European co-operation for Accreditation

Accreditation in Europe

Facilitating regulatory compliance and international trade






ACCREDITATION

TESTING

INSPECTION

CALIBRATION

VERIFICATION

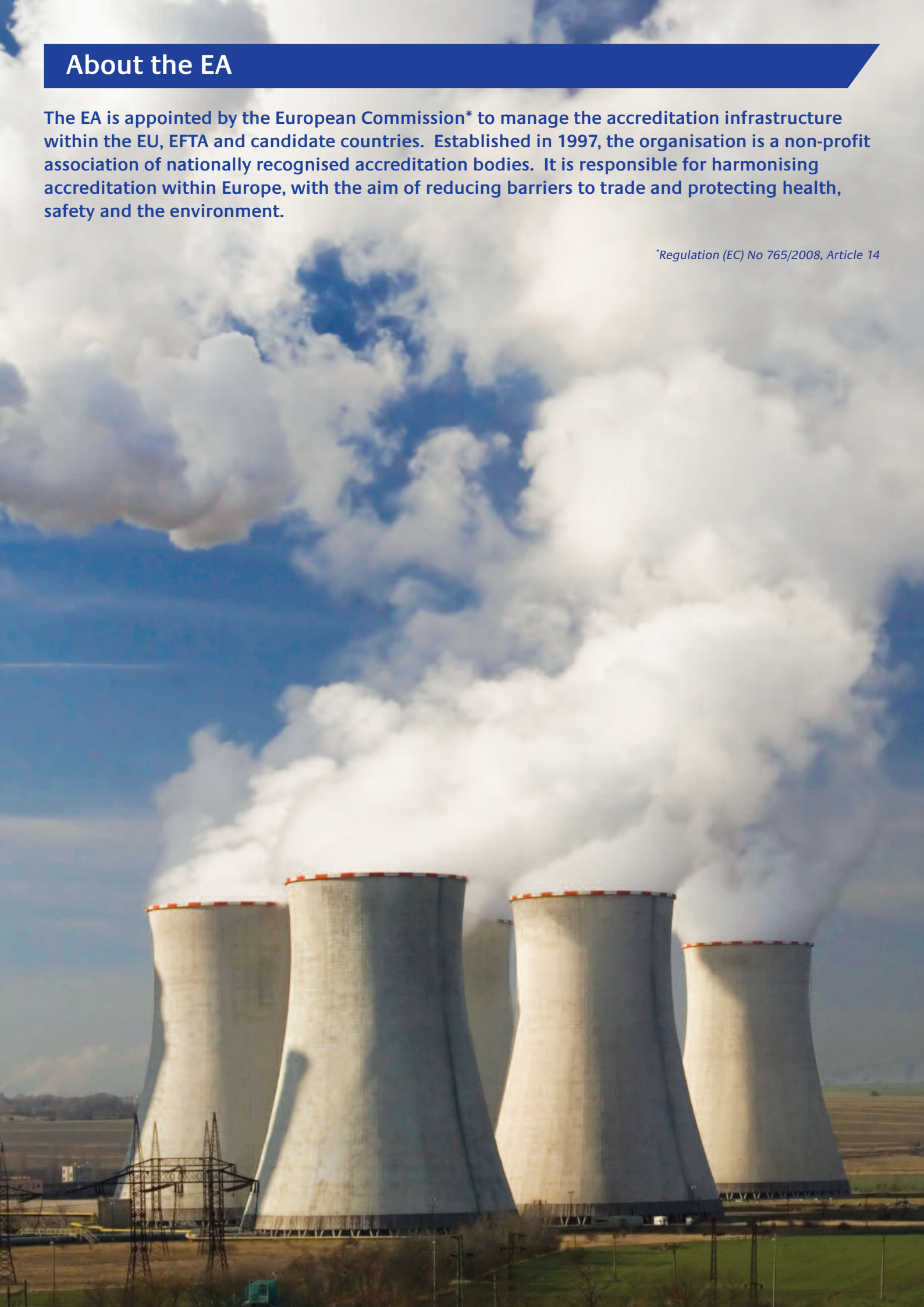
CERTIFICATION

EXAMINATION

About the EA

The EA is appointed by the European Commission* to manage the accreditation infrastructure within the EU, EFTA and candidate countries. Established in 1997, the organisation is a non-profit association of nationally recognised accreditation bodies. It is responsible for harmonising accreditation within Europe, with the aim of reducing barriers to trade and protecting health, safety and the environment.

