



European Cooperative Programme for Plant Genetic Resources (ECPGR)

Phase VIII (2009-2013)
2009 Progress Report

AEgis section extracted from:

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4. AEGIS INITIATIVE FOR “A EUROPEAN GENE BANK INTEGRATED SYSTEM”

During 2009 further steps were made with respect to the development of elements that are essential components of the AEGIS system. In addition, some other important developments took place during 2009 which are summarized below.

On 22 April 2009 the AEGIS Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was sent to the ECPGR National Coordinators for signature by the respective country authorities. On 23 July 2009, upon signature of the tenth country eligible for membership, AEGIS entered into force. By the end of 2009 the following 17 countries had returned the signed MOU to Bioversity International, the depositary of the agreements: Albania, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland and the Ukraine. In addition, seven AEGIS Associate Membership Agreements between institutions holding *ex situ* accessions and the respective National Coordinators were concluded and copies sent to the Secretariat in Rome.

In September 2009, as a follow-up to the Steering Committee meeting in Sarajevo, the Secretariat, in close collaboration with Theo van Hintum (CGN, The Netherlands), finalized the discussion paper “Quality Management System for AEGIS”, AQUAS in short. The paper includes a definition of a quality management system, the principles of such a system, the operational framework including responsibilities, and the implementation steps of AQUAS.

During its Eleventh Meeting, the Steering Committee had approved the formation of a Competitive Grant Scheme, as part of the establishment phase of AEGIS. A small Task Force had assisted the Secretariat in developing the Scheme which is intended to support activities that will directly contribute to the establishment and/or operation of AEGIS. A total of € 103 000 had been set aside for this purpose during Phase VIII. The announcement on the launch of the Scheme was made on 26 June 2009, inviting ECPGR Networks, Network Coordinating Groups and Working Groups to submit proposals. A total of 17 proposals were received by the 18 October 2009 deadline, of which 14 were eligible (see the full list at: http://aegis.cgiar.org/about_aegis/latest_news/aegis_grant.html). The evaluation process was initiated under the leadership of the newly established AEGIS Advisory Committee.

In September 2009 the Steering Committee approved the Terms of Reference and the composition of the newly established AEGIS Advisory Committee. The Committee consists of Dave Astley (UK), Ladislav Dotlačil (Czech Republic), Gert Poulsen (Denmark), Anke van den Hurk (The Netherlands) and Vladimir Meglič (Slovenia) (<http://aegis.cgiar.org/structure/governance.html>).

The Secretariat staff participated in a number of ECPGR Network and Working Group meetings, as well as in some other European meetings that provided adequate fora for discussion and the creation of awareness on AEGIS. These included:

- ECPGR/FAO/Bioversity/EAPGREN Inter-regional Cooperation Workshop on International Treaty Implementation, 19-20 March 2009, Entebbe, Uganda
- SEEDNet Regional Steering Committee Meetings, 30 March-2 April 2009, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, and 7-9 October 2009, Dubrovnik, Croatia
- EPGRIS3 meeting on the creation of protocols to facilitate the exchange of characterization and evaluation (C&E) data and to explore and improve the linkage between ECCDBs and EURISCO, 7 May 2009, Bundesanstalt für Landwirtschaft und Ernährung (BLE), Bonn, Germany
- EUCARPIA Genetic Resources Section, 26-30 May 2009, Ljubljana, Slovenia (keynote presentation on AEGIS)
- Preparatory meeting for the FP7 call for proposals on research “PGR Secure, i.e. KBBE.2010.1.1-03: “Characterization of biodiversity resources for crop wild relatives to improve crops by breeding”, 2 July 2009, organized by the University of Birmingham
- The Integration of Cryopreservation in Genebank Strategies. COST Action 871, WG2 Workshop, 10-11 September 2009, IPK, Gatersleben, Germany

- Fourth Meeting of the ECPGR Working Group on Medicinal and Aromatic Plants, 29 September-1 October 2009, Kuşadası, Turkey
- Third Meeting of the ECPGR Vegetables Network Meeting, 10-12 November 2009, Catania, Italy.

In July 2009 the Framework Programme 7 of the European Union published the “Research Infrastructures – Support to existing research infrastructures – Integrating Activities” Call which included a topic “Integrated research infrastructure for a rational *ex situ* conservation and use of European plant genetic resources for food and agriculture”. The Secretariat, Bioversity and some ECPGR member countries had worked closely with key officials to make this topic fully applicable to the establishment of AEGIS. The ECPGR Steering Committee endorsed the suggestion that the ECPGR Secretariat should coordinate the development of the proposal. On 3 December 2009 the proposal was submitted (EUROGENEBANK in short) after an intensive period of discussions and writing in which the selected Work Package leaders played a key role.

During the first (out of two) face-to-face meetings, it was decided to stick to a number of principles, i.e.:

- To place the EUROGENEBANK Project squarely within the AEGIS framework
- To include key aspects agreed upon by the ECPGR SC (i.e. “A Strategic Framework for the Implementation of a European Genebank Integrated System (AEGIS) – A Policy Guide”)
- To build on the strength and existing capacity/infrastructure
- To create the Project as an “independent” entity, but to actively manage the interface with the wider community
- To make the Project outputs available to all European genebanks (owing to the importance of capacity building).

The submitted EUROGENEBANK Project entailed the following interesting facts and figures:

- If funded, the ECPGR Secretariat would coordinate the Project implementation.
- The project involves 32 formal participating organizations (i.e. partners) in 19 countries.
- The total requested budget is € 8 683 685 with more than 1060 person/months and a duration of 4 years. The proposal includes 79 deliverables and 85 milestones.
- The Project consists of 11 Work Packages (see box below), lead by 8 different organizations.

Work Packages of EUROGENEBANK Project
WP1: Project Management (Bioversity)
WP2: Policy dissemination and communication (KIS)
WP3: European <i>ex situ</i> conservation and use knowledge base (CRI)
WP4: Creating the European Collection (Graminor)
WP5: Designing C&E procedures and infrastructure (BLE)
WP6: Capacity building (Bioversity)
WP7: Upgrading PGR information management and interfaces (CGN)
WP8: Access to European PGR Catalogue (Bioversity)
WP9: Developing operational and technical standards (MTT)
WP10: Designing the quality management system (MTT)
WP11: Supportive research to facilitate rationalization of germplasm management (INRA)

According to the instructions of the SC at its meeting in Sarajevo (2008), the following **publication**, previously printed as a “Discussion paper”, was made available on the Web in a revised form and as a “Policy guide”:

- ECPGR. 2009. A Strategic Framework for the Implementation of a European Genebank Integrated System (AEGIS). A Policy Guide. European Cooperative Programme for Plant Genetic Resources (ECPGR). Bioversity International, Rome, Italy.

A new dedicated **Web site for AEGIS** was developed and launched in December 2009:
<http://www.aegis.cgiar.org/>

Outlook for 2010: major activities foreseen for 2010 include the development of a template for an operational genebank manual, the development of generic operational genebank standards and support to the WGs in the drafting of minimum crop standards. Draft system(s) should be developed for recording and reporting on the implementation of AQUAS. Procedures for identifying MAAs should also be streamlined. The selected Grant Scheme 2009 projects will be implemented and a second Grant Scheme 2010 is expected to be launched at the end of 2010. The number of AEGIS members and of established Associate Membership Agreements is expected to increase and possibly the first accessions belonging to the European Collection will be designated.