

TEST AND RESEARCH CENTRES FOR WOOD PRODUCTS AS A CHALLENGE FOR B&H WOOD PROCESSING SECTOR

Ismar Alagić, Ph.D., Assistant Professor
Municipality of Tešanj/University of Zenica, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering,
Tešanj/Zenica,
Bosnia and Herzegovina

ABSTRACT

The role of products from the forest and the companies that process and sell them in BiH is enormous. The strategic importance of BiH's wood industry is internationally recognized. At present stage production orientated companies do not have business techniques and required knowledge for testing of wood products. 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 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. 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.

Most countries in the European Union have their own institute or 'centre' for the Wood & Wood Products Industry. Most of these were originally supported and often founded by government or regional states and have over time developed their own test facilities. 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. 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. 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.

The strategic importance of BiH's wood industry is internationally recognized. Significant number of companies does have possibility to produce furniture 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) 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 [1].

There are several initiatives for establishment of Wood Excellence Center in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since 2006, the activities of University of Zenica on establishing of Wood Excellence Center have been conducted in collaboration with the University of Applied Sciences Berne, School of Architecture, Civil and Wood Engineering HSB, Switzerland. The project aims to increase the expertise of lecturers and researchers of the University of Zenica to implement demand driven aR&D and advanced training activities for the BiH wood processing sector. The main project activities involve the adaptation of international methods and materials for the local environment, the training of lecturers and researchers at HSB, and the implementation of the first aR&D and training activities in collaboration with the local industry [2]. Final problem of wood processing SMEs in BiH from field of testing and laboratory services for woodprocessing through WEC will be resolved by MENTOR project implemented by ZEDA Agency and financially supported by EU Delegation in BiH. Second major partner of WEC in project implementation will be University of Zenica with its vast experience in material testing and certification. The Wood Excellence Center (WEC) project aims to increase the chances of export oriented woodprocessing firms in BiH to implement demand driven a R&D and advanced testing activities for the BiH wood processing sector. The implementation of first stage of WEC project will be done in collaboration with the local industry, University of Zenica and backstopped by Swiss partner- HSB.

ARTECO – Wood Technology Center was established in January 2009. through the EI Project which is financed by the USAID and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA). ARTECO Ltd. is located in the premises of Artisan, a wood processing company, in Tešanj, BiH. Its mission is to provide technical services to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the wood processing sector in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) to increase the competitiveness of these SMEs. ARTECO offers critical and complex services that are not easily accessible and will be a driving force of economic development in the BiH wood processing industry through application of new technologies [3].

2. TEST CENTRES FOR FURNITURE PRODUCTS IN EUROPE

This section deals with the ultimate value-added wooden products for consumer purposes. It presents a set of Test Centres that work within the furniture industry and in some cases also offer building products certification to fulfil a complete commercial service. The EU furniture industry accounts for about half the world furniture production with a production value of 82 bio € and as a labour-intensive industry it provides employment for around one million people. The furniture sector is a basic industry in most of the industrialised countries, representing in general between 2 and 4% of the production value of the manufacturing sector. There are no specific Directives for furniture but several Directives have implications for the furniture sector.

The main environmental Directives which directly affect the furniture industry are industrial emissions - Integrated Product Policy (IPPC), Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC), and waste (Packaging and Packaging Waste). Waste products from furniture production have been eliminated from the hazardous waste list, but some products used by furniture manufacturers remain, such as varnishes. The EMAS schemes are already used in the sector and furniture industry is also concerned by the Community eco-label award scheme. The eco-label scheme is designed to promote products which have a reduced environmental impact compared with other products in the same product group and to provide consumers with accurate and scientifically based information and guidance on products. A feasibility study on a EU eco-label for furniture can be found on the European Commission's environment website. Organic solvents are used in a large number of industrial processes and, due to their volatility, are emitted either directly or indirectly into the air in many of these processes. A number of organic compounds are directly harmful to health. The legislation concerned is Council Directive 1999/13/EC on the limitation of emissions of Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC) due to the use of organic solvents in certain activities and installations. The emission limit values set in the Directive were determined for each industry sector on the basis of 'best available technologies'. Therefore, the values differ from one production process to another or depend on the installation capacity. In order to help businesses in the furniture sector comply with this legislation the Federation of European Furniture Manufacturers (UEA) - with financial support from the European Commission - has developed a 'best

practice guide' to help businesses check if they comply with the legislation. Follow this link to view the best practice guide.

