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DO WE NEED EUROPEAN HALAL ACCREDITATION AGENCY?

Aldin Dugonjić

The Bridge, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Corresponding author: Aldin Dugonjić

E-mail address: aldin.dugonjic@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

In the last decade we are witnessing the development of halal standards for food, bodies providing halal certification and bodies providing halal accreditation. The most important institution which is publishing halal standards is The Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC) and in the terms of halal accreditation they published OIC/SMIIC 2:2019_Conformity Assessment – Requirements for Bodies Providing Halal Certification and OIC/SMIIC 3:2019_Conformity Assessment - Requirements for Halal Accreditation Bodies Accrediting Halal Conformity Assessment Bodies. Countries such as UAE and Türkiye has implemented this standard as their national standards and start to issuing halal accreditation for halal certification bodies. The missing part is that halal certification bodies if want to be accredited in both mentioned countries shall go for accreditation in each country.

The huge step was made by Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) by establishing Islamic Forum for Halal Accreditation Bodies (IFHAB) with the aim that halal accreditation for a halal certification body in one of the OIC member countries, shall be mutual recognize between member countries.

However, the major challenge on the EU halal market is the lack of clear regulatory frameworks of halal certification, standardization and accreditation even the most important halal certification bodies are halal accredited according to above mentioned standards the questions which are still remains are:

1. the self-proclamation of halal for the food and services,
2. halal certification without accreditation for EU market,
3. supervision of halal food which has been imported from OIC countries and others in EU.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the need for establishing European Halal Accreditation Agency using secondary sources and the author's previous research.

Keywords: *halal certification, halal accreditation, EU halal market.*

1. Introduction

Accreditation, as defined by the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) is the process of independently evaluating conformity assessment bodies against recognized standards. Its primary

objective is to ensure the impartiality and competence of these bodies to perform specific activities such as tests, calibrations, inspections, and certifications. Accreditation bodies, established in various countries, play a crucial role in overseeing conformity assessment bodies,

thereby maintaining the integrity and reliability of their operations. (IAF, 2024)

2. Halal accreditation

Accreditation of halal certification bodies, as it is often called today, halal accreditation, which emerged as a necessity on the market, got its outlines with the creation of the first standard for Conformity Assessment - Requirements for Halal Accreditation Bodies Accrediting Halal Conformity Assessment Bodies in 2011 as result of study of the Standardization Expert Group by Organization of Islamic Cooperation and International Islamic Fiqh Academy. These standards have been adopted by The Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC) after its establishment in 2010 and the new edition of standard has been published in 2019. (SMIIC, 2019).

In the terms of history of halal accreditation, it is worth to mention the establishments of International Halal Accreditation Forum (IHAF) in 2013 in Istanbul with the moto: One Standard, one Conformity Assessment System (Certification and Accreditation). The IHAF 2013 was the first organization which emphasizes discussion of mutual recognition of halal accreditation and certification among the potential stakeholders.

In 2016 in Dubai new *International Halal Accreditation Forum (IHAF) as an independent, non-government network of accreditation agencies all mandated to enforce halal standards in their countries and regions was founded* by 10 institutions: Dubai Municipality (Dubai Accreditation Center), Emirates Authority for Standardization and Metrology (Emirates National Accreditation System), American Association for Laboratory Accreditation, Pakistan National Accreditation Council, Entidad Nacional de Acreditacion (Spain), GCC Accreditation Centre, Saudi Accreditation Committee, United Kingdom Accreditation Service, Joint Accreditation System of Australia and New Zealand, and the National Council for Accreditation Egypt (Emirates News Agency, 2016).

Both institutions are currently inactive. In the UAE, Ministry of Industry and Advanced Technology is in charge for registration of halal certification bodies after they finish halal accreditation process by one of the 15 approved accreditation bodies listed on the Ministry website (MOIAT, 2024).

