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**Harmonizing Forest Certification and Deforestation-Free Legislation:
Advancing Sustainable Forest Management in Slovakia Under the EUDR**

Paluš, H. *, Parobek, J.

*Department of Marketing, Trade and World Forestry,
Faculty of Wood Sciences and Technology, Technical University in Zvolen, Slovakia
*palus@tuzvo.sk*

Abstract

The European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), adopted in 2023, represents a major transformation in global forest governance, requiring that products entering the EU market be both legally harvested and demonstrably deforestation-free. This paper explores the harmonization of voluntary forest certification standards with this new legal framework through the case of the Slovak Forest Certification System (SFCS) operating under the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC). The international benchmark standard, PEFC ST 1003:2024 Sustainable Forest Management-Requirements, was revised to incorporate explicit clauses on legality, prohibition of conversion and degradation, and mandatory geolocation of forest management units. In response, PEFC Slovakia revised its national standards TD SFCS 1001 and TD SFCS 1003 in 2025 to ensure full alignment with both the updated PEFC benchmark and the EUDR. A clause-by-clause comparative analysis and validation against the PEFC International Public Assessment Report confirmed that the Slovak standards integrated all new definitions such as agricultural plantations, forest degradation, and geolocation while maintaining compatibility with the national Act on Forests. The revision reinforced operational controls on conversion, enhanced traceability, and established clear legal cross-references, strengthening compliance assurance within certified forest operations. The Slovak experience demonstrates how national certification systems can act as bridging instruments between voluntary sustainability mechanisms and binding legislative frameworks. It illustrates an applicable approach to achieving deforestation-free value chains and contributes to the broader understanding of sustainable forest management as an evolving intersection of policy, legality, and certification practice.

Keywords: *Sustainable forest management, PEFC, EUDR, Forest certification, Deforestation free legislation*