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Forest certification in Romania and the marked perspective

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ABSTRACT

The first discussions about forest certification were initiated in Romania in June 1998 when a workshop co-organised by the National Forest Administration, the World Wide Fund for Nature and the Forest Stewardship Council was attended by more than one hundred representatives of the main forest stakeholders. The dissemination of information about FSC certification increased significantly after the establishment of a working group for forest certification in late 1999.

In 2001 two state forest districts (Varatec and Targu Neamt, included in Vanatori Neamt Forest Park) applied for FSC certification and one year later the certificate was issued by Woodmark Soil Association for the first 31,611 ha of Romanian state forests, with an annual allowable cut of about 140,000 m³. The National Forest Administration intends to increase significantly the certified forest area in the coming years.

After 2000 several foreign and Romanian companies have expressed their interest in buying FSC certified timber and timber products from Romania. In anticipation of the first forest management certificate two foreign investors in wood processing in Romania got the chain of custody (CoC) certificate in December 2001. By the end of 2002 there were four CoC certificates in Romania and other seven companies were pre-assessed by an accredited certifier in view of chain of custody certification. Considering the foreign demand for FSC certified timber and timber products and the availability of certified timber it is expected that the number of companies CoC certified operating in Romania will increase significantly in the next period.

In spite of the ecological and social benefits of forest certification it appears that the main driving engine for forest certification in Romania will be the market benefits.

Key words: forest certification, chain of custody, certified timber, Romania

INTRODUCTION

Forest certification is a tool to verify that forest management meets defined standards and its potential to promote good forest management practices has been recognized internationally. In the last decade there has been an increasingly rapid development of certification connected to markets which differentiate in favour of “environmentally-sound” forest products (Bass and Simula 1999).

The first discussions about forest certification were formally initiated in Romania in 1998. Whilst the dissemination of information as well as the debates regarding forest certification have been relatively intense in the last years, the first forest area was certified only in mid-2002. However, there is a clear commitment to certify in the coming years a large area of state forests, primarily for market reasons. This paper intends to highlight the main aspects regarding forest certification in Romania and its market perspectives.

FOREST CERTIFICATION IN ROMANIA: FROM THE FIRST WORKSHOP TO THE FIRST CERTIFIED FOREST

In June 1998 the first workshop regarding forest certification was co-organised at national level by the National Forest Administration (NFA), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Forest Stewardship Council-FSC (FSC was the only existing certification scheme at that time). It was attended by more than one hundred representatives of the main forest stakeholders: the public authority for forests, the National Forest Administration (national and county levels), logging and processing sectors, research, higher education, non-governmental organisations etc. Due to the relatively limited experience at that time regarding various aspects of forest certification combined with the large number of questions from the audience the conclusion of the workshop was that a phased approach is recommended for the Romanian context. As a result of the workshop an initial working group for forest certification (following FSC procedures) was established and it included representatives of NFA, research, academia and Forest Progress NGO. However, due to some management changes in NFA (which was supposed to coordinate the group) and lack of resources the initial working group had been inactive.

WWF Danube Carpathian Programme supported the establishment of an active working group for forest certification in the second half of 1999. Under the coordination of the Forest Department in the previous Ministry of Waters, Forests and Environmental Protection representatives of the main forest organisations in Romania were invited to be part of the working group and participate at the first meeting, which took place in September 1999. At the respective meeting the participants decided that in a short term the main objectives for the working group are: (i) dissemination of information regarding forest certification to the institutions and

organizations from the forestry sector and to the public, (ii) promotion of forest certification among the forest stakeholders, (iii) supporting the activities regarding forest certification in Romania, and (iv) development of the national standards for forest certification. Whilst the first three objectives have been successfully carried out via information materials (brochures, newsletters, articles published in forest magazines), web page, meetings, seminars and lectures for NFA staff, the development of the national standards have been relatively slow.

Two studies carried out in the period 1999-2000 in Brasov area identified the main corrective actions needed to fulfil the requirements of FSC forest management certification in state forests as well as the major improvements different types/sizes of logging/processing companies should undertake in order to get the chain of custody certificate (Abrudan, 2001).