**Regulation (EC) No 765/2008, Article 14*



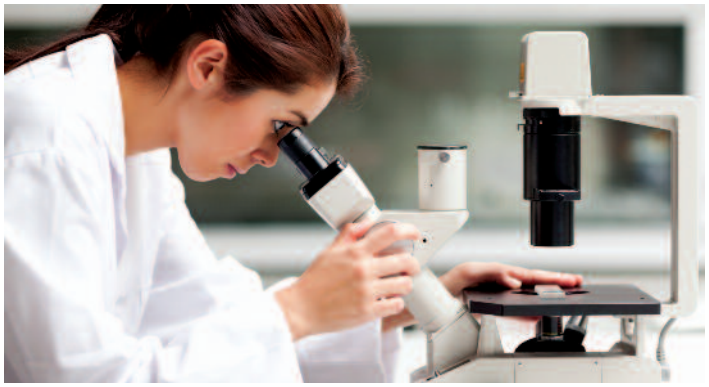
What is accreditation?

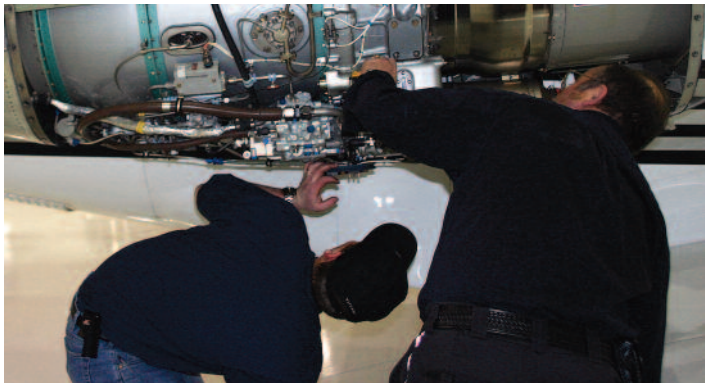
All countries, and all market sectors, have seen an increase in the number of technical regulations, standards, testing and certification procedures. Generally, these are introduced to meet the requirements of quality and safety that consumers, businesses, and regulators demand of goods and services.

The increasing number of specified standards has seen a corresponding growth in the number of organisations providing third party evaluation of conformity and compliance with these standards.

The **accreditation process** determines the technical competence and integrity of organisations that offer testing, examination, verification, inspection, calibration and certification services (collectively known as **conformity assessment**). Accreditation operates in the public interest across all market sectors, providing a transparent and impartial assessment of these services against internationally recognised standards and other national or sectoral requirements.

Together, conformity assessment and accreditation are important parts of a nation's quality infrastructure, along with metrology and standardisation. They build confidence that goods and services, processes, management systems and the work of individuals comply with national and international standards and regulations. They also assist in the risk-management and decision-making of manufacturers and regulators.





Who benefits from accreditation?

For businesses, accurate calibration, measurement and testing, performed in accordance with best practice, can limit errors and product failure, control production costs and contribute to an innovative environment. Accreditation is therefore an essential tool for decision-making, risk management and supplier selection. It can also provide a competitive advantage in domestic markets through access to public sector contracts, and also overseas with greater acceptance in export markets.

For national governments and regulators, accreditation is the preferred mechanism for identifying competent bodies to implement government policies and regulations aimed at safe-guarding the public and building public confidence in activities that impact on such fields as health, welfare, security, the environment, education, and financial services.

For consumers accreditation helps to increase access to goods and services of consistent and reliable quality and safety.

The importance of accreditation—some examples

Accreditation is an on-going process of assessment of a conformity assessment body to ensure that its performance is: **impartial, technically competent,** to **the required standard, appropriately resourced,** and can be **sustained.**

These are all vital attributes of testing, examination, calibration, verification, inspection and certification carried out in the areas of activity listed below. These are just some examples of how accreditation is helping to safeguard the health and safety of individuals and to avoid unnecessary costs or potential liability claims.

Environment

- **Plant health inspections.** These are essential to reducing the risks of importing harmful organisms such as viruses, bacteria, fungi, and insects that can threaten indigenous plants and ecosystems.

- **Improving environmental management.** It is increasingly important for businesses to show that they are implementing an effective environmental management system that delivers the benefits not only of improved environmental performance but also of better management and improved regulatory compliance.

Safety and security

- **Crime scene investigation.** To avoid unnecessary additional costs to all parties within the criminal justice system, let alone miscarriages of justice, it is vital that the examination of crime scenes and the collection and analysis of evidence is carried out correctly and to the highest standards in order to maintain the integrity of the materials being collected and their chain of custody.

- **Telecommunications security.** The electronic transfer of information and data includes much that is sensitive for personal, commercial or financial reasons. Telecommunications service providers must be able to demonstrate the integrity and confidentiality of their information security management systems.

Health and welfare

- **Supply of clean drinking water.** Laboratory analysis of samples of drinking water and the associated reporting of the results must meet regulatory requirements in order that decisions about public health issues are based on the best and most accurate information possible.

