

Recognition of Russian NDT Personnel Certification Bodies under EFNDT MRA. Problems and Solutions

Nadezhda VOLKOVA, Alexander MULLIN, Research-Training Center “Testing and Diagnostics”, Moscow, Russia

Background

EFNDT Multilateral Recognition Agreement (MRA) has the aim of harmonization of the personnel certification schemes operated by Certification Bodies nominated by the national NDT societies and facilitation of world wide recognition and acceptance of certificates of competence conforming to applicable certification standards.

Russian NDT society is signatory to the EFNDT Multilateral Recognition Agreement. It means that Russian NDT personnel certification bodies have opportunity to be recognized under MRA. There are around 30 NDT personnel certification bodies in Russia that issue about 20000 certificates per year. But most of them can not be recognized by European NDT community. Many certification bodies did not implement EN 473:200 or ISO 9712. Russia has not a body in membership of European Accreditation (EA). In spite of these problems one of Russian certification bodies had been recognized under MRA eight years ago.

EN 473 certification of personnel in Russia and MRA recognition

Today there is no single basic standard on the procedure of NDT personnel certification as well as on the procedure of certification bodies accreditation. Variety of branch-wise certification systems with their own norm documents establish different procedures and rules of certification. In development of such documents provisions of international standards may be considered however no one certification system do not apply these norms directly.

Integration of Russia into global economic order requires application of international standards like ISO or regional like EN. More and more contracts are signed by Russian businesses with their foreign partners. Contract provisions consider requirements to personnel qualification, including NDT personnel qualification. Very frequently these are requirements for EN 473 or ISO 9712 certification. Within this employers come to a deadlock as no one Russian certification system is recognized today by manufacturers worldwide. Being forced to send their personnel to foreign certification authorities employers face significant expenses as well as run into translation problems.

Establishment by Russian authorities of new certification systems similar to EN 473 requirements and accreditation of them in one of European accreditation systems accepted by EA became a solution of the problem. Certification bodies in many countries have been accredited by independent agencies (supported by national governments) known as accreditation bodies. IAF is the international organization consolidating national

accreditation bodies so as EA in Europe. Some accreditation bodies operate outside national boundaries.

The process of accreditation is oriented to increase of client confidence in certification body status. Accreditation mitigate client's risk and assure competence of accredited bodies in their activities sphere. IAF member accreditation bodies should operate efficiently and require from accredited bodies to comply with international standards as well as with IAF regulations on said standards application (In 2003 IAF developed draft regulations on application of standards by accreditation and certification bodies).

Accreditation issued by IAF MRA-member accreditation body and based on recurrent inspection of accreditation programs for conformance evaluation allows companies and personnel being holders of conformance evaluation certificate to be sure that the certificate is worldwide valid. From April 1, 2005 accreditation should be conducted in compliance with ISCMEC 17024 International standard. EN 45013 having been applied before is not valid today.

Unfortunately Russia has no national accreditation authority recognized at international level. Accreditation issued by inspection authorities allows activities only within the sphere covered by their authority. Only ISO/IEC 17024 accreditation issued by internationally recognized authority let Russian certification bodies issue a certificate valid at international level. Our RTC "Testing and Diagnostics" is a holder of certificate from German accreditation system.

However foreign accreditation imposes a lot of problems to certification bodies. Certainly language barrier is one of them and inspection result may depend on interpreter qualification. Also auditors prejudice element may occur as auditors are engaged from national certification bodies having commercial interest in Russia. Besides that accreditation bodies develop their own requirements to technical equipment of certification body laboratories. Many Russian organizations are unable to purchase expensive equipment and materials. For example a set of 50 radiographic films of molded pieces may cost Euro 2500.

Today EFNDT facilitates international recognition process by means of promotion of Multilateral Recognition Agreement (MRA) for certification systems. However basic requirements for joining the Agreement are ISCMEC 17024 accreditation and real practice in EN 473 certification. As seen from mentioned above only a few certification bodies in Russia may be recognized within MRA framework. The very procedure of EN 473:2000 certification is complicated as normative bases in Europe and Russia strongly differ from each other. At manufacturer inspections are conducted in compliance with requirements of GOSTs (national state standards) and normative documents of supervising authorities (PB for Rostekhnadzor and PNAE for nuclear industry etc), while applicant wishing to get EN 473:2000 certificate should pass examinations under requirements of European norms. He also should practice these norms not only have knowledge of them.

Radiographic testing imply application of image quality detectors compliant to EN 462. During ultrasonic testing an applicant should not adjust sensitivity from reference dishpan but use reference signal from side hole. Test specimen for magnetic particle method should comply with EN ISO 9934. Requirements to applicant qualification should produce requirements to training course and pre-certification training. The applicant should study requirements of European norms, testing techniques etc. Certain international programs such as WH/85 or IAEA TECDOC-628 may facilitate the progress in the sphere.

Within this also trainers and examiners should be trained appropriately. Knowledge of European norms, procedures of examination conduct as well as evaluation procedures for examinations themselves should be the same regardless of country of training, examination and EN 473:2000 certification.

Conclusion

In 2003 the Federal Law “On Technical Regulation” was enacted in Russia, which enable development of national technical regulations and standards harmonized with international. We hope that provisions of the Law will facilitate correction of non-compliances between Russian and European norms and regulations as well as finalize harmonization process for requirements to NDT personnel certification and officially put in force EN 473:2000 in Russia.

Such events will enable Russian certification authorities to bring their activities in compliance with ISO/IEC 17024 и EN473:2000 and set up background for joining MRA.