In the second half of 2000 the discussions about other certification schemes (especially PEFC) intensified, especially in the pages of the main Romanian forestry magazine. However, due to various reasons including the very small proportion of private forest in Romania and the lack of resources within the Association of Private Forest Owners, the PEFC scheme has not been promoted in practice and presently there is no PEFC National Governing Body established and endorsed by PEFC Council.

In 2001 two state forest districts (Varatec and Targu Neamt, included in Vanatori Neamt Forest Park) applied for FSC certification in the frame of the Biodiversity Conservation Management Project (financed by the Global Environmental Facility, the Romanian Government and the National Forest Administration). One year later the certificate was issued by Woodmark Soil Association for the first 31,611 ha of Romanian state forests, with an annual allowable cut of about 140,000 m³.

The FSC certification of the first Romanian state forest highlighted the strengths of the present forest management practices as well as the improvements needed to get the certificate. The minor corrective actions were related to the following issues: the long term use rights and land titles (as the forest restitution process in the area was ongoing at the time of assessment); health and safety conditions (provision of personal protective equipment for forest workers and the monitoring of its use); protection of water resources and minimisation of damage during harvesting operations; inclusion of monitoring in relation to the environmental and social impacts of forest management in the standard management planning process; and provision of public information in relation to monitoring (Jones, 2002)

The National Forest Administration announced the intention to increase significantly the certified forest area in the coming years (1 million hectares). After the approval in December 2002 of the "Governmental Decision 1447/2002 regarding the approval of some measures related to the sustainable forest management", the NFA has the legal framework which allows it to certify the state forests on its costs, following the public procurement procedures (***, 2002). The Governmental Decision underlines the importance of market benefits of certification, specifying that the option regarding forest certification should consider the market demands. It is known however that certification brings social benefits (by including and consulting the social stakeholders in the process, more transparency etc.) as well as environmental ones.

In February 2003 Smartwood pre-assessed the first private forest district (managing the forests owned by Zetea community (composesorate) – an undivided common ownership type) in Romania and another private forest is planned to be certified in the frame of a WWF-IKEA Partnership as a demonstration group certification scheme for private owners in Romania.

The experience gained during the certification of the first Romanian forest (when the FSC generic standards were used by the certifier) highlighted the need to develop national certification standards that would better reflect the local/regional conditions. The development of the national certification standards is expected to be intensified as the working group for forest certification secured most of the funds needed for the process. Part of the support is also provided by the GEF - Biodiversity Conservation Management Project.

FOREST CERTIFICATION AND THE MARKET PERSPECTIVE

After 2000 several foreign and Romanian companies have expressed their interest in buying FSC certified timber and timber products from Romania. More than fifty companies have contacted the working group or the National Forest Administration in order to identify Romanian sources for certified timber or timber products. Most of the companies are located in western Europe (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom) and the demand is both for broadleaves and conifer species.

In anticipation of the first forest management certificate two foreign investors in wood processing in Romania got the chain of custody (CoC) certificate in December 2001. By the end of 2002 there were four CoC certificates and other seven companies were pre-assessed by the accredited certifiers in view of chain of custody certification. Presently, the CoC certificates cover a relatively limited spectrum of wood products (roundwood, raw and coated MDF boards, kiln dried and profiled wooden elements of various species, garden furniture, joinery products etc.) but it is expected that their number will increase significantly in the near future.

Considering the fact that Romania is a net exporter of wood and wood products to western European countries, the growing foreign demand for FSC certified timber and timber products, and the increasing availability of certified timber from the country's forests it is expected that the number of CoC certified companies operating in Romania will grow rapidly. However, for many Romanian companies the CoC certification is seen as a customer "need" that should be satisfied if they want to keep the existing market or to gain access to new markets. There is still a long way for the majority of them to realize that certification provides their customers with a credible guarantee that the company is acting responsibly with respect to the environmental and social issues of those involved in forest and forestry.

CONCLUSION

In the last years forest certification has evolved in a stepwise manner in Romania: it began with the introduction of the concept to the main stakeholders, continued with the dissemination of information about the process and the certification of a pilot area. Recently, the FSC certification has got the right momentum for a rapid development both in state and private forests. In spite of the ecological and social benefits it appears that on a short term the main driving engine for forest certification in Romania will be the market.

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