

Code	GCR
Version	6 <sup>th</sup>
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## 1. Objective

This Certification Regulation refers to the certification procedures applied by BQC for the auditing and certification of Management Systems in accordance with the requirements of the **ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015** standard and the requirements of the Hellenic Accreditation System (E.SY.D.).

The overall management and issuance of the certificate of compliance meets the requirements described in the present General Regulation, using as auditing criteria the criteria specified in the corresponding standard and specifically referred to in the relevant MS certification Regulation.

The Management System Certificate is the document indicating that the certified organization has documented, implemented and maintains a Management System in compliance with the requirements specified in the standard with which it is certified.

The certificate is not associated in any way with the auditing and certification of the provided products and services. Therefore it is not a certificate of conformity of products and should not be confused or used as such.

## 2. Terms – Abbreviations – Definitions

**E.SY.D.:** Hellenic Accreditation System

**MS:** Management System

**CM:** Certification Manager

**QM:** Quality Manager

**Client:** organization whose management system is being audited for certification purposes

**Certified customer:** organization whose management system has been certified

**Impartiality:** actual and perceived objectivity

**Confidentiality:** maintaining the private/sensitive nature of data or information

**Provision of Management Systems Consulting**

**Services:** participation in planning, implementation and maintenance of a MS

**Certification Audit:** audit carried out by an auditing organization which is independent of the client and

those involved in the certification process, for the purpose of certifying the client's management system

**Auditor:** person who conducts the audit

**Competence:** ability to apply knowledge and skills in order to achieve the desired result

**Guide:** person appointed by the client to assist the audit team

**Observer:** person who accompanies the audit team but does not audit

**Non-conformity:** lack of satisfaction of a requirement

**Major Non-conformity:** the complete or to a great degree lack of satisfaction of a requirement of the relevant standards or legislation, or of the present Regulation, or of the relevant MS Certification Regulation or other requirements subscribed to or set by the organization. For any major non conformities, it is necessary to review, accept and verify the corrections and corrective actions taken within three (3) months from the date of completion of the audit for the issuance of the certificate of conformity or its retention.

**Minor Non-conformity:** the limited deviation from a requirement of the relevant standards or legislation, or of the present Regulation, or of the relevant MS certification Regulation or other requirements subscribed to or set by the organization. For any minor non conformities, it is necessary to review and accept organization's plan for corrections and corrective actions within three (3) months from the date of completion of the audit for the issuance of the certificate of conformity or its retention, whereas their verification is confirmed during the next audit.

**Observation:** deviations from the requirements of the standard that are recorded during the 1<sup>st</sup> stage of the initial certification audit. These observations are re-examined in the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage and in case they have not been resolved, they are upgraded to non-conformities.

**Opportunities for Improvement:** items which would allow optimization of the management system in relation to the requirements of the relevant standard

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and their implementation is recommended to the organization.

**Correction:** action to eliminate a detected nonconformity

**Corrective Action:** action to eliminate the cause of a nonconformity and to prevent recurrence

**Technical Expert:** person who provides specific knowledge or expertise to the audit team

**Certification Scheme:** conformity assessment system related to management systems to which the same specified requirements, specific rules and procedures apply

**Audit Time:** time needed to plan and accomplish a complete and effective audit of the client organization's management system

**Certification Audit Duration of a Management System:** part of the audit time spent conducting audit activities from the opening meeting to the closing meeting

**Information and Communication Technology (ICT):** means that can be used to perform remote audit

### 3. Risk Based Approach

BQC in order to ensure the provision of competent, consistent and impartial certification services, has identified the potential threats that could affect it. For all the identified threats BQC has taken appropriate measures to mitigate and the measures are evaluated annually.

### 4. Independency – Impartiality – Confidentiality – Transparency

BQC's independence is ensured by its statute (it does not provide consulting services), its organizational structure and the certification process, which ensures the independent operation of the auditors and the Certification Decision Maker(s). It is also ensured through signed statements of independence, that there is no interconnection of the certification decision maker(s) or of the auditors with the under assessment organizations.

BQC is a private company whose impartiality is guaranteed by the operation of the Impartiality

Committee. All executives and external partners of BQC sign a Statement of impartiality **F035-6** and do not allow commercial, financial or other pressures to compromise impartiality.

The management of BQC is committed through the Quality Policy regarding impartiality in the performance of MS certification activities.

BQC is responsible for the impartiality of the compliance activities it conducts.

