Evaluation of FSC® (Forest Stewardship Council) Forest Management Certification in Turkish Forestry in its 15th year

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ABSTRACT—*In response to demands from the forestry sector in Turkey, the forest management certification process according to the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) system began in 2010. Turkey has 18 FSC FM/CoC certificates under 17 FRDs (30 FRDs in total). A total of 11,450,701.12 ha of forest area has been certified (49% of the total forest area). Türkiye's total forest area is 23,363,084.00 ha, of which 13,813,598.00 ha (59%) is productive forest. Accordingly, it is understood that a very large portion of the productive forest area has been certified. This study examines the functioning of the FSC process in Turkish forestry and its challenges, and proposes recommendations.*

Keywords— FSC, Forest Management, Certification, Türkiye

1. INTRODUCTION

Local communities and other NGOs gained the power to generate national and global interest in forests and forestry in the 1980s. Furthermore, national bilateral agencies, along with organizations such as the World Bank and FAO, have funded and managed numerous projects aimed at improving forest management and conservation. Furthermore, initiatives such as the "Tropical Forest Action Plan "and the "International Tropical Timber Organization" were established to improve tropical forestry activities [1]. Forest resources came under increasing scrutiny by NGOs in the 1980s and 1990s. Friends of the Earth began conducting research in the mid-1980s linking timber companies in the UK to tropical deforestation [2]. To address public concerns, producers began labeling their products claiming the sustainability of their forest resources.

For some, the situation became even more urgent in the late 1980s, when journalists, the media, and environmental NGOs began targeting retailers and their purchasing policies. All these efforts to find solutions contributed to the emergence of certification in the forestry sector. Even early criticisms of the certification idea contributed to the success of the process by identifying the fundamental interests and needs of different groups. Until the late 1980s, most national efforts to promote better forest management focused on pressuring their own governments and foresters. Furthermore, many bilateral and multilateral efforts in tropical regions targeted the same groups. In contrast, initiatives in northern countries such as Friends of the Earth UK, the Ecological Trading Company (ETC), and the Woodworkers' Alliance for Rainforest Conservation (WARP) developed the idea of using market forces to promote good forest management. These initiatives focused particularly on timber traders and retailers, and proposed encouraging preferential imports of tropical timber from identifiable and well-managed forests, paving the way for global accreditation and certification [1].

In addition, other initiatives, such as WWF International, developed plans for a campaign to promote sustainable forest management and to intensify international trade in sustainably managed forest products worldwide [3]. In July 1991, WWF-UK identified the potential role of Forest Monitoring Agency International in achieving this goal. By May 1992, the target had been expanded to cover "all worldwide trade in wood and wood products" [4]. In the mid-1990s, the Nature Conservation Foundation (TNC) conducted a study on the need for certification and the potential for TNC to

become a certification body itself. They consulted with organizations involved in certification, trade, and forest conservation. Most were highly skeptical about the need for certification and the feasibility of reliable tropical forest certification. Shortly thereafter, The Homeland Foundation launched a study on the requirements for a reliable certification system for forest products. The first group to take a leading role in forest certification was the Rainforest Alliance, a New York-based NGO with four years of experience in rainforest areas. In 1990, a program was developed in Indonesia to identify “well-managed tropical forests” and to assess logging permits [5].

In October 1990, the launch of the Smartwood certification program was announced. The lack of "generally accepted standards for specific tropical forest regions" was recognized, and a simplified certification system was developed based on 1) watershed stabilization, 2) sustainable yield production, and 3) positive impact on the well-being of local communities. Operations demonstrating "strong operational adherence to these criteria" would be classified as "well managed" [6]. This was the first third-party certification system for forest management. In November 1990, the Rainforest Alliance's draft "Criteria for Assessing the Sustainability of Tropical Logging Operations," published which closely followed the recent ITTO Guidelines [7,8]. These eventually evolved into the Smartwood standards. The Rainforest Alliance confirmed that certification required "independent third-party field assessment" and, in due course, broad agreement on the definition of "sustainable logging." Thus, the concepts of third-party assessments and widely accepted standards formed part of the original concept. Meanwhile, this early version of certification focused attention on and spurred other certification initiatives. Green Cross Certification Co. (1991) (later SCS) and the Institute for Sustainable Forestry [9]. (ISF,2004), both based in California, drafted their own forestry certification systems in March 1991; the Soil Association began certification negotiations with the WWF in May 1991, and SGS also began showing interest around the same time [1] .

From January 1991, the Certification Working Group (CWG) took the initiative. Over the next year, most of the activities leading to the establishment of the FSC were associated with this group or its members. However, it remained rather informal, with a gradually expanding roster or forum rather than a fixed membership. The CWG convened a certification meeting in San Francisco in April 1991[1]. A large portion of the meeting was devoted to a comprehensive discussion of concerns, expectations, and questions related to forest and wood certification and to the development of a Forest Stewardship Code to which all certification groups could subscribe and comply. The meeting also addressed the structure and governance of the organization that would monitor compliance by certification bodies. It was now clear that the new organization under consideration would not certify forests itself but would be responsible for developing some form of standard. The meeting report noted the emergence of "an umbrella certification monitoring/standards organization, tentatively named the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)" [5]. Concerned about accelerating deforestation, environmental degradation, and social exclusion, a group of timber users, traders, and representatives of environmental and human rights organizations met in California in 1990.

