



European Cooperative Programme for Plant Genetic Resources (ECPGR)

Minutes of the 10th ECPGR Executive Committee meeting 19-20 October 2017, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Present:

Eva Thörn (Chair)

Marc Lateur (Belgium)

Gordana Đjurić (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Küllli Annamaa (Estonia)

Flavio Roberto De Salvador (Italy)

Lorenzo Maggioni (ECPGR Secretariat)

The Agenda for this meeting and other background documents are available online ([here](#)).

Financial situation of ECPGR

By Mid-October 2017, Phase IX contributions received were totalling € 1 842 000 from regular contributions, plus € 211 000 deriving from voluntary contributions, mainly from Germany. The Secretary presented an estimate of the available resources, keeping into consideration expected expenditures over the entire Phase and missing contributions from Azerbaijan, Israel, Poland and Spain. Based on such calculation, ca. € 134 000 were considered still available to cover the funding of new Grant Scheme Activities.

Selection of Grant Scheme proposals

A total of three proposals were submitted as a result of the Fifth Call of the ECPGR Activity Grant Scheme (including the resubmission of a revised BETANET proposal, which was invited by the ExCo after the evaluation of the Fourth Call). Following an evaluation of these proposals, based on the established criteria, the ExCo selected for funding two proposals (see below), while the proposal VitNet-EU from the *Vitis* Working Group (WG) was not accepted for funding.

The approved proposals, listed in the table below, need to be sent to the Steering Committee (SC) to allow for comments or objections regarding the proposed partnership in each Activity. The results of the evaluation, including justification for rejection, will be sent by the ExCo Chair to the Activity Coordinators of all the submitted proposals. Successful proposals and the corresponding Letters of Award will be published on the ECPGR website.

Title of approved proposal	Working Groups	Coordinator	Budget
1. BETANET	<i>Beta</i>	Piergiorgio Stevanato, Italy	€ 15 000
2. <i>Prunus</i> Alignment	<i>Prunus</i>	Matthew Ordidge, UK	€ 29 000
Total Budget			€ 44 000

Regarding the presence of 13 partners in the *Prunus* proposal, the ExCo agreed that this number could be justifiable in the given proposal and felt that the limit of 12 partners could be slightly increased if justified and does not exceed the given budget frame.

Planning for a Sixth Call for proposals under the ECPGR Grant Scheme

A Sixth Call for proposals should be launched as soon as possible in November 2017 with deadline end of March 2018. The ExCo will evaluate the proposals during its meeting in May 2018, at the occasion of the SC meeting. The maximum amount available for each Working Group should not exceed € 15 000. Although a few countries have exhausted their country quota, the ExCo will be prepared to use its discretionary quota in order to guarantee the participation of valuable partners.

ECPGR objectives and Mode of Operation

The ExCo noted that the revised document of the ECPGR objectives had reached an advanced stage after improvements and comments received from both the Steering Committee and the WG Chairs. It was agreed that a new output related to phytosanitary issues should be added to Objective 1. The revised draft (v.3) of the objectives should be included among the background documents for discussion at the next SC meeting. The draft Mode of Operation for Phase X, presented by the Secretariat the day before at the WG Chairs' meeting, should also be circulated to the SC and included among the background documents. The ExCo noted that this document had received appreciation during the WG Chairs' meeting.

Recommendations from Working Groups' Chairs

The ExCo took into consideration 12 recommendations prepared by the WG Chairs during their recent meeting. The recommendations are listed below, together with the respective ExCo responses:

1. WG Membership: two types of membership are suggested, a Full Member and expert in the subject and Associate Member(s) as persons who wish to be kept informed about the outcomes of the WG. All members of a WG should complete a proforma that stipulates their expertise and what level of input they have to the WG. Participation in the Grant Scheme would normally be associated with Full Members. As an alternative, one person per country (Full Member) and in addition Associate Members who are kept informed by the Full Member.