BQC recognizes, analyzes and documents potential conflict of interests that may arise when providing certification, including conflicts arising from its business relations. Maintaining relationships does not necessarily create a conflict of interest for BQC. However, when a particular relationship constitutes a risk to impartiality, BQC shall document and demonstrate to the Committee of Impartiality how it eliminates or mitigates such risks.

In order to maintain impartiality during the certification of an organization (3-year validity of certificates), the relevant threats have been identified and evaluated and precautionary measures have been installed, as defined in E045-1 form. In addition, where possible, a different Lead Auditor is assigned in each certification cycle of the organization.

BQC has no subsidiary companies, does not certify other certification bodies for MS certification activities, does not offer internal audits to certified customers and does not grant audits through subcontracting to advisory services. BQC only uses individuals as auditors, who meet the competence requirements of the **ISO/IEC 17021-1** standard.

BQC promotes its services on its own, and its activities are not promoted by or connected to the consulting services of another body.

In order to ensure the absence of conflict of interest, any personnel that has provided consulting services of management systems, including those in management positions, do not participate in activities of audit or certification, if they had been involved in providing consulting services to the specific organization for the past two years.

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BQC, in order to provide capable, consistent and impartial certification services, has identified potential risks that may affect them. For this reason, it has created an electronic file for recording and evaluating these risks (Risk Assessment of Impartiality).

In order to ensure that potential threats to impartiality are identified, BQC is in consultation with interested parties. The identified interested parties are recorded in an electronic file.

All auditors, the certification decision maker(s) of BQC included, follow closely the Regulation and the Procedures of BQC, as well as the guidelines of national or international standards, and do not deviate from them in order to certify BQC clients.

All executives and partners of BQC (e.g. external auditors), are committed to maintain the necessary privacy and confidentiality of information or documents that belong to the client. All executives and external partners of BQC sign the confidentiality statement **F035-4**.

BQC is bound by signed contract to the audited organization to ensure the confidentiality of information collected or developed during the provision of certification activities at all levels of its structure, including committees and external bodies or partners that may act on its behalf.

BQC informs the client in advance for the information it intends to publish. All other information beyond those available in public by the customer shall be regarded as confidential. In cases where BQC is summoned by law or by an Accreditation Body to publish confidential information to third parties, the involved client or person shall be informed in advance for the information to be published, unless the law provides otherwise.

Information about the client coming from sources other than the client (e.g. legislators, persons that file complaints, etc.) is treated as confidential, in line with the BQC policy.

BQC, provides through its website to any interested party all information describing the processes of audit

and certification for the granting, maintenance, extension, renewal, reduction, suspension or withdrawal of certification, as well as details on the certification activities, types of management systems and geographical areas in which it operates.

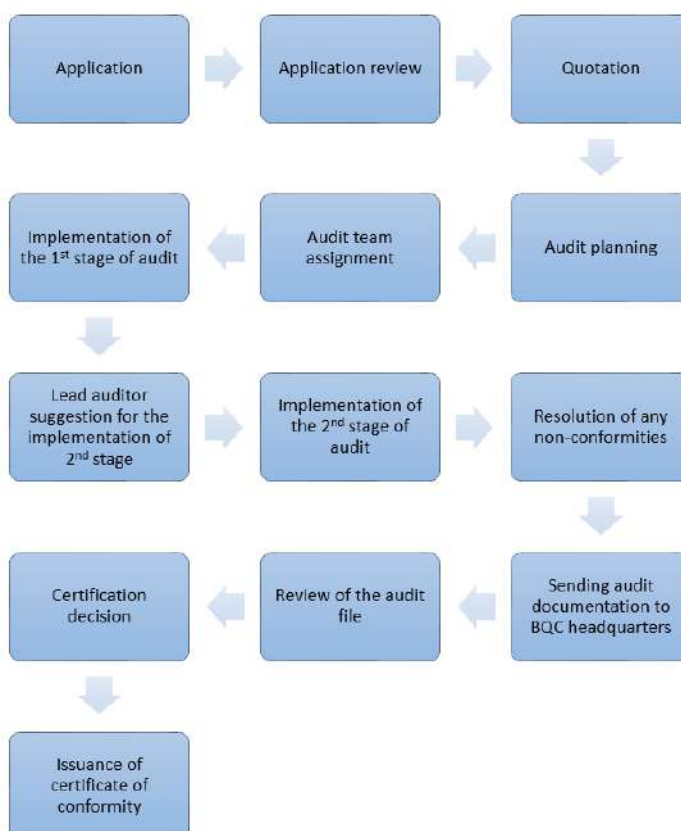
Upon request, the Registry of certified organizations can also be provided free of charge.

