CONFIDENCE IS KEY

"Polish conformity assessment bodies are very well prepared for performing their tasks in the conformity assessment system. They have the necessary resources: well-trained and experienced personnel, infrastructure and equipment, and credible conformity assessment procedures relevant to specific fields of activity," **LUCYNA OLBORSKA**, Director of the Polish Centre for Accreditation (PCA), tells "Polish Market."

PM **Do you often hear the question of what accreditation is actually about?**

Not in the environment in which I work. But I understand that accreditation issues may seem more complex to a broader audience. The basic goal of accreditation is recognising the competence of conformity assessment bodies – certification bodies, inspection bodies and testing laboratories – to perform specific activities. Accreditation rules are defined by international standards and guidelines containing specific requirements for both accreditation bodies and conformity assessment bodies. Receiving accreditation means that the accredited organisation has been assessed according to these documents. Standards are omnipresent and we are often not even aware of their universality. The results of accreditation pertain to all areas of social life.

PM **The leitmotif of this year's World Accreditation Day on June 9 was "Accreditation.** Delivering a Safer World." How do these two areas overlap? And how do you view accreditation results in today's world?

Expectations when it comes to safety are something that concerns us all in some respect. Even if we think that it does not concern us our individual actions have an impact on collective safety. It is impossible to omit safety matters, be it in the work environment or when it comes to the safety of products, transport and food. Statistical data show that the real-world situation does not always measure up to our expectations. Bringing the existing situation into line with the expectations is extremely important for governments, regulators and businesses in an effort to enhance the safety of people at work, in private life, when travelling and in all other spheres of our social and daily life. After all, every community needs precisely defined standards to ensure its problem-free functioning.

Meeting specific standards, conformity assessment and accreditation are well-tried and recognised tools which contribute to enhancing safety in the world. The use of the accreditation system and its requirements influences our daily life by, for example, ensuring our safety at work, safe vehicle designs, the safety of products, technical equipment and building materials, safe and healthy food, reliable management systems, the protection of personal data and cybersecurity.

PM **How can accreditation help to increase the effectiveness of activities carried out at local and central government level? Is accreditation properly applied in Poland by local authorities and public institutions?**

Acting effectively means reaching one's goals while at the same time eliminating unnecessary risk and the associated cost of wrong choices or decisions. The public administration sector and local governments can and should use the Polish accreditation system and the results of accredited conformity assessments in their activities and when

taking decisions in the area of protecting public interests, such as health, general safety and safety at work, environmental protection and consumer protection. The results of accredited tests, inspections and certification are a credible basis in the decision process. Relying on this verified basis, the public administration sector and local governments may avoid many wrong decisions, for example in the process of public procurement, and operate effectively in the interest of us all as society. The accreditation system can also be used directly by central and local government bodies in auditing or assessing the competence of individual organisations for the purpose of their authorisation or notification in a specific area of activity.

PM How are Polish conformity assessment bodies prepared for their role? Is accreditation only a formality for them? Do they adhere after their accreditation to the standards required by PCA?

Polish conformity assessment bodies are very well prepared for performing their tasks in the conformity assessment system. They have the necessary resources: well-trained and experienced personnel, infrastructure and equipment, and credible conformity assessment procedures relevant to specific fields of activity. To receive accreditation, an organisation needs to develop and implement a management system complying with the requirements of a relevant international accreditation standard and prove its competence to carry out specific conformity assessment procedures, like for example testing and product certification. In accreditation, competence is understood as the ability to use knowledge and skills in practice. It is essentially the main object of assessment in the accreditation process: observing the organisation's activity in the specific conformity assessment area and assessing whether the set and required goal is achieved. Accreditation assessments are seen by conformity assessment bodies as a rigorous verification of their preparation for conformity assessment tasks. This expert rigorous approach, based on identical and uniform requirements of international standards applied by all accreditation bodies, is the main reason why accreditation results and results of accredited activity, like for example reports from tests and conformity certificates, are widely recognised across the world. After granting accreditation , PCA supervises the accredited conformity assessment bodies and in doing so applies the same assessment rules as in the accreditation process. The assessments, just like those in the accreditation process, are designed not only to verify that the bodies meet the requirements, but also to ensure that assessment teams provide value added to the organisations. PCA entrusts the task of assessing the bodies to teams of assessors who are reliable experts in relevant conformity assessment fields.

PM To what extent is the business community aware of the role of accreditation? Do managers see it as a quality assurance tool?

I think that managers are aware that having a management system certified by accredited conformity assessment bodies adds to the company's advantage and competitiveness on the market.

The business community's awareness of the role of accreditation in improving public safety, supporting quality and the competitiveness of Polish industry, and boosting foreign trade grows every year. The number of economic sectors where services of accredited conformity assessment bodies are used is on the rise. One example which proves this is the growing interest of managers in implementing information security management systems in compliance with the ISO/IEC 27001 standard and business continuity management systems in compliance with ISO 22301. The ISO/IEC 27001 standard ensures systematic approach to managing sensitive data, which makes the company secure. Information security management systems (ISMS) cover people, processes and IT systems, and support

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small, medium and large firms of any sector in protecting their information resources. Business continuity management systems (BCMS) enable the firms to prevent dangerous incidents, decrease the likelihood of their occurrence and be ready to adequately respond if they do occur, thus reducing the risk and potential damage resulting from the incident. The system makes it possible to understand and identify essential threats for the operation of the business. This classic example allows us to say that managers are well aware that by maintaining management systems certified by accredited conformity assessment bodies in their organisation they enhance its advantage and competitiveness on the market.

PM Is it possible to indicate economic sectors where accreditation is particularly justified and should have the widest application?

One of the key advantages of the conformity assessment and accreditation systems is that they can be applied in almost every sector of industry and business context: from food safety and environmental safety to construction and crime investigation.

There are now thousands of various accredited conformity assessment standards. In some sectors, accreditation is legally required. And in most sectors, even if the standards are voluntary, organisations are expected to apply them. Standards are indispensable for the development of an organisation in almost every economic sector. They not only regulate the proper functioning of the organisation, but also add to its competitive advantage and strengthen the reputation of itself and its products. There is also a strictly economic benefit involved in the form of transaction cost reductions or the development of new ties contributing to higher production efficiency.

PM Is accreditation a guarantee of the quality of conformity assessment services provided by laboratories and certification bodies?

I can definitely say with full responsibility that a crucial part of building public confidence in goods and services is their assessment conducted by conformity assessment bodies. The bodies undergo a rigorous process of assessment which checks whether they meet a number of detailed requirements directly related not only to the testing and certification activity they conduct, but also their management systems, which are expected to ensure the constant improvement of the organisations. PCA is not liable for the activities conducted by the accredited bodies. However, the requirements that the accredited bodies have to meet in the process of assessment by PCA mean that there is definitely high certainty that in practice they will be taking care to provide credible and quality services.

Thanks to accreditation, one can be certain that goods and services launched on the market, irrespective of their country of origin, meet quality and safety standards. •