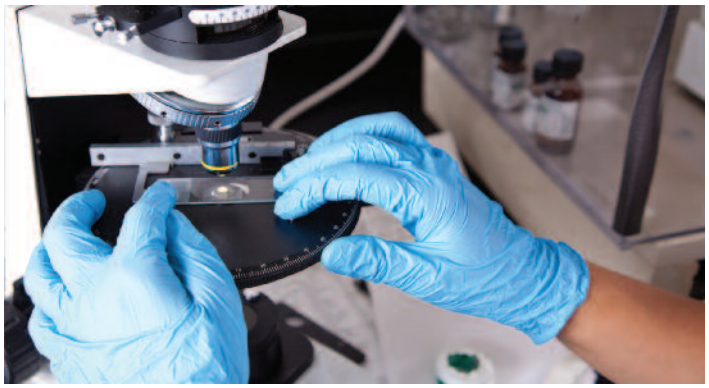
- **Medical diagnostics and testing.** Tens of thousands of samples are taken and medical tests carried out every day. Patients, doctors and the health commissioners must be able to rely on the correct handling of samples and reporting of results in order that the right diagnosis is made and appropriate course of treatment prescribed.

Farming and food

- **Ensuring the safety and authenticity of food.** Consumer confidence not only in the safety of food but also in information about the environmental impact and trading ethics of its production and supply can only be gained through the appropriate application of food safety management systems, supported by credible testing and inspection regimes.

Commerce and finance

- **Removing technical barriers to trade.** Access to new markets is made easier because of the international recognition of accreditation and the equivalence and reliability of conformity assessment services. Once tested or certified by an accredited conformity assessment body, products and services may be exported without the need for re-testing or re-certification for each new market.



National Accreditation Bodies

Since 1 January 2010 it has been a requirement that every EU Member State should formally appoint a single National Accreditation Body to be the sole provider of accreditation services for that country. Each National Accreditation Body works in the public's interest, ensuring that organisations supplying conformity assessment services such as testing, examination, verification, inspection, calibration and certification are fit to do so. In this way, the certificates, reports and other conformity assessment results that they issue can be relied upon to support the provision of products, processes and services across all sectors of economic activity that comply with voluntary or mandatory regional, national or international standards or requirements.

In Europe, National Accreditation Bodies are organised under the auspices of the European co-operation for Accreditation (EA). EA members may also be members of the two organisations with worldwide representation—the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC), and the International Accreditation Forum (IAF).

European co-operation for Accreditation

The EA Multilateral Agreement (MLA) reducing barriers to trade

The EA MLA is a signed agreement between EA accreditation body members to recognise and accept the equivalence and reliability of their individual accreditation services and thus the certificates and reports issued by the organisations they accredit (conformity assessment results).

The EA MLA is fully in line with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade which strongly encourages countries to recognise the results of other countries' conformity assessments such as testing, examination, inspection, calibration, verification and certification.

National Accreditation Bodies are admitted to the MLA only after stringent evaluation of their operations by a peer evaluation team to determine continued compliance with ISO/IEC 17011, the internationally recognised standard for accreditation bodies.

Market confidence in the EA MLA and the conformity assessment results provided by organisations accredited by EA MLA signatories supports the free movement of goods and services in Europe and the rest of the world by acting as a 'passport for trade' through elimination of the need for products and services to be re-tested, re-calibrated, re-inspected or re-certified in each country into which they are imported and sold.

The EA MLA is recognised at international level by the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC), and the International Accreditation Forum (IAF). Reports or certificates provided by organisations accredited by EA MLA signatories are also recognized by the signatories of the ILAC and IAF multilateral agreements.

European co-operation for Accreditation (EA)

Appointed by the European Commission to manage the accreditation infrastructure within the EU, EFTA and candidate countries, the main purpose of the EA is to ensure that the results of conformity assessment services in one country are accepted by regulators and the marketplace in another country without further control.

The EA's main roles are:

- to serve as a cooperative association of National Accreditation Bodies in order to achieve a coherent European accreditation system that operates in the general European interest;
- to define and harmonise accreditation in Europe by ensuring common interpretation and application of the standards used by Members;
- to ensure transparency of Members' operations and results issued;
- to maintain multilateral agreement on mutual recognition between accreditation activities and reciprocal acceptance of accredited conformity assessment services and results;
- to manage peer evaluation of National Accreditation Bodies consistent with international practices;
- to act as a technical resource on European policies on accreditation.

Full members of EA are the National Accreditation Bodies from EU and EFTA countries or in a country formally identified by the EU or EFTA as a candidate country for EU or EFTA membership.

Associate members of EA are National Accreditation Bodies legally appointed as such by countries or economies identified by EU or EFTA as potential candidate countries or economies for EU or EFTA membership or identified by EU in the European Commission's European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) as countries or economies of particular importance.

Further information

For further information about the EA please visit the EA website where you can also find contact information about individual European National Accreditation Bodies and links to their websites.

www.european-accreditation.org

Information about Regulation (EC) No 765/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council can be accessed via the following link :

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ: L:2008:218:0030:0047:en:PDF

European co-operation for Accreditation

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