## 5. Certification Procedure

The procedure followed for auditing and certifying an organization's MS is the same for all certification standards subject to BQC's accreditation scope. Any differences as defined in the respective standards or other standard documents are described in the relevant MS Certification Regulation.

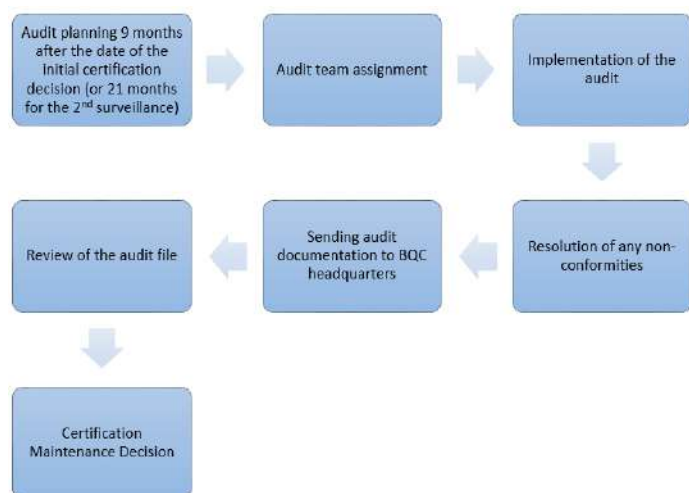
### 5a. Initial Certification

The procedure followed for the initial certification of an organization's MS consists of two stages and is illustrated below.



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When determining the interval between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> stage, the organization's need to resolve any deviations (registered as observations) in the documentation or application of the requirements of



the standard identified during the 1<sup>st</sup> stage, is taken into account (points that could be documented as non-conformities during the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage). This period may not be more than six (6) months. BQC may postpone or cancel the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage audit if BQC considers that these deviations are significant and may affect the effectiveness of the management system.

If the organization's management system is integrated and structured as one management system to include common responsibilities and processes for more than one standard, then during the 1<sup>st</sup> stage the audit team confirms the level of integration of the management system as determined according to document **IAF MD11:2023**. The certification body shall review and modify, as necessary, the audit duration based on the information provided at the application stage.

Any findings registered as non-conformities during the initial certification audit shall be resolved within three (3) months starting from the date the audit was completed.

The validity of the certificate of conformity is three years from the initial certification decision date, provided that the MS of the certified organization

complies with the requirements of the relevant standard throughout the three years.

### 5b. Surveillance

In order to prove compliance, two annual surveillance audits are carried out (one per calendar year) starting from the date of issuance of the initial certification decision. The process is illustrated below.

If the organization's management system is integrated and structured as a management system, the organization confirms that the level of integration remains unchanged throughout the certification cycle – based on the submitted organizational changes form **F050-47**, so that to ensure that the specified audit durations are still applicable.

Any findings registered as non-conformities during the surveillance audits shall be resolved within three (3) months starting from the date the audit was completed.

### 5c. Recertification

The recertification audit shall be performed within a sufficient period of time before the completion of the three-year cycle, so that any non-conformity that may arise during the audit can be resolved and the validity of the compliance certificate may not be affected. The process followed is the same as the surveillance process shown in §5b.

If the organization's management system is integrated and structured as a management system, the organization confirms that the level of integration remains unchanged throughout the certification cycle – based on the submitted organizational changes form **F050-47**, so that to ensure that the specified audit durations are still applicable.

Any findings registered as non-conformities during the recertification audit shall be resolved within three (3) months starting from the date the audit was completed (in case that the certificate of compliance does not expire during this period). In case that this period passes without the organization resolving



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them, the validity of the certificate shall be suspended. The organization may restore its certification by resolving non-conformities within six (6) months from the date of its certificate suspension.

## 6. Transfer of Accredited Certificate

Transfer of certification is carried out in accordance with the provisions of IAF MD2 and the BQC Guideline G02.