The significant stride toward harmonizing halal certification and accreditation was achieved by the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC) through the publication of OIC/SMIIC 2:2019 and OIC/SMIIC 3:2019 standards. OIC/SMIIC 3:2019 delineates the general requirements for halal accreditation bodies (HABs) accrediting halal conformity assessment bodies (HCABs). Rooted in Sharia Law and ISO IEC 17011, alongside other pertinent ISO standards, this standard sets a comprehensive framework for ensuring the integrity and reliability of halal accreditation processes. Furthermore, the standard establishes evaluation mechanisms aimed at regional and international levels within the OIC framework. These mechanisms serve to ascertain that HABs operate in strict adherence to the prescribed standards. Successful completion of such evaluations enables HABs to participate in mutual recognition arrangements within the OIC. Regular re-evaluations are integral to maintaining continued adherence to the established standards. These arrangements facilitate a streamlined process for recognition, promotion, and acceptance of each other's accredited conformity assessment bodies for halal certification. Through this concerted effort, the OIC aims to establish a unified and efficient system for halal certification and accreditation across its member states (SMIIC, 2019).

The establishment of the Islamic Forum for Halal Accreditation Bodies (IFHAB) marks a significant milestone in advancing mutual recognition of halal accredited certification bodies within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries. IFHAB's mission is to implement a transparent and robust system for halal products and services, aligned with Sharia principles and international technical requirements. This endeavor entails enhancing the quality infrastructure across OIC member

countries, collaborating closely with the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC), and fostering a culture of continuous improvement within IFHAB's operations. One of IFHAB's key objectives is to ensure the representation of diverse stakeholders, including accreditation bodies, conformity assessment bodies, legislators, consumers, and others. By fostering inclusivity and collaboration, IFHAB aims to promote consensus-building and drive the adoption of unified halal standards across the OIC. Moreover, IFHAB seeks to capitalize on the economic potential of the halal industry by facilitating international trade and creating new employment opportunities. Through its initiatives, IFHAB aims to position Islamic countries as leaders in halal certification and accreditation, thereby solidifying their influence both regionally and globally. In summary, IFHAB's establishment underscores the commitment of OIC countries to elevate the halal industry to new heights, while also promoting unity, innovation, and economic growth within the Islamic world (HalalFocus, 2023).

3. EU Halal market

The Halal Food and Beverage market in Europe has experienced remarkable growth in recent years, as highlighted in a report by Bonafide Research titled "Halal Food and Beverage Market Outlook in Europe to 2027." According to the report, the market surged by US\$29 billion between 2016 and 2021, with further growth anticipated at an annual rate of 6% to 7% until 2027. Halal meat, poultry, and seafood products remain the most sought-after items, reflecting consumers' preference for ethically sourced and halal-certified options. However, other product categories such as bakery, confectionery, and snacks are witnessing rapid growth, with an annual increase of nearly 8%. Key players driving this growth include Nestle SA, Ferrero International SA, KQF Foods, JAB Holding Company, and Tahira Foods. These companies contribute significantly to the market's expansion by offering a diverse range of halal-certified products to meet consumer demand. Retail chains

such as Tesco, Sainsbury's, Marks & Spencer, and Waitrose play a pivotal role in catering to consumers' halal needs. They offer a wide selection of halal food items, including meat, sweets, bread, cereals, and snacks, thereby enhancing accessibility and convenience for consumers across Europe.

Several factors contribute to the dynamic growth of the halal market in Europe. These include the increasing Muslim population, multiculturalism, and globalization, which have led to greater awareness and demand for halal products. Additionally, health and safety concerns, coupled with strict standardization measures and effective digital marketing strategies, have further fueled the market's expansion. Overall, the Halal Food and Beverage market in Europe presents significant opportunities for businesses to capitalize on the growing demand for halal-certified products. By understanding consumer preferences and adhering to stringent halal standards, companies can position themselves for success in this burgeoning market (Bonafide Research, 2022).

4. Challenges on the market

The European Union (EU) halal market faces several challenges despite being a significant exporter of halal products. How much important exporter of halal products are EU countries witness for example, Saudi Arabia which imports about 80% of its food requirement from the EU countries and the fact that the 40% of the registered halal certification bodies by the UAE Ministry of Industry and Advanced Technology are from EU (MOIAT,2024).

The key challenges in the EU halal market:

1. Recognition of Islam: In Austria, Belgium, Spain and Croatia, Islam is recognized as an equal religion, while in other member countries it is not.
2. National Organization of Islamic Communities: Islamic communities within the EU are organized on a national basis, which complicates the standardization and

interpretation of halal regulations. The diverse interpretations of halal and varying levels of acceptance of standards among believers pose challenges for halal standardization efforts.

