

GLOBAL, EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS - WHAT DOES EACH DO? HOW DOES IT ALL FIT TOGETHER?

IN TODAY'S EUROPE, ADVOCACY HAS BECOME COMMONPLACE FOR INDUSTRIES AS WELL AS INTEREST GROUPS AT ALL LEVELS: NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL. THE QUESTION IS HOWEVER: HOW DOES IT ALL FIT TOGETHER?

TEXT **SIADA EL RAMLY & MICHEL BAUMGARTNER** - KELLEN EUROPE



SIADA EL RAMLY

MICHEL BAUMGARTNER

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IT IS OFTEN DEBATED WHAT THE DIFFERENCE IS AMONG NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS, EUROPEAN ASSOCIATIONS AND GLOBAL ASSOCIATIONS. THE REALITY OF THE MATTER IS THAT EACH HAS A VERY DISTINCT ROLE TO PLAY IN THE DELIVERY OF A SINGLE MESSAGE

A national association tends to be the association that brings together representatives of the industry in the country in which it operates, which includes small and medium sized industries. National associations are also the foremost port of call in terms of liaising with the national government. In a sense, the national association is the advocating party that brings an issue full-circle as legislative procedures usually originate at a national level and

return to the national level for implementation once such issues have been debated at a European and sometimes global level.

A European association takes on the role of clearing house for information on what is happening at the Member State level and also that of advocacy centre for legislation that is going through the European process.

Last but not least comes the role of global associations. These associations usually act on international regulations that come into play often in areas such as standardisation.

Now that the roles have been outlined one might question why the differing roles of these types of associations come into question at all. The reason is often that, in practice, these roles are not always so

well-defined. Often the issue of competition among associations at the various levels arises when there is an overlap in the operating space in which each works. There is also the ongoing issue of competition for membership. These issues can lead to a degree of unease between associations at times.

The fact of the matter is, however, that in Europe today, each of these kinds of associa-

tions is dependent on one another. In an ideal world the national legislation should only be dealt with by the national association; there are occasions where the national association might call on the European or even the global association for support. This is usually done either by supporting the positioning or showing that the context in which the national issue can affect the European or even the global arena.

Similarly the European association is often dependent on the national association not only to relay information on possible upcoming legislation or on the implementation of European legislation but also on the reinforcement of the 'European' messaging at a national level during the legislative procedure. This echoing of messaging from both parties consolidates the views of the party represented.

Also it is important that legislators understand the tangible affects of what is being discussed, and often hearing about this from the viewpoint of their local constituency or from a local industry representative portrays a clearer image than a view from an 'umbrella' European association. In this way, leveraging the network of the national association is inherent to bringing the message across.

The natures of the associations are different but there are always aspects of the advocacy role that can be used within their respective operating arenas and in this way best practices can be followed. National associations are usually very close to the national legislators and this bond is something that is often not as strong at the European level. On the flip side, alliance-building is usually excelled at a European level. In short, it is important that the strengths of both kinds of associations should be used in a collective effort to bring across the core message being advocated.