

Welcome address by Bergdis Ellertsdottir

Deputy Secretary General, EFTA

EFTA Workshop on Certification and Marking for Europe

Brussels, 11 June 2008

Good Morning, Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Firstly, I must convey apologies on behalf of our Secretary General, Kåre Bryn, who was due to open this workshop this morning, but unfortunately could not attend due to a broken arm. He sends his good wishes for a successful workshop.

It is a pleasure for me, as Deputy Secretary General of EFTA, to open this workshop, entitled “Certification and Marking for Europe”, organised in cooperation with the European Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry, and with the European Parliament, more specifically with MEP Christel Schaldemose, who will speak first in the afternoon session.

I am very happy that Director General Heinz Zourek is here, to open the workshop together with me.

Some may say that this event has outgrown the format of a workshop, and they may be right. The interest was greater and the number of stakeholders higher than we expected when we started planning. We have tried to include as many as possible without making it too large. I hope we have your understanding for that.

I wish a warm welcome to all participants today and a special welcome to all speakers and our chair, Vincent Merken, who has agreed to take on the difficult task of steering discussions on a complex issue and, in deference to the other speakers, **stopping those**

who do not respect the time frame allocated to them. Perhaps this task may prove unnecessary?

As you all know the background for this workshop is the EFTA Study on Certification and Marks in Europe.

However, before I explain to you why we carried out this study, I would like to express my sincere thanks to some people outside EFTA who have contributed a lot to this project. They have spent a considerable amount of time and resources, assisting both EFTA and our consultant, Chris Evans

This thank you goes to the Steering Committee of the study, consisting of :

Hubert van Bremen, Eurobusiness

Ivar Jachwitz, representing the three European Standardisation Bodies

Jacques McMillan, DG ENTERPRISE, assisted by Doris Gradenegger

Jan Basten, Eurolab

Tania Vandenberghe, ANEC

and last but not least

Johannes Thorsteinsson, the Chair of the Steering Committee, appointed by the EFTA TBT Committee. Since he left the EFTA Secretariat in 2006 Johannes has been willing to share with his successor, Tore, his knowledge and ideas and for that we are grateful. Johannes and Tore started to talk together about this study back in 2001 - a good example of what perspective you need when you work at European level.

I should also thank my own staff, as without them we would not have been here.

The full report from the study was published at the end of April and is available on the EFTA webpage. Today you have received the Executive Summary. You will hear more about the findings of the study from our consultant, in a short while.

Why a study on certification and marks in Europe?

We have invested a lot of resources in building up a European market for the free movement of products, through harmonised European product legislation and European standards. And with a lot of success.

Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway are integrated in the single market through the Agreement on the European Economic Area, better known as the EEA. Important parts of the product legislation adopted at European level have been included in bilateral agreements between Switzerland and the European Union. The EFTA countries are a part of European standardisation.

For many products, the legislation prescribes mandatory CE marking. CE marking should be the only passport needed for products, that comply with European product legislation, to circulate freely in Europe.

However, the manufacturers of CE-marked products may still encounter a need for additional certification and marking of products at national level. This may be voluntary, but is often still perceived as de facto mandatory for manufacturers, in some markets or in some countries.

This contributes to a fragmentation of the Single Market, contrary to the objective of the European Economic Area. The EFTA TBT Committee and the EFTA Council wanted to make a contribution by gathering facts and suggesting actions that could help to reduce this fragmentation.

The main objective of the study was therefore to create a better understanding of crucial parts of the market for certification and marks in Europe, providing a better basis for a **follow-up policy discussion**. This workshop today is a part of this follow-up.

The political context changed during the study, due to the Mattel case which made headlines in the midst of the discussions in the European Parliament on a New Legal Framework for the marketing of products. I am sure Mr. Zourek will say more about these issues.

A few words on the background, the scope and the aim of this workshop.

The background is the EFTA Study on “Certification and Marks in Europe”, in the context of the New Legal Framework for the marketing of products, the CE marking system and the European Commission’s consultation on a possible future European Consumer Safety Mark.

The scope of the Workshop is the New Approach Sectors **except certification and marking of construction products**. This exclusion does not mean that we think constructions products are not important, but because the Constructions Products Directive is so different.

The Political aim of the Workshop is to secure free movement of safe products in Europe. There is a balance to be struck between free movement and the level of certification.

We know that we cannot find all answers in this workshop. The intention today is not to agree on any “resolution”. EFTA will in the near future produce a paper summing up the experiences and the ideas emerging from our project on certification and marking, **as EFTA sees it**. BUT, we are not alone in Europe, and will of course listen very carefully to what is said today.

EFTA needs your assistance, through this workshop, to clarify how we can improve the **free movement of safe products** in Europe **with a special focus on what role certification and marking can and should play**.

The workshop is called Certification and Marking for Europe. Why “**for**” Europe? Because we depend on certification and marking in Europe, we cannot do without it. But, as with all other issues discussed under the single market agenda, we need to put on critical glasses when we focus on a specific issue.

The focus today is on certification and marking, so the critical look will go in that direction. This is why we have many certifiers here.

The European Commission is these days assessing the possibility of a new European Consumer Safety Mark. I have been told that we will today hear that there is already **too much** voluntary but de facto **mandatory** certification and marking in Europe. If that is the case, it may be that certification and marking in its totality no longer acts “for” Europe but “against” Europe. We then need to make a correction in order to get the certification package right within the New Legal framework for the marketing of goods in Europe.

I now wish you all a very fruitful day’s work and look forward to the contributions, from speakers and participants.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your attention.