## 7. Special Audits

Special audits are conducted:

- When on-site verification of corrective actions is required, to resolve non-conformities identified during the certification audit, surveillance or recertification audit (follow-up audit).
- If there is evidence or indications that the requirements of the relevant standard and of BQC applicable Certification Regulations are no longer met (e.g. after complaints of customer of the certified organization, violation of existing legislation found by a competent authority).
- When requested by any other person or legal entity, upon request and after the agreement of the organization.
- In cases in which it is brought to the attention of BQC or there has been a report for improper use of logo.
- When it is proven and by responsibility of BQC, that an audit was not conducted in an objective and technically sound way.
- When changes are made to the organization that among others, are related to the legal, commercial, organizational status, as well as the ownership, change of address of the certified organization or its activity.

## 8. Extraordinary Audits

Unannounced audits or audits on a short notice are carried out:

- In cases where complaints are investigated,
- If there are changes which impose an on-site audit and there is some suspicion for an increase in the audit risk (e.g., in OH&S MS in case that a serious

incident 9accident) occurred or a serious breach of the relevant legislative or/and regulatory requirements), or

- In cases where the use of the certificate has been suspended and it is considered that the organization has not complied with the relevant requirements of BQC.

Due to the organization's inability to approve the Audit Team (due to the fact that the audit is unannounced), BQC will make every effort to carry out this audit with auditors who have being approved by the audited organization in the past.

The audited organization cannot refuse the facilitation of extraordinary audits and should allocate the necessary resources for their proper conduct. Extraordinary audits are performed at the expense of BQC.

## 9. Remote Audits due to Extraordinary Circumstances

The procedure followed in cases of extraordinary circumstances (e.g. COVID-19) where a remote audit may be deemed necessary or beneficial to complete the audit of an organization shall be in accordance with the provisions of IAF ID3, BQC ProcedureP060 and any Accreditation Body Guidelines.

## 10. Scope Extension Audits

To extend the scope of a certification that has already been granted, the organization submits a relevant application. Afterwards, BQC follows the procedure described in §5 of this Regulation. The scope extension audit can be combined with another scheduled audit (surveillance or recertification).

## 11. Registry of Certified Organizations

BQC maintains a registry of existing valid certifications which states the name, relevant normative document, scope and geographical location (e.g. city and country) of each certified client (or the location of the central and any other facilities falling under the scope of a multi-site certification). Upon request BQC provides the above registry to

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anyone interested free of charge. In any case the registry remains property of BQC.

## 12. Renewal of certificate

See §5 Certification Procedure.

## 13. Discontinuation of the Use of Certificate

The organization has the right to discontinue the use of the conformity certificate at any time it wishes. In this case, it notifies BQC in writing, returns the certificate and withdraws all promotional material and entries which refer to the certified Management System.

## 14. Rights / Liabilities of BQC

BQC:

- gives to the interested parties an early notice of any changes in certification requirements, procedures, and processes implemented by sending the new or amended documentation.
- verifies that all certified clients comply with the new requirements.
- conducts special audits (see §7).
- proceeds to suspension of certificates (see §16).
- conducts all audits with qualified and technically trained personnel.
- provides and updates a list of companies that have been granted a certificate of conformity.
- is obliged to abide by the rules of discretion and confidentiality.

BQC is not responsible for damages caused by the use of products or services of the certified organization. In cases where claims for the above damages are raised, the organization is obliged to notify immediately BQC in writing.

BQC is responsible for the decisions it takes regarding the granting or refusing of certification, maintaining of certification, extension or reduction of the certification scope, recertification, suspending or restoring certification, if it has been suspended, or certification withdrawal.

## 15. Rights / Liabilities of Client

The certified organization-client:

- should comply with the requirements of BQC, when referring to the certification status in communication media such as the Internet, brochures and other promotional material or other documents.
- should not – or allow others to – make misleading statements regarding the certification.
- shall not use or authorize the use of certification documents or any part thereof in a misleading way.
- should discontinue the use of promotional material that includes a reference to the certification, as indicated by BQC, in case of suspension or withdrawal of the certification.
- should amend all promotional material when the scope of certification is reduced.
- should not use its certification in a manner that discredits BQC or/and the process of certification and leads to a loss of public confidence in BQC.
- may use the MS certificate of conformity for any commercial purposes, for advertising purposes or to demonstrate the conformity of the MS only in relation to the activities mentioned in the Scope of Certification, provided that in every case the organization complies with the current legislation, this Regulation, the standards of certification and the relevant signed contracts. In these cases it should not be implied in any way that the certification regards product (and service) or process.
- may request based on documented justification (e.g. unsuitability of auditors, confidentiality, competition), the replacement of the audit team up to ten (10) working days before the audit.
- may appeal to the Objections Committee of BQC, if the organization does not agree with the decisions of the Certification Manager.
- may request a special audit if proven that an audit was not was not conducted in an objective and technically proper way by responsibility of BQC.
- shall implement a MS in accordance with the requirements of the certification standard and this Regulation and continuously improve it.

