



Every two months, Prof. Dr. Thorsten Arnhold, IECEx Chairman 2014-2019, provides an update on developments within the organisation

When I wrote my article for the April issue of Hazardex, it was the beginning of March. At the time, European governments were starting to announce countermeasures in the fight against coronavirus. Two weeks later, public life in almost all European countries and across the world had been locked down. Now, at the time of writing, it is the beginning of May and we are still in a state of emergency with the first cautious discussions about a way out beginning to take place. Nobody knows how long the crisis and its consequences will keep us busy.

For me there are some significant insights from this crisis. Firstly, the position of individual nations is much stronger than many globalists and Eurocentrics predicted. For many, national governments and organisations have been the strong anchors in the storm. In my eyes, international organisations such as the European Union, United Nations, and the World Health Organisation played a disappointing role in the management of the crisis. Under these extraordinary circumstances, it was shown what the correct order of international relations should look like: not that international organisations are governing nations, but that strong nations are regulating and coordinating their relationships to the benefit of all participants by means of effective international organisations.

The importance of international organisations and digitalisation

However, my concern is that the lessons learned during the last few months will have a negative impact on the acceptance of other international organisations like the IEC and ISO. This is not good since we need the work of multinational organisations to harmonise international relationships. For the restart of the global economy after the crisis, the international standards and conformity assessment systems will play an essential role.

The role of science can be rather overestimated by people. I have the feeling that in developed western countries, science has taken over the role of a modern religion. There is a common belief that science is able to predict the future precisely and that science can always deliver the absolute truth and the right answers to any question. After hearing the numerous scientific statements and explanations on the news during the last two months, I cannot agree with this! For example, I remember the long scientific discussion in Italy about "Patient Zero" – the person who first carried the virus to Italy. One strong theory based on a scientific DNA analysis was that this single person came from Bavaria.

On the other hand, German broadcaster Deutsche Welle said that more than 300,000 Chinese people work permanently in textile factories in Lombardy, the hot spot of the coronavirus in Italy. Many of them went home for Chinese New Year and came back to Italy. Sometimes, adding one plus one can bring better results than blind belief in sophisticated science!

Don't misunderstand me, though. I think science is essential for human wealth and progress, however it needs common platforms for discussion and consensus between experts. Something like international standardisation works to find the smallest common denominator. In addition, it is important to not forget that the value of scientific knowledge is based on the correct

use of scientific tools. We have a right to expect that people who create and announce official scientific statistics master the basic rules of statistical science and are able to distinguish between correlation and causality.

If there is a positive coming from the pandemic, it is the proven importance of digitalisation for almost every aspect of daily life. Millions of employees have been able to continue their jobs from home offices. In my company, we established shift work; one-half of the office working at home enabled the other half to keep necessary social distances.

It was quite surprising for me to see how well the work of national and international standard and conformity assessment organisations could be continued without any travel activities. Telephone conferences are in some respects more efficient than face-to-face meetings. Another surprise for me was the smooth transition to online lectures at universities. My students participate quite actively in my lessons despite the distance of 400km between us.

All this is a confirmation that the work the IEC is doing for the development of standards regulating the digital infrastructure is very important. However, we must not forget that as deeper implementation of digital channels in our private and commercial life increases, the danger of cyber-attacks also rises. That is why it is important to develop cyber security strategies and define them in international standards so that new and smart digital solutions can be developed.

Finally, some words about the actual programme of IEC CAB. All meetings until October 2020 have been transformed into remote meetings. Even the IEC General Assembly which was planned for the end of September in Stockholm has been cancelled. However, as I said before, thanks to the progression of digitalisation this is not a significant issue for our work. ■