The FSC's timeline began with this meeting. The FSC concept and name were developed at this meeting. Some of the FSC's objectives were defined as follows: to promote adequate forest management, to provide the necessary assistance for the environmentally sound and economically sustainable use of natural resources, and to prevent the degradation or impact of these resources, ecosystems, or surrounding communities; to promote the sustainable management of forest resources and environmentally sound forestry production; and to promote the Principles and Criteria for the responsible management of the world's forests through the development of forest management standards and a voluntary accreditation program [1,5].

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

The FSC Principles and Criteria were first published in 1994 and revised in 1996, 1999, and 2001. A comprehensive review beginning in 2009 resulted in significant revisions to the wording (though not the substance) of the Principles and Criteria proposed in 2011 [10,11].Before any forest management unit can receive FSC certification, all ten principles and criteria must be implemented. The Principles and Criteria apply to all forest types covered by the certification and to all areas within the management unit. The P&Cs are globally applicable and relate to forest areas and diverse ecosystems, as well as to cultural, political, and legal systems. This means they are not specific to a particular country or region. Forest management certification according to the FSC system in Turkey began in 2010 in response to requests from the forestry sector. The FSC Principles and Criteria were adapted to Turkish forestry by incorporating indicators tailored to national or local conditions into an adapted standard. Because there was no national standard yet for Turkey, certification bodies, in conjunction with input from local stakeholders, implemented certification processes based on their own "general" standards, adapted to account for local conditions within the country or region [12].

In this study, FSC Forest Management certification studies carried out in Türkiye since 2010 were examined. Along with these studies, some structural suggestions have been tried to be developed based on the author's experience as the

lead auditor of FSC Forest Management Certification since 2012. In these structural suggestions, the author's experience and knowledge in the studies he personally conducted in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were also benefited. Publicly available publications made by FSC were also used in the study.

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3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Forest management certification in Türkiye began in 2010 according to the FSC system. Initially, projects were initiated under the scope of subFMU (Sub-Forest Management Unit), FMU, and FRD (Forest Regional Directorate). Later, the FGD (Forest General Directorate) determined that projects under the FRD were best practice. Initially, certification activities were carried out by SGS-Turkey and the Soil Association certification bodies, but currently, all projects are carried out by SGS-Turkey. Currently, Türkiye has 18 FSC FM/CoC certificates under 17 FRDs (30 FRDs in total) (Table 1). A total of 11,450,701.12 ha of forest area has been certified (49% of the total forest area). Turkey's total forest area is 23,363,084.00 ha, and according to 2024 statistics [13]. 13,813,598.00 ha (59%) of this area is productive forest. According to these data, a very large portion of the country's productive forest area has been certified.

There are 277 FMUs within the Turkish forestry organization, almost all of which are state forests. Of these, 152 have been certified, meaning 55% of the total management units have been certified. These figures indicate that a significant milestone has been reached in the certification processes conducted according to the FSC system in Turkish forestry. Therefore, due diligence must be taken to fulfil the system's requirements, taking this important milestone into account. This is only possible if the existing forest management system and the FSC system are fully aligned. Without this alignment, problems are always possible. It should be emphasized here that the certified area in Turkish forestry has reached a significant proportion.

First of all, at the beginning of the FSC forest management certification process, the process was treated like other projects in our history, with authorities stating that it would be tested in specific areas, or that otherwise the process would be terminated. However, the situation is different in forest certification, and it has been repeatedly emphasized that this process differs from other historical forestry processes. The forest certification process in Turkey was initiated in response to the demand of the forestry industry. This is the correct approach to the process, and foresters from these countries have stated that the process has begun in many European countries in this manner. This demand from the forestry sector demonstrates the importance of this process for the forestry sector in entering new markets and diversifying its customer base. Therefore, if the FGD, which holds a monopoly on wood raw material harvesting in Türkiye, initiated such a process, the forestry sector could not be expected to remain indifferent. Indeed, the number of forestry sector organizations exporting FSC certified products, which was around 50 in 2010 when the certification process first began, had surpassed 1,000 (FSC CoC certified organizations) by 2025.

Since the certification process is considered a temporary process, there are difficulties in its internalization by the local forestry organization. The fact that this is an irreversible system must first be accepted by the forestry system. This will only be possible with a top management approach. Top management's ownership of the process will contribute to the permanence of the process. This will only be possible by establishing a structure responsible for the management and monitoring of the certification process. A chief engineer or branch directorate responsible for the FSC process should definitely be established in the FRDs. The sole duty of this unit should be the FSC process, and the formation of a quality management system should be ensured together with the local organization. Thus, a more effective mechanism will be in place to solve the problems encountered at the FMUs level.