3. **Lack of Official Halal Standard:** Official registration of halal standards for food is limited to only a few EU countries, such as Austria and Croatia. The absence of standardized halal regulations across all member states creates inconsistency and ambiguity in the halal market.
4. **Lack of Accreditation:** There is currently no formal halal accreditation system for the EU market. This absence of clear criteria results in the proliferation of halal certification bodies without proper oversight. As a result, there are instances where products are falsely labeled as halal, leading to consumer confusion and potential harm. It is not possible to determine the number of halal certification bodies in the member countries that are engaged in issuing halal certificates. The positive examples are the halal certification bodies operates in EU more than 40 years which are halal accredited by halal accreditation body in some Muslim majority country.
5. **Self-Proclamation of Halal:** In many shops, butchers or restaurants in the member countries, the mark halal or the word halal stands out in order to attract consumers, however, in most of them the certification procedure has not been carried out and they are not holders of a valid halal certificate.
6. **Import Regulation and Supervision:** The importation of halal products from Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries into the EU highlights the need for robust regulation and supervision. While many imported products are halal certified, there is often inadequate verification or accreditation, exposing consumers to potential risks (Dugonjić and Bećirović, 2023). Partial supervision of imported halal raw materials, semi-finished products and finished products is carried out if they are used in further processing in the production or the provision of

services that have been certified by an accredited halal certification body.

5. Possible solutions

Efforts to address the challenges in the EU halal market have been met with both progress and obstacles. Two notable attempts to overcome these challenges include:

1. **European Association of Halal Certifiers (AHC-EUROPE):** Founded in Brussels on March 9, 2010, AHC-EUROPE emerged as an Islamic, independent, non-profit, and non-governmental institution. Comprising ten halal certification bodies from Europe, its primary objective was to foster cooperation and facilitate activities among member organizations. AHC-EUROPE aimed to serve as the reference institution for halal affairs in Europe to third parties, thereby promoting standardization and credibility in the halal certification process (GIMDES, 2010).
2. **European Committee for Standardization (CEN) Working Group:** In 2010, CEN established a Working Group tasked with analyzing the feasibility of implementing a European Standard to regulate the requirements for halal food. The group consisted of experts from EU countries, Turkey, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, despite several years of deliberation, the working group was dissolved due to significant opposition from Muslim communities in Europe (Kayadibi, 2014). These communities expressed concerns that halal matters primarily fall under religious jurisdiction and should be governed by Muslim religious authorities. The French Muslim community, one of the largest in Europe, explicitly rejected the proposal, asserting that religious questions, decisions, and accreditation pertaining to halal certification are the exclusive domain of competent Muslim authorities and institutions. They emphasized that non-Muslim organizations should not own standards for halal procedures used by the Muslim community (HalalFocus, 2015).

These attempts highlight the complexities surrounding the regulation and standardization of halal certification in the EU. While there have been initiatives to address these challenges, resistance from Muslim communities underscores the importance of respecting religious authority and ensuring that any regulatory framework aligns with Islamic principles and practices. Moving forward, collaboration and dialogue between regulatory bodies, certification organizations, and Muslim communities will be essential to establish effective and widely accepted standards for halal certification in the EU.

6. The foundation of European Halal Accreditation Agency?

The establishment of a Halal Accreditation Agency in non-OIC is viewed as imperative from the perspective of halal certification bodies. Over 65% of them advocate for the need to accredit or recognize halal certificates from Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries for products sold in non-OIC countries. Additionally, half of these bodies believe that a halal accreditation agency should be established in countries outside the OIC, such as the USA or the EU (Dugonjić and Mešić, 2023).

The Turkish government established the Halal Accreditation Agency (HAK) on November 18, 2017. HAK, the sole legal entity authorized to provide halal accreditation services, operates in accordance with OIC/SMIIC 3:2019 standards. It accredits halal certification bodies that meet the requirements outlined in OIC/SMIIC 2:2019. Today halal accreditation by the HAK is obligatory for halal certification bodies for products and services which will be placed on the Turkish market including those imported. To date, HAK has issued 45 accreditation certificates for Halal Conformity Bodies (HCB) in compliance with OIC/SMIIC 2:2019 requirements (HAK, 2024).