Fire safety is a crucial issue for upholstered furniture manufacturers and their suppliers. It causes difficulties for the industry in so far as fire safety regulations in UK and Republic of Ireland conflict with the goal of reducing the utilisation of certain flame retardants that are proven or are suspect to be dangerous for the environment and/or the human health. As the furniture sector is not covered by any specific legislation, upholstered furniture fire safety issues falls under the General Product Safety Directive 2001/95/CE and is under the responsibility of the Health and Consumer Protection DG.

The prime source for these centres is recorded by the UEA (Union Européenne d'Ameublement) in Brussels. This association has set up EURIFI (European Association of Furniture Technology Institutes). Whilst EURIFI does not include all the premier Furniture Test centres, its prime task is to ensure conformity of access and equality of test programmes, mutual inter-acceptability of results along with the formulation of joint research and product activity that can be developed within the EC concept. These centres have been assessed and accredited according to the EA rules and accreditation bodies. Currently 15 Institutes and Centres are a part of EURIFI, essentially one for each major EU country with new ones welcomed as they evolve.

3. 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.

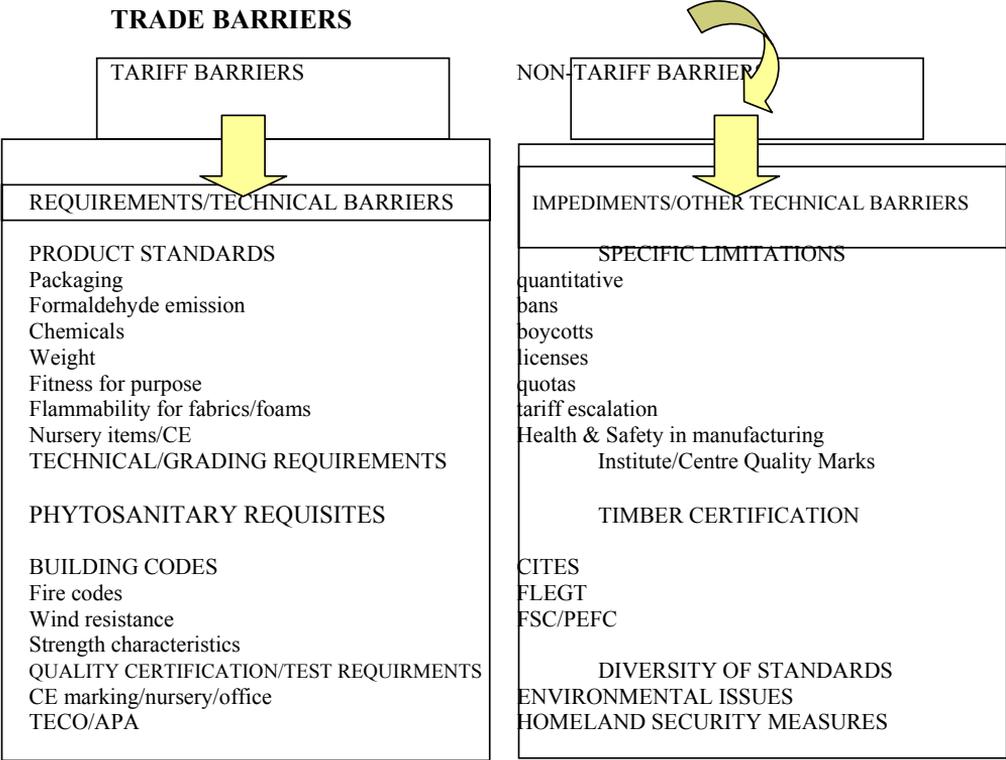


Figure 1. Technical Trade Barrier for Wood processing industry.

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.

4. 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’.

5. CONCLUSION

A brief overview of the European test centres for wood processing industry was given in this article. 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 BiH and the same conclusion could be drawn for whole Western Balkan region limits producers from further expansion. Without improving the situation in this area, domestic wood processing companies will not be able to make any significant penetration to the foreign markets and increase production growth rates in the area of value-added wood products. Final problem of wood processing SMEs will be resolved by Wood Excellence Center and its services [4]

6. REFERENCES

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