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STANDARDIZATION OF TEST METHODS

This documents contains proposals from the Rapporteur on Metrology (Ms. U. Lahteenmaki) on future activities relating to the preparation of guidelines on methodologies for measuring procedures (see documents TRADE/WP.6/1999/15 and TRADE/WP.6/2000/16)

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Having discussed the Draft document with experts working in accredited testing laboratories as well as in national metrology institutes, at home and abroad, I may summarise my comments as follows:

In the first place there is a wide unanimity that the draft document is dealing with a most important issue in the conformity assessment context. It is also recognised that developing high quality and reliable test methods appropriate for a specific intended use is a task for qualified experts knowledgeable about the purpose of the testing and the measurements to be executed as well as the applicable metrological requirements.

*/ This paper is being submitted without formal editing.

At present the competence of testing laboratories to generate technically valid results is officially recognised by accreditation bodies, applying the international standard ISO/IEC 17025 in their assessment. This standard contains all the requirements considered necessary for demonstrating the quality and technical competence of testing laboratories, including test methods and method validation.

The regional (CEN/CENELEC) and international (ISO/IEC) standardisation organisations are drafting standardised test methods for products, materials and processes on one hand, and standards on guides for expressing uncertainty in measurements on the other. There are also quality assurance standards such as ISO 10012-1 Quality assurance requirements for measuring equipment. Part 1: Metrological confirmation system for measuring equipment and ISO 10012-2 Quality assurance for measuring equipment -- Part 2: Guidelines for control of measurement processes or the standards ISO 5725 on Accuracy (trueness and precision) of measurement methods and results (Parts 1 ... 6). The OIML is working on metrological requirements and testing, verification and calibration methods for measuring instruments. Also the accreditation bodies (ILAC/EA) are drafting guidance or application documents for different sectors of testing and for estimation of measurement uncertainty, working together with the professional laboratory communities. This list is not close to being comprehensive.

There is a wide range of work done but also a wide range of problems to solve. I agree with Dr. Zemskov on his proposal to create a "framework" document, which would be helpful in unifying the form and content of developed or revised testing methods. It should be based on a review of the present Draft Guidelines on Methodology for Measuring Procedures, taking full account of the available generic standards or documents such as terminology (VIM - International vocabulary of basic and general terms in metrology) and the definitions given in GUM, Guide to the Expression of Uncertainty in Measurement and the ISO/IEC 17025: 1999 (general requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories). Also, the rationale of third party certification of test methods by metrology services should be reviewed in light of the present practices of validation and control of test methods.

Considering the world-wide interest for such a document, it would be necessary to continue the work as a joint activity with the international standardisation and metrology organisations.

In case the elaboration of the document should be considered in the first place as a support to the transition countries in their efforts for technical harmonisation in conformity related procedures, especially the recognition of accredited test results, a more general policy document could be feasible. Also, in that case, however, the document should include the main requirements of those international standards that are underpinning the international recognition of accreditation and conformity assessment results.

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