

TRADE AGREEMENTS AND MRAS – AN UPDATE

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Abstract

In the past decade, a variety of voluntary mutual recognition arrangements (MRA's) have been concluded among peer organizations – accreditors of testing and calibration laboratories, accreditors of management system certifiers, and national measurement institutes. These arrangements are based on peer review and recognition of the technical competence of participating organizations; they are intended to facilitate trade by establishing confidence among users of measurement and test results. In parallel, governments in the United States, Europe, Asia and the Americas have negotiated a series of important trade agreements that provide, in the telecommunications sector at least, for mutual recognition of product approvals of regulated products by qualified conformity assessment bodies. These agreements bind regulators to accept test reports and certificates generated by foreign conformity assessment bodies whose competence is assured by their home governments. While it is clear to practitioners – accreditors, national measurement institutes – that voluntary MRA's can provide the technical underpinning to support regulator confidence in the results of measurements and tests – no formal link has been made to date between government-to-government agreements and these voluntary MRA's. This presentation discusses ongoing efforts in the United States to link the results of voluntary MRA's to government-to-government trade agreements. It discusses the both the difficulties and advantages of building confidence among regulators in the effectiveness of voluntary MRA's and lays out recommended steps for developing a policy and operational framework that can both improve regulatory efficiencies and facilitate trade.