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- must give written consent to BQC for disclosing any third party complaint concerning the organization.
- has the obligation to provide truthful and accurate information in all the activities of an audit, to facilitate the conduct of audits and to make available the relevant staff for the successful performance of these.
- is obliged to implement the corrective actions regarding non- conformities recorded during the audits within the time agreed with the audit team.
- is obliged to inform BQC, within one month, of any significant change in:
  - a) the legal, commercial, organizational status, as well as the ownership,
  - b) the organizational structure and management (e.g. key managerial or technical, staff or managers responsible for making decisions)
  - c) the contact address and facilities,
  - d) the scope of activities under the certified management system, and
  - e) the management system and its processes.
- is required to comply with the financial obligations and all other terms towards BQC, as described in the signed cooperation agreements. Violation of any term of the cooperation agreement leads to withdrawal of the Certificate of Conformity of the MS.
- is obliged to use the logo of BQC in accordance with §21 of the present Regulation.
- is obliged in case of certificate suspension, to immediately cease every use of the logo and trademarks of BQC.

## 16. Suspension of Certificates

BQC suspends the certification if:

- the certified management system of the client consistently or significantly fails to meet the certification requirements, including requirements for the effectiveness of the management system.

- the certified organization does not allow the conduct of surveillance or recertification audits at the required time intervals.
- the certified organization requests the suspension.
- the certified organization fails to take appropriate action to resolve any NCs recorded during the recertification audit in time and the validity of the certificate expires.
- the certified organization has not fulfilled its financial obligations in time.
- the certified organization uses the certificate of conformity and / or the BQC logo in a misleading manner.
- during the audits the audit team is given misleading or false information.
- the certified organization engages in intentional or consistent non-compliance (e.g. violation of the law), as it is considered a serious failure to support the policy commitment to meet the compliance obligations (alternatively to the suspension of a certificate, it may be decided to withdraw the existing certificate).

In the event that the organization's management system is integrated and structured as a management system, if certification under one or more management system standards/specifications is subject to suspension, the certification body shall investigate the impact of the certification on other management system standard(s)/ specification(s).

Under suspension, the certification of the management system of the organization does not apply temporarily. In the cooperation agreement is explicitly mentioned that in case of suspension, the organization ceases to promote certification. BQC has a registry of organizations whose certification has been suspended. Upon request, this registry is available to anyone interested free of charge. The suspension of the certificate may not in any case be more than six (6) months.

## 17. Withdrawal of certificates

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BQC proceeds to the withdrawal of the issued certificate of Conformity of the MS of the organization in the following cases:

- When the cause of suspension of the certificate has not been resolved after six (6) months.
- When the organization ceases to exist as a legal entity or declares bankruptcy.
- When the organization decides to terminate the collaboration with BQC.

In the event that the organization's management system is integrated and structured as a management system, if certification under one or more management system standards/specifications is subject to withdrawal, the certification body shall investigate the impact of the certification on other management system standard(s)/ specification(s).

In case BQC proceeds to withdrawal of the certificate and the organization wishes to reacquire the certificate of conformity, a new application shall be submitted to BQC and the certification process shall be carried out from the beginning. BQC has a registry of organizations whose certification has been withdrawn. The above registry is available to anyone interested free of charge, upon request.

## 18. Reduction of Certification Scope

BQC reduces the scope of certification of the organization to exclude segments that do not meet the requirements when the organization consistently or significantly fails to meet the certification requirements, for those parts of the scope of certification.

In the event that the organization's management system is integrated and structured as a management system, if certification under one or more management system standards/specifications is subject to reduction of certificate scope, the certification body shall investigate the impact of the certification on other management system standard(s)/ specification(s).

Any such reduction is consistent with the requirements of the standard used during the certification. The organization should amend all promotional material when the scope of certification is being reduced.

## 19. Objections

Objections may be raised against the decisions of the certification decision maker(s) for the result of the certification.

