Quality related problems on wood and wood products imported from Balkan countries: the Greek users point of view.

Michalis Skarvelis¹, Ioannis Kakaras²

¹ NAGREF/Forest Research Inst. of Athens, ATHENS, GREECE, skmi@fria.gr
² Technological Educational Inst. of Larisa, Karditsa dept. of Wood and Furniture Design and Technology, KARDITSA, GREECE, kakaras@teilar.gr
Greece imports 80% of its needs in wood and wood products

- 85% of the hardwoods used are imported
- Traditionally, Balkan countries were a major source for our needs
- Nowadays they still remain such a source
- Several Greek enterprises have invested in Balkan countries
• The last decades the conditions in political, economical and technological level are continuously changing.

• Due to the climatic conditions the equilibrium moisture content in most Greek districts is lower than in northern countries, which in turn raises increased requirements, especially for outdoor or semi outdoor applications.
Some questions emerge:

- Is everything OK up to now?
- What does Greeks believe?
- How can help this situation?
A questionnaire was implemented

- A structured questionnaire of 20 questions was prepared
- It was handled to enterprises using wood and wood products from Balkan countries
- Connection with the enterprises has been done with personal interviews, last winter
- 32 questionnaires have been answered
Identity of interviewees

- Round wood importer: 70%
- Sawn wood importer: 60%
- Sawn wood merchant: 70%
- Wooden floor producer: 50%
- Wooden floor merchant: 40%
- Frame producer: 30%
- Furniture producer: 20%
- Furniture merchant: 10%
- Other: 0%
Wood – wood products country of origin
Main wood species imported

Number and percentage of the imported species
Form of the imported products

- Floor strips (ready to use)
- Boards (25 mm) for parquetry
- Sawn timber
- Semi final products
- Round wood

Number and percentage of the imported forms of products
Final use of the imported products

- Doors, windows: 9%
- Sculpturing: 4%
- Building constr.: 13%
- Furniture: 21%
- Flooring: 53%
• 53.1% of the enterprises continues processing of the imported products
• 78.1% resells in wholesale
• 84.4% resells to final consumers.
Wood moisture content (%) at the time of import

Moisture Content %

- < 10%
- 10-12.5%
- 12.5-15%
- 15-20%
- 20-30%
- > 30%
- > 50%
• 56% of the correspondents declare that there is a need of further drying and almost all of them proceed to the drying procedure
• 81,3% of them adopt conventional drying after air predrying
• 6,3% adopt both conventional and vacuum drying after air predrying
• the rest 12,4% adopt air drying as the final method.
• 31% of the interviewed persons declare that they encounter problems related to moisture content
## Drying defects observed in imported (dried) products

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of drying defect</th>
<th>Answers</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distortions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface checks</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End checks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discolorations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casehardening</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honeycombing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great MC variation (25-65%) in the same stack of sawn timber</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue stain (in conifers)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regain of moisture (after drying, there aren't shelters)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20,0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Preferred ways to manage problems emerging from drying defects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preferred Action</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am present during delivery, to avoid having problems</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By sending shipment back</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By claim (in money or in next shipment)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By redrying</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect for the MC to be lowered by air drying</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult question, if you have to deal with Balkan suppliers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normally, no solution can be found! Croatians respond more positively, Romansians are not so flexible.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• They were also asked whether they believe that existing MC and/or drying related issues could have been more clear from the beginning, so they could have been avoided. 46 % of them answered “Yes”, showing that a great percentage of the troubles might be avoided.

• A percentage of 64 % also believes that themselves (or another Greek enterprise upon their request) could dry products in a better way, 29 % believes the opposite and 7 % answered “might be”.
EN Standards about Drying Quality

• None of the interviewed Greek enterprises knew anything about EN Standards dealing with measurements and estimation of properties related to drying quality of sawn timber

• It is believed that the same is valid for their suppliers from Balkan countries.
**Other quality related issues with the imported products? “YES” - 67%**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Ans.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality specification</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>77,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No accuracy in conversioning (e.g. wide mortise in floor strips, not uniform thickness in sawn lumber, opposite profiling in parquet elements)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not uniform colour</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colour modification (due to long-time exposure without stickering)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knots</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of standard prices</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No large lengths</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences in quantity estimation (volume estimation)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sap existence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5,6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quality specification

