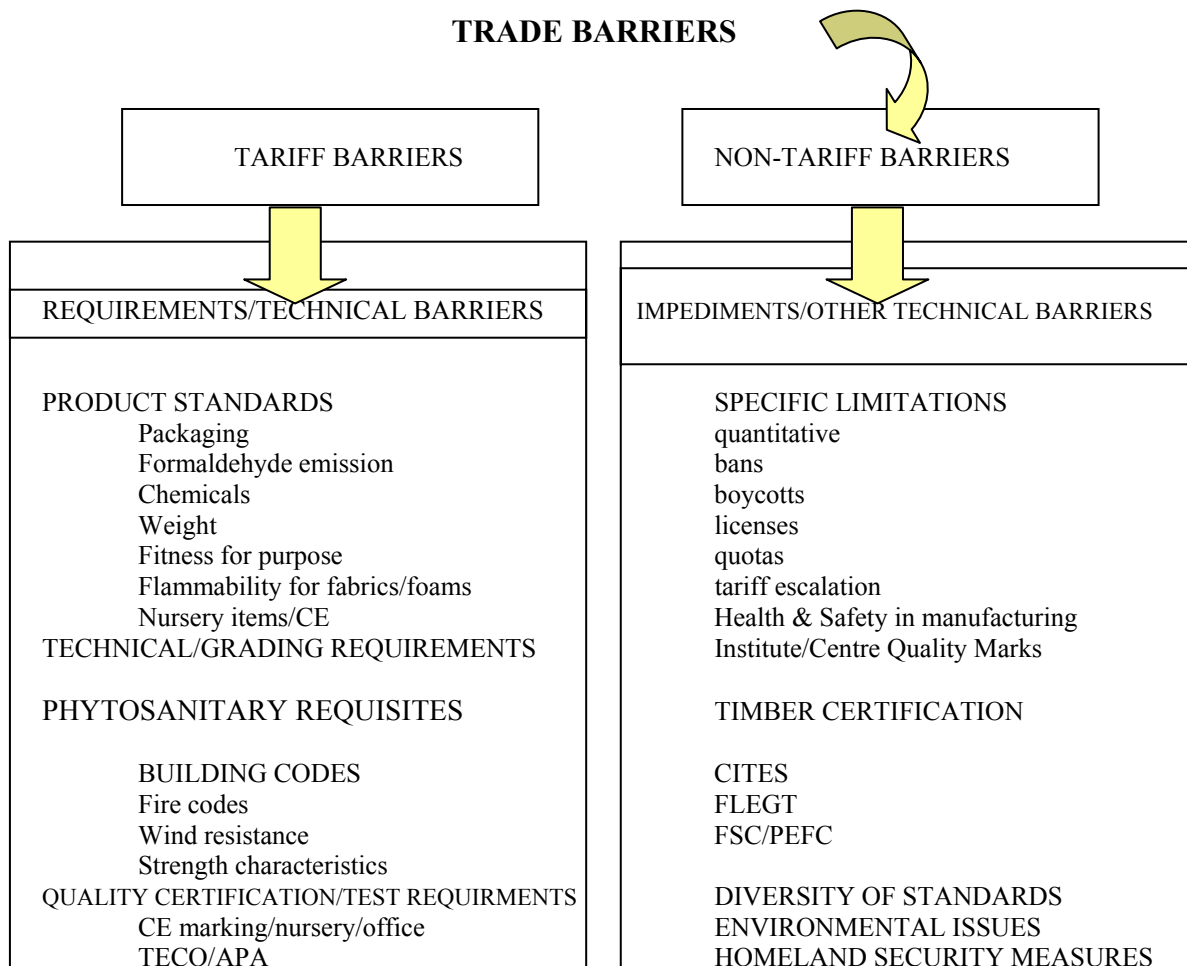


Figure 1. Technical Trade Barrier for Wood processing industry.

The European Union, currently comprised of 27 member countries, operates through the programs of the European Commission (EC). The EC has issued the Construction Products Directive. In support of the Construction Products Directive, the Commission has issued mandates to the Committee on European Normalization (CEN) to develop appropriate performance and product standards called

European Norms (ENs) to effect compliance with this directive. Standards developed by the ISO have served in several cases as the basic references for these CEN standards.

5. ACCREDITATION AWARENESS AND ACCEPTABILITY

As with most credible systems and organisations, the actual Institutes and Centres that test and certify wood & wood based products for commerce, government and consumer demands, using standards and specific criteria, are monitored and approved for that purpose and the function that they carry out. This approval of these organisations allows for a consistency across the EEA. It acts as a guardian AGAINST such actions becoming a trade barrier. To ensure this checking (accreditation) occurs within the EEA on an equal and consistent basis, an organisation exists that has responsibility. It is linked to world sources for accreditation and these can be viewed on the EA web-site. The European co-operation for Accreditation (EA) is the Association of the national accreditation bodies that provide accreditation of many conformity assessment activities. Most EEA countries have these bodies. EA operates under Memoranda of Understanding with the Commission of the European Communities and EFTA. The Members of EA are the nationally recognised accreditation bodies of the member countries, or the candidate countries, of the European Union and EFTA

Associate Membership is open to nationally recognised accreditation bodies in countries in the European geographical area. All members have to be able to demonstrate that they operate an accreditation system compatible with the applicable international standards. The members agree common policies with regard to accreditation and work towards the mutual recognition that is achieved through membership of the EA Multilateral Recognition Agreement. They are advised by a formally constituted Advisory Board (EAAB) which is representative of the stakeholders of accreditation at the European EA level. The organisations in each country are not necessarily capable of carrying tests against either of the 2 EU directives – they are simply the actual bodies that ensure consistency. They are bodies that ‘test-the-testers’.

6. CONCLUSION

A brief overview of the European market access requirements and directives for wood processing industry was given in this article.

BiH has forests that are being logged for timber – mainly as oak and beech. Whilst much of this cut may be exported, a significant amount is used in value-added wood products. These need to meet consumer moves of sustainability. Sustainability of timber resources in a forest environment is a thread that links directly with logging through supply and manufacturing to the end user.

The relevance of the Wood Excellence Center (WEC) in Zenica is underlined by the fact that the requirements of private companies has led to this project in hand. SME will profit from the improved knowledge at WEC what will result in the further development of their business and an additional demand on qualified wood processing specialists.

7. REFERENCES

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