ExCo reply: the ExCo will propose for decision by the SC that WGs remain open to several members; at the same time the National Coordinator (NC) should identify one contact person per WG with responsibility to answer questions of national matter and to act as coordinator within the country for matters related to the specific WG. The Secretariat would maintain two separate distribution lists, one including only the WG contact persons and a second list including all the WG members. Additionally, NCs will be asked to regularly revise the list of WG members (at least twice per Phase) and possibly check whether the members are active or not.

2. WG representation: the WG Chairs believe it would be to the benefit of ECPGR in general if the WG Chairs had a chance to make recommendations and inputs to the decision-making process within ECPGR. Currently, there is a feeling that decisions are taken without consultation of the WGs which are then required to implement decisions.

ExCo reply: the ExCo will propose for decision by the SC that meetings of all Chairs become regular events, to be held possibly twice per Phase, in advance of the SC meetings, with the dual purpose of improving coordination across WGs and of creating a consultation mechanism that can provide feedback and suggestions to the SC.

3. Deputy Chair: re-introduce the concept of “Vice-Chair” (Deputy Chair) in order to share the leading work and to guarantee continuity in case of retirement.

ExCo reply: it is suggested that Chairs, whenever considered useful, identify one or more deputies, using their discretion for the appropriate selection mechanism. Deputy Chairs will then be identified by the Secretariat on the web contact lists.

4. Chair Committee meeting: the Chairs Committee should meet at least twice in a Phase prior to the SC meeting to review their suggestions to be put before the SC.

ExCo reply: see reply to point 2 above.

5. Fund all WGs: to ensure all WGs are active, provide funding of all WGs.

ExCo reply: with the proposed new Mode of Operation for Phase X, the opportunity for all WGs to have easier access to funds is increased.

6. Inter-WG communication should be improved: ensure contact among members including through better communication and transfer of information.

ExCo reply: measures suggested by ExCo in reply to points 1 and 2 above should improve both inter- and intra-WG communication. WG Chairs are also reminded that Activities can be proposed jointly by various WGs. Additionally, the general as well as Chairs-specific ECPGR listservers (<http://www.ecpgr.cgiar.org/ecpgr-listserver>) are available as inter-WG communication tools and WG Chairs are invited to promote their use.

7. Promote utilization of germplasm: ECPGR needs to establish a Task Force to 1) review the operation of basic genebank operations; 2) promote inter-institutional cooperation (e.g. for safety duplication in AEGIS).

ExCo reply: the ECPGR objectives under discussion for Phase X already include activities addressing the proposals made.

8. Crop Portals: to improve visibility of the genetic resources in the European genebanks, the development of Crop Portals and communication targeted to breeders and other stakeholders are developed.

ExCo reply: improving visibility of AEGIS accessions is a new activity already included in the draft objectives for Phase X. Although the development of Crop Portals by national institutions is welcome, this activity is currently not a priority for the use of ECPGR funds (see draft objectives of ECPGR for Phase X).

9. Maximize funding for ECPGR activities: ECPGR needs to establish a Task Force to review potential funding sources to enhance the opportunity of ECPGR action.

ExCo reply: the ExCo believes that the suggested task is already covered by the ExCo itself, in coordination with the entire SC.

10. Develop joint activities: particularly promote activities that build links between: a) genebanks and seed companies; b) genebanks and small farmers producing for local consumption; c) genebanks and local governments; d) genebanks and training activities (specially for genebanks located in universities); e) genebanks and biodiversity agencies.

ExCo reply: these activities are within the remit of the draft ECPGR objectives for Phase X. In particular, objective 5 (Use of PGR) is specifically addressing these points. Activities can be developed and funded as part of the Grant Scheme and through the new Mode of Operation.

11. AEGIS-related activities: 1) Introduce the term “AEGIS candidate” in order to speed up flagging and registration (for accessions which do not officially meet the AEGIS criteria but for which registration would be worthwhile for other specific reasons, such as uniqueness); 2) ECPGR should work towards strengthening the basis for funding for genebanks in Europe; 3) Exploring options for AEGIS to gain ERIC (European Research Infrastructure Consortium) status; 4) Introduce a genebank mentorship system to stimulate collection holders to flag AEGIS accessions; 5) Actions should be initiated to encourage upload of C&E data into EURISCO on a larger scale.