FSC Forest Management Certification process management is provided by the Business and Marketing Branch Directorates in the local organization. However, the FSC Forest Management certification process is not just a business marketing process, the entire management system is certified. In short, the compliance of all forestry activities with international norms is checked during the audits, and the aim is to continuously improve the system by revealing any non-conformances in the criteria. Another reason why the process should be evaluated together with Business Marketing is the completely wrong perception that there is a high expectation that it will contribute positively to wood pricing. FSC certification has provided an 18% increase in wood prices compared to FGD records, but this increase should be expected to be higher in qualified products (certified oak, beech, etc.).

Which certification system to use depends entirely on the marketing portfolio of the buyers of wood products. For this reason, the certification system to be used should be determined through surveys to be conducted with wood buyers and the road map should be determined accordingly. In this way, directing the certification systems by the wood producer organization without taking the demands of the buyers of wood products will cause problems in the future. Because the system in which raw wood is certified can only be marketed after passing through the CoC (Chain of Custody) certification system of FSC or PEFC. Wood material certified according to FSC and other systems cannot be replaced or used by another system. Organizations that will use raw wood in other certification systems must have the CoC

certificate of this system. Since these changes will be shaped according to the marketing portfolio of the buyers and will cause changes, it is necessary to ask the buyers of wood products.

Table 1. FSC Forest Management Projects in Türkiye.

FRD	FMU	Total Forest (ha)	Certificate beginning
Bolu	Aladağ (1 subFMU)	4.502	04.10.2011
Bolu	Partially (5 FMU)	303.123,36	17.04.2014
Muğla	All (12 FMU)	1.152.359,70	12.12.2012
Kastamonu	All (17 FMU)	937.921,90	05.04.2013
Zonguldak	Partially (8 FMU)	375.793.40	21.03.2013
Bursa	Partially (3 FMU)	150.597,07	07.03.2014
İstanbul	Partially (3 FMU)	257.744,36	18.03.2014
Balıkesir	All (9 FMU)	676.210,34	29.01.2020
Çanakkale	All (9 FMU)	570.558,00	13.05.2020
Antalya	All (14 FMU)	1.173.530,60	08.11.2019
Adana	All (10 FMU)	880.395,80	29.03.2019
Mersin	All (9 FMU)	833.260,88	6.02.2020
Konya	All (7 FMU)	699.699,41	11.11.2020
Amasya	All (15 FMU)	1.560.419,89	25.03.2023
Sinop	All (6 FMU)	388.335,20	26.07.2023
Giresun	All (11 FMU)	710.324,21	08.06.2024
Artvin	All (7 FMU)	497.295,80	23.06.2024
Kütahya	All (7 FMU)	654.422,60	21.01.2025
Toplam	**152 FMU**	11.450.701,12	

4. RESULTS

There is no distinction between easy and difficult systems among Forest Management certification systems. All systems are take into account the norms of international organizations and has commitments in this regard. Again, there is no distinction between cheap and expensive among these systems. Because significant amounts are paid to the accrediting institution. Not only the positive price contribution of the FSC forest management certification process to the wood producer FGD, but also its country-based contribution to the forest industry should be evaluated. Therefore, when necessary, the certification process should be considered as a public service contributing to the forest industry sector.

The expenditure on the certification process remains very modest, considering the positive contribution of this process to the promotion of our forestry and the forest industry. Despite this, studies should be carried out on the recycling of these costs with the difference to be added to the estimated cost of certified wood.

It is not possible for our country to go back from the FSC certification process, and permanent quality systems must be established in all central and local forestry organizations. Instead of leaving the management and follow-up of the process only to the Business Marketing Branch Directorate, all branches should be included in this process, and the management and follow-up should be controlled only by a chief engineer or branch manager whose work is the certification process.

It is important for senior management to take ownership of the process during the certification process. Better development is achieved if the top management embraces the process.The certification process must be included in the in-service training program. Thus, the system will be kept active at all times.

In regions with FSC Forest Management certification, this issue must be included in the internal audit, and FSC-related issues must be examined during the controls carried out by the branches. FGD, which has a monopoly on wood production, must decide together with the forest industry on which system it will produce, taking into account the international situation. Efforts to create systems for which there is no demand will further tire the provincial organization, which already has a high workload.

The current forestry management system in Turkish forestry must be overlapped with the FSC quality system. By ensuring this overlap, it will be possible to run the system more smoothly. If there is demand in the future, the "Double Certification" process, in which the FSC system is used together with the other requested system, can be tried. However, the demand situation must be taken into consideration in this regard. In other words, if there is a demand from the forest industry sector in this regard, the process should be initiated.

Our country's forestry is rich in terms of NWFP (Non wood forest products) potential, and attempts should be made to include potential products within the scope of certification in certified regions. This will pave the way for these products to enter new markets by creating higher added value.

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