Especially in wooden parquet
(ready parquet and wet boards 25 mm thick)

• Greek parquet enterprises classify into 4, 5 or even 8 classes
• In most of the cases (84 %) the specifications of the Greek market are used
• In 25 % of the cases, the specifications from the country of origin are used
• The EN Standards are used only in 9 % of the cases
• Also more than one type of specifications could be used between the same pair of enterprises (seller – buyer)
• In general, Greek importers are considered “strange” customers and this is due to the peculiarities of the Greek market.
### Ways to manage problems relating to quality issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic settlement (claim)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settlement in next order</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching for a new supplier</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have already invested there, so we don't have problems</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returning back shipment (seldom)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The (Greek) importer takes the wrong quality back</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is no organized arbitration (it existed in the past)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I buy from importers, making my own selection</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My representative interferes to solve the problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goods replacement</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CE marking

• Greek enterprises were asked about CE marking on wood and wood products and only a percentage of 53 % was adequately informed.
• The same enterprises import CE marked products from Balkan countries at a low percentage of 13 %
• This happens only when they buy products (normally this is Balkan parquet) through a foreign (usually German) enterprise, which reexports the product to Greece.
Some interesting statements, that Greek enterprises did:

- "I use only Greek transporting companies, to avoid problems during transportation"
- "After 1990 there are problems with standardization"
- "Slovenians, Croatians and Serbians are more reliable, Romanians less reliable"
- "In Serbia and Croatia we have problems with Small Size Enterprises. In Slovenia things are better. In Romania we can find large quantities, which are difficult to be found from the same supplier in former Yugoslavia"
Some interesting statements (cont.)

- "In Bosnia there still exist problems with adequacy of drying equipment (old fashioned)"
- "Things in former Yugoslavia are better now, than it was 4-5 years ago"
- "You need to have your representative present during sorting, in order to have the agreed qualities"
- "They are not strict in inspection issues, but it also depends on the supplier"
- "I do a second sorting in Greece"
- "In order to achieve lower cost and desired quality we invested ourselves in Romania (also Serbia), we transferred our know-how and now we are producers and suppliers"
Some interesting statements (cont.)

- "In some areas there are problems with power (electricity) supply"
- "We can not find large lengths (especially for oak strips)"
- "We turned to the North American market (for oak wood), due to uniformity of products, larger lengths and better economic agreements"
- "I have also serious moisture problems (in conifers), with wood coming from Austria"
- "I prefer to buy beech wood from Germany although it is much more expensive, because I can find a standard quality"
Some interesting statements (cont.)

• "We import wood products from Balkan countries but only through German enterprises, in order to be sure for the specifications"

• "We could dry better, but we have higher cost of drying"

• “We find in Ukraine what we can not find always in Balkans: large quantities (of oak wood) and application of our classification system”
Radioactivity issues

• Some Greek enterprises (especially parquet producers) and also final consumers, were concerned in the past about radioactivity in wood and wood products coming from Ukraine (mainly) and the former Yugoslavia

• Past and contemporary tests showed that there is not such a danger

• There still exists a fear among some final consumers
Some Conclusions:

• Traditionally, there was a good collaboration in the wood supply chain, among other Balkan countries and Greece.

• For a period of more than 10 years some “abnormalities” occurred.

• In recent years the market for wood products gradually becomes more organized, balanced and harmonized. This process is still going on.

• In Balkan countries have prevailed many serious timber exporters that the Greek importers trust, but still exist some casual insolvent exporters.
Some troubles still exist:

- In some cases there is high moisture content (about 10-12%) in ready parquet products or 12-15% in sawn timber.
- Bad quality of parquet units or sawn timber due to improper mechanical process. This problem gradually disappears with changes in machinery.
- Different approaches emerge in classification, which should be solved with mutual negotiations.
- CE marking is not demanded for wood products by the customers, for the moment. The producers also don’t apply it, although it could be an advantage for the cooperation in the future, against the competitors.
Maybe it is time to try harder in all area of Balkan Peninsula:

- to inform people and apply EN Standards dealing with properties related to drying quality of sawn timber
- to inform and apply EN Standards dealing with wood products classification.
THANK YOU!!!
ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΩ ΠΟΛΥ!