The applicant shall submit a written request by filling the **E070-1** "Objection Management", within 10 working days after notification of the decision. The request is sent to the General Manager, who, within ten (10) days from the date of receipt of the objection shall convene the Objections Committee (composed of the 2 oldest auditors) and the appeal is examined. The committee's decision is recorded in **E070-1**. The Objections Committee promptly and formally informs the concerned within 3 working days from the date of the Commission decision. In case the objection is not adequately reasoned, a letter is sent to the concerned with all necessary explanations. The decision of the Objections Committee is final and not open to further action. Until the informing of the concerned person to the above decision, the decision taken by the Certification Decision Maker(s) is valid.

Information regarding the above procedure and Form **E070-1** is available by BQC to any interested party, free of charge, upon request.

In case the Objections Committee rules that the objection is valid, the necessary corrective actions are taken (e.g., conduct of a special audit, personnel training, etc.).

In any case responsible for all decision at all levels of the appeal-handling process is BQC. In case that a certified organization makes an appeal, BQC and its executives do not treat the organization in a different way or discriminate against others.

Note: None of the Objections Committee's members should be involved in any part of the audit process of the organization (whose certification is under



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judgment) in the past 2 years. In case one of the members of the Commission has been involved in any part of the audit process of the organization in the past 2 years, he/she is replaced by the next most senior auditor. An auditors list depending on their seniority, is maintained by the QM.

## 20. Complaints

When receiving a complaint (after the completion of the **E070-1**) the certification decision maker(s) of BQC determines whether the complaint relates to the certification activities, for which BQC is responsible and if so, forwards it to the Committee of Impartiality. In any other case, the certification decision maker(s) informs the person concerned. The Impartiality Committee within ten (10) days from the date of receipt of the complaint, convenes and examines the complaint considering the effectiveness of the certified management system. The decision is recorded in **E070-1** which is sent to the Certification Manager, who is responsible for taking the necessary corrective actions when they are needed.

Any complaint about a certified organization is reported to the certified organization by the certification decision maker(s) of BQC.

BQC keeps all information of both the person making the complaint and the complaint itself confidential. The certification decision maker(s) is responsible for the collection and verification of all information necessary to validate the complaint and, where possible, notifies the concerned by letter about the progress of the review and the outcome of the complaint.

BQC determines, along with the client and the person making the complaint, whether and to what extent the complaint and its resolution will be made public. Information regarding the above procedure and Form **E070-1** is available by BQC to any interested party, free of charge, upon request.

In case that a certified organization makes a complaint, BQC and its executives do not treat the

organization in a different way or discriminate against others.

Note: None of the staff members should have been involved in any part of the organization's audit process that have dealt with the case under investigation. In the event that someone is involved, then he/she is replaced.

## 21. Use of Logos

After the successful auditing of organizations, the relative certificate and the logos of BQC are sent to them. The logo of BQC, is property of BQC and has been registered to the relevant state body. The logo of the Accreditation Body is the property of the respective body and used only after the accreditation of BQC. In case of suspension of the relevant Accreditation of BQC, BQC immediately informs all certified organizations to immediately cease the use of the relevant logo. The BQC logo along with the certificate of Conformity is exclusively used by the organization for which it was issued and is not transferable. The use of the BQC logo onto the organization's products in order to indicate conformity of products or services is prohibited. The use of the BQC logo in a way that indicates conformity of products or services is considered misleading, amounts to non-conformity and causes the suspension of the certificate. The BQC logo may be used under the following conditions:

- in combination with the name of the certified organization / or its corresponding certified department and with a clear reference to the certification scope,
- with reference to the number of the granted certificate,
- in combination with the "Certified Management System" indication and reference to the Certification Standard.

The organization shall use the certification logo with the specific size and colors as delivered by BQC.

In any case, the executives of BQC are willing to assist the organization before the use of logos, in order to

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ensure the correct use of logos/certification marks.  
The use of the BQC logo is optional.

## **22. Financial Conditions**

The organizations' financial obligations towards BQC are described in detail in the signed quotations - contracts.

In case that the financial terms of the contract are violated, BQC proceeds to the suspension of the organization's certificate.

## **23. Changes and Revisions**

The present Certification Regulation may be amended at any time by BQC.

In the case of the Certification Regulation's revision, BQC informs the organizations certified by BQC in writing, for this revision, the changes made, and defines an adjustment period proportionate with the extent of the changes, in order for the organizations to adapt to the new requirements of the Regulation.

At the end of the adjustment period, all organizations certified by BQC shall comply with the requirements of the amended Regulation. BQC in no way provides consulting services to assist in the conformity with its Regulation.

In case that an organization certified by BQC fails to comply with the requirements of the new Regulation, BQC proceeds to the suspension of its certificate.