The main requirements of OIC/SMIIC 3:2019 stipulate that:

1. The halal accreditation body (HAB) must be an Islamic entity legally registered.
2. Personnel of HAB must adhere to Islamic principles in their actions.
3. HAB must ensure that all personnel involved in halal conformity assessments and accreditation activities are Muslims with technical competency and ethical commitment to Islamic values.
4. Accreditation criteria for halal conformity assessment bodies must align with relevant normative documents, such as OIC/SMIIC standards and guidelines (SMIIC, 2019).

Given the challenges faced by halal certification bodies in the EU market and their expressed need for accreditation, establishing a European Halal Accreditation Agency following these standard requirements is deemed necessary. Countries such as Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are prime candidates for hosting the headquarters of such an institution. Croatia, an EU member, recognized Islam in 1916 and has a history of collaboration with its Islamic community, as evidenced by agreements signed in 2002 (Dugonjić, 2019). Bosnia and Herzegovina has a longstanding tradition of Islamic authority and holds observer status in the OIC, with EU candidate status. Both countries have developed national halal standards and possess decades of expertise in halal standardization and certification, making them well-suited to host the European Halal Accreditation Agency.

7. Conclusion

In recent years, significant progress has been made in the realm of halal accreditation. The publication of OIC/SMIIC 3:2019_Conformity Assessment - Requirements for Halal Accreditation Bodies Accrediting Halal Conformity Assessment Bodies by SMIIC and the establishment of the Islamic Forum for Halal Accreditation Bodies (IFHAB) by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) are notable developments. The creation of IFHAB holds promise for further positive changes in the halal accreditation landscape. With numerous halal certification bodies having obtained at least two accreditations and recognition of certificates, particularly those from the EU, IFHAB's role in

harmonizing and standardizing these processes will be crucial. Given the challenges faced by halal certification bodies in the EU, including the growing Muslim population, the region's significance as a halal product producer and exporter, self-declared halal products, and the need for effective supervision of imported halal goods, establishing a European Halal Accreditation Agency appears to be a viable solution. Such an agency, adhering to the requirements of OIC/SMIIC 3:2019, and with membership in IFHAB, would ensure consistency, credibility, and adherence to Islamic principles in the halal certification process within the EU.

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TREBA LI NAM EVROPSKA AGENCIJA ZA HALAL AKREDITACIJU?

Aldin Dugonjić

The Bridge, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Autor za korespondenciju: Aldin Dugonjić

E-mail adresa: aldin.dugonjic@gmail.com

SAŽETAK

U posljednjoj deceniji svjedoci smo razvoja halal standarda za hranu, tijela koja pružaju usluge halal certificiranja i tijela koja pružaju usluge halal akreditacije. Najvažnija institucija koja objavljuje halal standarde je Institut za standarde i mjeriteljstvo za islamske zemlje (SMIIC), a u pogledu halal akreditacije objavila je OIC/SMIIC 2:2019 Procjena usklađenosti – Zahtjevi za tijela koja pružaju usluge halal certificiranja i OIC/SMIIC 3: 2019 Ocjena usaglašenosti - Zahtjevi za halal akreditacijska tijela koja akredituju halal certifikacijska tijela. Zemlje poput UAE i Turske implementirale su ove standarde kao svoje nacionalne standarde i počele su izdavati halal akreditaciju za halal certifikacijska tijela. Ono što nedostaje je da će halal certifikacijska tijela ako žele da se akredituju u obje navedene zemlje izabrati će akreditaciju u svakoj zemlji.

Ogroman korak napravila je Organizacija islamske saradnje (OIC) osnivanjem Islamskog foruma za halal akreditacijska tijela (IFHAB) sa ciljem da halal akreditacija za halal certifikacijsko tijelo u jednoj od zemalja članica OIC-a, bude međusobno priznata između zemalja članica.

Međutim, glavni izazov na halal tržištu EU je nedostatak jasnih regulatornih okvira za halal certifikaciju, standardizaciju i akreditaciju, čak i najvažnija tijela za halal certificiranje imaju halal akreditaciju prema gore navedenim standardima pitanja koja ostaju:

1. samoproglšenje halala za hranu i usluge,
2. halal certifikat bez akreditacije za tržište EU,
3. nadzor halal hrane koja je uvezena iz zemalja OIC-a u EU.

Ovaj rad ima za cilj da analizira potrebu za osnivanjem Evropske agencije za halal akreditaciju koristeći sekundarne izvore i prethodna istraživanja autora.

Ključne riječi: Halal certificiranje, halal akreditacija, EU halal tržište