ExCo reply:

- 1) the ExCo considered that a list of “AEGIS candidates” might be useful in order to identify groups of accessions requiring priority attention or funding. The ExCo was however not convinced that it would be useful or practical to include such lists into EURISCO, since the reasons behind the status of ‘candidate’ might have very different meanings in different situations, for example lists conceived by the WGs or by the National systems. It would be difficult to provide a clear information to the users with regard to the meaning and timeframe of the candidates’ lists as well as to keep them up to date within EURISCO. It is therefore suggested to appropriately include on the AEGIS web site lists of candidate AEGIS accessions for each WG or National system wishing to provide them. The explanation of what is meant by ‘candidate accessions’ should be added to each specific list (i.e. what are the reasons to delay the flagging as full AEGIS accessions, whether they be related to administrative steps, funding requirements or other reasons); The opinion of the Steering Committee will be sought about the alternative opportunity to introduce an ‘AEGIS candidate’ status directly in EURISCO (either visible or not) and to generate from EURISCO candidate lists to be provided to ECPGR Secretariat.
- 2) strengthening the basis for funding for genebanks in Europe is considered at the heart of what AEGIS is already trying to achieve, with the definition of formal commitments for long-term conservation by governments and identification of priority accessions as well as promotion of responsibility sharing in Europe. More specific suggestions from the Chairs might be welcome;
- 3) In the understanding of the ExCo, ERIC mainly offers a legal framework to a research infrastructure, which is not a requirement of AEGIS. Moreover, ERIC promotes the establishment and operation of research infrastructures; however, research is not the main function of AEGIS (which is rather conserving and giving access to material outside of the structure). In any case, the ExCo will further explore the potential of ERIC, in consultation with the Chairs who proposed the initiative;
- 4) A mentorship initiative to stimulate collection holders to flag AEGIS accessions could be initiated by the Secretariat by sending a letter to all the Associate Members, enquiring whether they would like to receive specific mentorship. Further action could be planned based on the replies received;
- 5) Action promoting the upload of C&E has been initiated by the EURISCO Coordinator and this will be emphasized whenever possible. In particular, the EURISCO Coordinator will be invited to the next SC meeting to demonstrate the new functionalities and promote upload of C&E by the National Inventory Focal Points.
12. EURISCO: 1) development of a EURISCO feature for downloading of C&E data at experiment level; 2) evaluate the possibility to include C&E data from accessions that are currently not documented in EURISCO; 3) establishment of a quality check system in EURISCO, for example regarding taxonomy and geographic coordinates; 4) evaluate the possibility to include genetic and –omics data of accessions in EURISCO.

ExCo reply: as a general remark, prioritization of activities related to the EURISCO functionality is a task that is mainly demanded to the EURISCO Advisory Committee and the National Inventory Focal Points. Planned activities are published in the annual workplans that are available from the EURISCO website (Plans/reports Tab) and some of the suggested activities are already in the pipeline. Additionally, suggestions for improvements can be sent directly to the EURISCO Coordinator by any user. A recent feedback survey was launched by the EURISCO Coordinator on 11 October, addressing all the National Inventory Focal Points. The deadline for participation in this survey will be extended to 30 November 2017 and a reminder sent to all National Inventory Focal Points (NIFPs) and the NCs.

In reply to the specific suggestions made by the Chairs, a feature to implement an experiment-level download of C&E and passport data is planned and can be scheduled for implementation in 2018. Inclusion of C&E data from accessions that are currently not documented in EURISCO has been purposefully forbidden, as EURISCO intends to provide data only about accessions that are recognized by each National Inventory and that are trackable. A new descriptor for historic accessions (for which only data still exist) is however being added to EURISCO and this will allow National Inventory Focal Points to include in EURISCO also relevant data of accessions that are no longer available or existing. The establishment of a quality check system regarding taxonomy is part of the ongoing 'Taxonomy project' funded by Germany. The issue of geographic data is a regular topic of the annual training workshops. The ExCo agrees that the possibility to include genetic data should remain for consideration in the agenda of the EURISCO development and the EURISCO Coordinator is invited to start exploring the possibility to include SSR data, which are especially used by WGs of vegetatively propagated crops.

