



# Minutes of the 29<sup>th</sup> ECPGR Executive Committee meeting

6 March 2024 (h 09:00-12:00)

Online (Teams)

## Present:

Marianne Lefort (Chair)  
Birgitte Lund (Denmark)  
Petra Engel (Italy)  
Pavol Hauptvogel (Slovakia)  
Imke Thormann (Germany)  
Lorenzo Maggioni (ECPGR Secretariat)

## 1. Opening of the meeting

The ExCo Chair opened the meeting and welcomed Imke Thormann as a new member of the ExCo, representing the West region.

## 2. Evaluation of Grant Scheme proposals

The ExCo was pleased with the improvement in the quality of the proposals received. With the intention to also improve the evaluation process, it was agreed that the column of the budget table dedicated to inputs in kind was offering useful information. However, it should be clearly understood both by applicants and evaluators that this column is meant to give an approximate indication of the value of the work that the project partners will carry out during the implementation of the Activity, but is not paid for by the money received from ECPGR.

It was agreed that the Secretariat could organize a short briefing with all the Working Group (WG) Chairs at the time of the launching of the next Call for proposals, to explain how the templates (proposal description and budget table) are expected to be filled and to answer any questions of the Chairs.

The Secretariat reminded the ExCo of the decision made during the previous meeting, whereby the available funds for WG actions in 2024 could be ideally split between granted Activities (ca. €60,000) and proposed meetings (ca. € 45,000).

Two proposals were received for evaluation, submitted by the Solanaceae and Maize WGs. The proposal from the Solanaceae WG was approved for funding, at the condition that a number of questions for clarification would be answered satisfactorily through an informal exchange of emails.

The proposal from the Maize WG was also considered potentially eligible for funding, although the ExCo raised a number of questions and requests for improvement of the clarity of the text and the role of partners. A request for resubmission will be sent to the Activity Coordinator.

The submitted proposals are listed in the table below. The full proposals, once approved, and Letters of Award, will be published on the ECPGR website.

Title of submitted proposals	Working Group	Coordinator	Budget
<b>EUROPEPLAND</b> - Implementing a trans-EUROpean PEPper LANDrace collection for resilient agriculture	Solanaceae	Pasquale Tripodi, Italy	€ 29,947.50
<b>MALANIRS</b> - MAize LAndraces traits phenomic prediction using Near InfraRed Spectra	Maize	Stéphane Nicolas, France	€ 29,920

### 3. Request to hold a meeting of the Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAP) WG

A request to organize a meeting of the MAP WG in Albania in May 2024 at a cost of ca. €20,000 for 20 participants, was submitted by the Chair, Ana Maria Barata.

The ExCo appreciated the initiative aiming to re-activate the group. At the same time, they thought that the proposal needed more elaboration, since the proposed aim was rather generalistic, without a practical focus. In fact, it is no longer possible to organize a meeting without very specific objectives/concrete achievements to be reached through the meeting. Also, with a budget of maximum €15,000, no more than 12-17 participants can be funded, depending on the length and location of the meeting.

The ExCo decided to recommend Ana Maria to host an initial virtual meeting to identify proactive members and start identifying items of discussion as well as a work plan for the next years.

This approach may help to build a more complete and suitable agenda for a subsequent meeting, where specific work plan elements requiring further discussion can later be addressed in presence (for example the preparation by project partners of a Grant Scheme proposal or the finalization of a crop-specific document, etc.). It was also suggested that the Secretary participate in the virtual meeting to offer advice.

It was also indicated that meeting requests need to be submitted early enough to allow the Secretariat at least three months of preparation time after approval.

### 4. Appointment of new *Brassica* WG Chair

The need to identify a new Chair for the *Brassica* WG had been discussed in a [recent meeting](#) of the Eubraswild Activity in Catania, Italy. As previously announced, former Chair Ferdinando Branca invited the group to select a new Chair. There was a very large support for the candidacy of Smiljana Goreta Ban, Croatia, who was invited to submit an Expression of Interest. The ExCo evaluated the Expression of Interest and CV provided by Smiljana and unanimously thought that she was suitable for the position and decided to appoint her and send the customary Letter of thanks and Certification of service to Ferdinando Branca, after 17 years of service.

### 5. Briefing by the Secretary on ongoing items

The Secretary informed the ExCo about the developments of the Horizon project PRO-GRACE, explaining that the first year was concluded and an independent progress review commissioned by the EC was scheduled for 26 April. Items of interest touched by this briefing were the progress made by task leader Theo van Hintum with a questionnaire to several genebank managers. This was meant to explore the level of awareness of European genebank managers about the need to generally improve *ex situ* conservation with a quality system. Interest in getting engaged and committing towards the establishment of a certification system was also explored. Results of this analysis revealed a very variable status of development of

the European genebanks and a generally positive attitude to enter into a certification system, provided also capacity-building measures were offered.

The main responsibility of ECPGR is the overall coordination of a task aiming to draw the blueprint of the list of stakeholders, structure, governance, financial plan and mode of operation of a future European Research Infrastructure on Plant Genetic Resources (GRACE-RI). The role of ECPGR in this potential future scenario started to be discussed. The Secretariat thought that it would be important to appropriately embed the existing coordinating structure provided by ECPGR into the planned hub of the future RI. I. Thormann advised that the governments will likely not fund two different structures (ECPGR and GRACE-RI), if these were presented as separate or alternatives with similar objectives.

The Secretary also briefed the ExCo about the two recent virtual meetings held by the Genebank Managers Network and the ongoing preparation for the first physical meeting, scheduled for 14-15 May 2024 in Braga, Portugal.

National Coordinators of AEGIS member countries are being contacted by the Secretary, with the aim of verifying the commitment taken by the AEGIS Associate Members towards maintaining accessions as part of the European Collection. This was considered a first step to promote re-activation of the AEGIS system.

## **6. Any other business**

P. Engel observed that some WGs are much more active than others and it would be good to try to better monitor their progress so that appropriate incentives could be put in place to encourage more action where needed. Proposed mechanisms will need to be further discussed.