

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

first of all, thanks to OECD for organizing this fantastic event and thanks for having taken up this important topic “the elimination of technical barriers to trade” after the workshop which we have had in Berlin four years ago.

I am an economist with a trade focus. So, when I got in contact the first time with trade issues I rarely have noticed that there is something else than tariffs. But since then I learned that trade is hampered in many cases to a much bigger extent by standards, norms and an internationally recognised conformity assessment system than by tariffs.

When it comes to food products the EU requests any exporting country to show a reliable conformity assessment structure. Recently the case occurred that the EU banned the import of certain fish products from a West African country because a part of the national system in the field of testing was not working according to EU requirements. Today the necessary tests have to be performed in East Africa until internationally accredited testing facilities in West Africa can do the job. Before the accreditation of the testing facility in West Africa is declared, important time is lost day by day especially for a fresh product like fish and enormous costs occur for transport and external testing.

But technical barriers to trade are also a hurdle for industrialised countries. That is why the EU Commission has decided in its recently published market access strategy that the new focus of EU engagement will be to eliminate technical barriers to trade. One way to do so are so called Mutual Recognition Agreements. Here we talk about the mutual acceptance of conformity assessments. I guess it was Japan that did not allow the import of European skis and explained that the Japanese snow differs from the European one. So ski-friends would get stuck in the Japanese snow with European skis.

But while we talk about the governmentally controlled conformity assessment and the corresponding quality infrastructure a new phenomenon became even more important: Private Standards. I know that there is a proper session on private standards. That is why I will only briefly mention this topic. Germany as the first or second trading nation worldwide stands for international ISO standards and the internationally linked conformity assessment structure. Unfortunately, private standards are only sometimes linked to this international conformity assessment system, but not always. In many cases exporters do not only have to be certified according to the internationally agreed ISO standards, get conform with the technical regulations of the importing country, but they also have to show compliance to certain specific standards requested by retailers. In some cases these retailers have their proper certification structure and in some cases retailer standards contradict with ISO standards requested by other importers or retailers. We should support the usage of international standards and the internationally backed conformity assessment structures. This way we promote more clarity for consumers as they can really differentiate between different products of the same kind due to one implemented standardisation system and not competing ones with different not totally transparent criteria and also differing verification and certification procedures. We also assure that every country, industrialised ones, but also developing ones decide commonly on product standards and the rules for the respective conformity assessment.

Technical barriers to trade including the just mentioned private standards have received more and more attention in international trade negotiations. Many critical cases have been brought to WTO panels. I guess that everybody remembers the shrimp-turtle case or the import ban

for “Robben” products of EU. But unfortunately the progress of the WTO round remains limited. Although a new momentum has come into the negotiations with the change of the US government and although the recent talks in Delhi were encouraging we still have a long way to go before we finish the Doha round.

The financial and economic crisis shows how the international markets are linked with each other. The crisis started with a house price bubble which affected some financial institutes and has finally become an international crisis with harsh effects for the real economy. It shows how interwoven national economies are. The negative effects for developing countries were a long time limited, but with a certain time lag the crisis has come over even rarely internationally integrated countries via the strong worldwide trade relations. Fortunately, the crisis was not abused as a reason for more protectionism to the extent feared. But the crisis hampers progress on the WTO level. None of us might imagine the dramatic consequences of a raise towards protectionism. We have to show our commitment towards an opening up of our markets and the elimination of trade barriers especially during the current crisis. Technical barriers to trade are an important part of it.

In parallel or contrary to the WTO negotiations a thick spinning net (“dichtes Spinnennetz”) of bilateral free trade agreements which cover far more topics than the WTO agreements do was woven by their members. These bilateral agreements reduce the transparency of international trading rules. They contradict with the goal of one common and fair trade regulation for all. Bilateral free trade agreements are mostly concluded between differently strong negotiation partners. Consequently these agreements are often biased towards the stronger one. Exemptions are the Economic Partnership Agreements which the EU currently negotiates with ACP countries. Firstly, via these agreements the market access to the EU for ACP countries was assured after the respective exemption at WTO level, the cotonu-“waiver”, could not be prolonged anymore. Secondly, the wide coverage of these agreements should not lead to an extended market opening but to a deeper regional integration. This includes the intraregional elimination of technical barriers to trade. Thirdly, the implementation of these trade deals is facilitated by additional aid for trade.

Germany as one of the core donors of Aid for Trade stands to its commitment to reach its share of the target of annually 2 billion Euros from EU and EU member states until 2010. We will reach the respective German contribution to this target and we are already close to it. One important pillar of German “aid for trade” is the support of the national or regional quality infrastructure.

Germany supports via its specialised implementing agencies, first of all PTB, the German National Metrology Institute which has in parallel strong stakes in the in the international QI system.

The German engagement covers nearly all regional integration communities. We work in parallel on the international, continental, regional and national level. This way we assure coherence of our support and contribute to regional integration and an enhanced south-south trade.

The focal area of the German engagement towards the support of quality infrastructure is Africa. There we follow a pan-african concept. The African quality infrastructure derives out of the NEPAD action plan. Until now three pan-african QI institutions are in place. ARSO for standardisation, AFRIMETS the pan-african metrology system – meanwhile any national African CMC will be declared via Afrimets – and AFRAC the inter African accreditation

organisation. On the regional level we support the upgrading of the regional quality infrastructure of MAGHREB, ECOWAS, EAC, SADC and CEMAC. Additionally we implement some national projects to complement our regional engagement.

Within these regional organisations different solutions for an enhanced cooperation in accreditation were chosen. We are especially proud about our support to SADCA the first regionally operating accreditation body worldwide which is member of ILAC and IAF. In other regions like the EAC we have one strong national accreditation body which is close to the international recognition and weaker national ones in the other member countries. Here, one internationally accepted accreditation body might be the solution that cooperates with national assessor networks and national focal points. In central America we will have several national accreditation bodies which cooperate in a relatively loose network to share experiences and to cooperate in cases in which the one or the other country has specific experiences.

The goal of these regional networks is on the one hand side to accept mutually the performed conformity assessment. Stronger regional accreditation bodies like EA in Europe, a network of national accreditation bodies, declare the international recognition of new members via peer evaluations this means the mutual verification of each others competences.

In countries with smaller markets, regional accreditation bodies or networks are necessary for a second reason, an economical one. You need a minimum of accreditations per year to finance the expenses of an accreditation body without subsidising it. Here a regional solution is often the more reasonable one. Furthermore, it is not enough to have an accreditation body you need also the specialised assessors. In a region with few to be accredited certification bodies or laboratories you might not have in every member country sufficient assessors for every purpose.

To sum up:

Regional cooperation in the field of quality infrastructure and a continental and international alignment is an important contribution towards regional integration and an international elimination of technical barriers to trade.

Although private standards with proper conformity assessment procedures are gaining more importance we have to stick to international solutions. I am appealing to everyone here to support the usage of ISO standards and the international elements of the quality infrastructure.

Germany stands to its commitments to increase aid for trade. The support of the quality infrastructure is an important part of the German engagement in this field. We are eager to continue and enhance our engagement in this area.