Role of the WG Chairs

The ExCo suggested that all the current WG Chairs should be proposed for re-election and continue to serve in their role during Phase X, if available.

Ways to recognize their valuable service should be introduced such as: 1) Standard letter of thanks to be sent to the institute of the Chair at the end of each year (with previous agreement of the Chair); 2) ECPGR Certificate of service to be sent to the Chair at the end of his/her term; 3) Inclusion on the ECPGR website of picture and CV (if agreeable by the Chair).

Communication Strategy

The ExCo took note and appreciated that Szonja Csörgö from the European Seed Agency (ESA) had recently led the preparation of the draft ECPGR Communication Strategy and had provided a revised version to the attention of the ExCo. The ExCo found the draft exemplarily short and concise and liked the structure. Nevertheless, it raised some comments and suggestions to be sent to the Task Force (TF) (composed of Szonja Csörgö, Gordana Đjurić, Jens Weibull, Marc Lateur and Lorenzo Maggioni) insisting for further handling of the document. A time plan was also set as follows:

1. Revision of the Communication Strategy by the TF by the end of March 2018
2. Sending out the draft to the Steering Committee for analysis
3. Discussion of the draft at the SC meeting in May 2018
4. Definition of budget and then ask the TF to develop an action plan.

Preparation of project proposal under Horizon 2020

The ECPGR Secretary informed the ExCo of the steps taken by the three Networks' Secretariats as of March 2017, to organize and lead the joint submission of a proposal under the call SFS 28-2018 related to "Joining Forces for GenRes and biodiversity management" (Coordination and Support Action). In particular, the ExCo took note of the procedure adopted by the Secretariat to seek inputs from the National Coordinators within

15 September (letter sent at the beginning of August). The ExCo also endorsed the choice of partners from the crop sector made by the Secretariat, i.e. INRA, France; BLE and IPK, Germany; CGN, The Netherlands; Uni. Birmingham, UK and Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI). Options to enlarge the participation to other countries were also discussed, but considered not feasible, since each network was expected to add only 4-5 partners to the project. Each partner should be seen as the most suitable and best equipped to organize, through the project, network activities that are expected to involve and support the overall ECPGR objectives and programme. The ExCo Chair will also be invited to attend as a support person the preparatory meeting, scheduled in Rome, 6-8 November 2017.

Planning for the End-of-Phase Steering Committee meeting

The ExCo advanced the preparation for the End-of-Phase (15th) SC meeting, which is scheduled for 15-17 May 2018 in Thessaloniki, Greece, with the following decisions:

- a. The ExCo should hold its meeting on the day before, Monday 14 May, with arrival in Thessaloniki on Sunday 13th.
- b. The draft agenda should include the following items: Opening and statements; adoption of the agenda; report from the ExCo (including analysis of reports from WG Chairs); report on Phase IX (technical and financial) from the ECPGR Secretary; report on EURISCO (invite Stephan Weise); statements from all countries on future participation and financing of the programme; objectives and Mode of Operation for Phase X; communication strategy; Global Information System (invite representative from the International Treaty); MoU for an Evaluation Network (invite Gerald Moore); genebank peer review system (presented by Theo van Hintum); hosting arrangements for EURISCO and Secretariat; budget for Phase X.
- c. It was noted that the preparation of background documents was proceeding according to planning.
- d. The offer for hosting EURISCO had been sent by IPK and the ExCo considered it acceptable for submission to the SC. Eva Thörn will schedule a visit to Maccarese in November to discuss hosting arrangements for the Secretariat with the Director General of Bioversity International.
- e. The Secretariat was invited to prepare a draft budget for Phase X, including adequate staff time support and new budget lines for “WG Chairs’ meetings”, “Services to AEGIS” and “Communication Strategy”. An increase of the countries’ contributions in the range of 7-10% was suggested as appropriate.

6. Any other business

The ExCo extended warm thanks to Gordana Đjurić for her very good and appreciated contribution to the Committee in the past four years. Mirta Culek, Croatia will be proposed for replacement of Gordana in her role of representative of the Eastern region in a broad sense, as of January 2018.