

# As part of FTA deal, EU wants India to go easy on the quality control scheme

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The EU wants India to ease up on its Quality Control Order (QCO) scheme as part of the proposed India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and has proposed measures such as online application and accreditation of EU Conformity Assessment Bodies for consideration in the ongoing negotiations.

Experts, however, point out that allowing accreditation may lead to more interference by foreign conformity assessment bodies, which is avoidable.

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Foreign sellers complain of challenges in meeting QCO requirements due to factors such as the complexity of the certification process, the need for physical

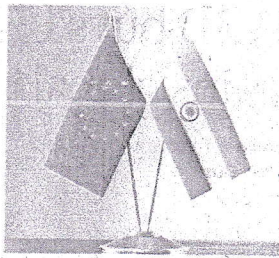
verification and inspections, and the time required for registration and approval.

## REGULATORY DIALOGUE

On the issue of QCO, the EU noted that the 11<sup>th</sup> round in May allowed for the first time in-depth engagement on the EU proposal for easing the process of certification. "While no detailed discussion could take place on the text during the round, negotiators clarified some procedural aspects and the areas where some improvements could be considered, that is online application and accreditation of EU Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs)," the EU report noted.

Special focus was on cars and car parts, and on pharmaceutical products, it added.

The EU has, several times in the past, raised concerns at the WTO about the in-



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creasing number of QCOs being issued by India across sectors.

## EMULATING THE WEST

India had argued that members like the EU had more stringent standards in place that had to be mandatorily met by all those selling in their markets. It said the country had drawn inspiration from the developed world to come up with product standards in key sec-

tors to improve the quality of the products being manufactured domestically and also to prevent sub-standard imports.

A QCO mandates compliance of a product to specified Indian Standards (IS), obtaining a valid licence and bearing of the standards mark on the covered product before supplying to the Indian market.

But Biswajit Dhar, Distinguished Professor, Council for Social Development, said: "Accreditation of EU CABs, as proposed by the EU, will imply more interference by them, especially the European Medicines Agency (EMA). India's pharmaceuticals industry will then have two bosses, the US FDA, which is already romping around, and the EMA. Another of my concerns is this: What will we do if the FDA and the EMA standards are not in harmony?"