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About this Newsletter

Biodiversity International is one of the 15 Centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). Biodiversity's vision is that: "People today and in the future enjoy greater well-being through increased incomes, sustainably improved food security and nutrition, and greater environmental health, made possible by conservation and the deployment of agricultural biodiversity on farms and in forests."

Biodiversity's Regional Office for Europe provides the Coordination Secretariats for the European Cooperative Programme for Plant Genetic Resources (ECPGR) and for the European Forest Genetic Resources Programme (EUFORGEN).

From October 2010 Biodiversity publishes only online issues of the Newsletter for Europe. This Newsletter is intended to serve as an informal forum for the exchange of news and views, and to create closer ties within the genetic resources community in Europe. Previous issues are available from the Biodiversity website: www.biodiversityinternational.org You can subscribe to the newsletter at: www.biodiversityinternational.org/about_us/regions/europe/newsletter_for_europe.html

Articles for publication in the Newsletter: We invite you to send your ideas, feedback and written contributions to Biodiversity's Regional Office for Europe by email to biodiversity-europe@cgiar.org. Please submit all contributions for NL43 by **30 April 2010**.

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Towards a new ECPGR



The ECPGR Steering Committee met in Bratislava in December 2010 to discuss the programme's future. Photo: P.Hauptvogel, Plant Production Research Centre, Slovakia

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As has already been mentioned in the previous two Newsletters, the independent externally commissioned review of ECPGR was due to be concluded with the discussion of the Review Report during the ad hoc ECPGR Steering Committee meeting in Bratislava, Slovakia from 14-16 December 2010. This meeting took place and allows us at the Secretariat and the Regional Office for Europe to look back and draw some conclusions. In fact, as it has been the very first ECPGR-wide review and considering that changes

expected at Biodiversity International may affect the hosting arrangement, it was felt opportune and justified to devote an editorial-cum-assessment to this review.

The Independent External Review of ECPGR was requested by the ECPGR Steering Committee (SC) at its 11th meeting (2008) and the actual review was completed in July 2010. The Review Panel – consisting of Thomas Gass, (Panel Chair) Switzerland, Marianne Lefort, France and Orlando de Ponti, Netherlands - based its review on a Stakeholder's consultation, a Synthesis document prepared by the Secretariat, a series of interactions with the Secretariat, Biodiversity International staff, selected ECPGR stakeholders, discussions with the Global Crop Diversity Trust, the Secretariat of the International Treaty and through the attendance of an ECPGR Working Group meeting.

The Panel submitted its Review Report to the Steering Committee on 28

July 2010, presenting its analysis, conclusions and 25 recommendations, 7 of which were institutional in nature, 4 related to ECPGR objectives, 2 with modus operandi issues, 2 with partnerships matters, 2 about capacity building, 6 dealt with ECPGR components and 2 with resources. (The full report can be found on the ECPGR website <http://www.ecpgr.cgiar.org/>)

As inputs for the extraordinary ad hoc Steering Committee meeting in Bratislava, the Secretariat prepared an annotated agenda and shared the 'Biodiversity International response to the Report of the External Review of ECPGR as host of the ECPGR Secretariat'. Presentations then followed from Thomas Gass (Panel Chair), on the Panel's conclusions and recommendations, Emile Frison (Director General, Biodiversity International) gave the response to the Review Report and Lorenzo Maggioni (ECPGR Coordinator) presented a progress report of Phase VIII.

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Towards a new ECPGR

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With the organization of four parallel sessions addressing ECPGR's objectives, issues related to the institutionalization, hosting arrangements and resource mobilization aspects, it was possible to effectively deal with all key recommendations.

The main decisions made by the Steering Committee included :

- A consensus agreement on the wording of ECPGR's new goal and outcomes of ECPGR (see Box 1)
- Establishment of an Executive Committee, the members of which were elected during the meeting, Gert Kleijer (Chair for first year), Merja Veteläinen, Silvia Strajeru, Alvina Avagyan and Fernando Latorre, each representing five sub-regions of Europe. Interim terms of reference will be developed by the Committee itself
- Assign to the Executive Committee the task of developing an 'options paper' that will address a number of topics (see Box 2 on page 3). This paper will be discussed at the next SC meeting during the second half of 2012, in order to allow sufficient time to prepare for the new Phase of ECPGR that should start in 2014
- Resurrect the Task Force to develop a plan to deal with the European Commission and produce a brief strategy paper on the relationship of ECPGR with the European Union/ Commission and Parliament.

The SC confirmed its role as overseer of EURISCO and requested the Coordinator of the Documentation and Information Network to contact Biodiversity International as the host of EURISCO to seek clarification regarding its development and supervision by ECPGR.

From the outcome of this meeting it can be concluded that the SC appreciated the Review, in broad terms agreed with the critical points made and that the implementation process of the recommendations would provide the

necessary opportunities for change and thus improvement.

The Committee unanimously agreed to constructively deal with the recommendations of the Review Panel, especially as the current Phase VIII terminates in 2013, but this would provide sufficient time to adequately plan the changes and implement them in a timely manner. This positive attitude of the SC is, among others, demonstrated by the instant development of the left hand side of the logical framework, i.e. the goal and outcomes of the ECPGR Programme. This will be a very helpful guide for future developments of the programme. Specific indicators to verify the targets that are to be reached will be identified, together with the necessary outputs and activities. Another example of this positive approach was demonstrated by the instant adoption of the recommendation regarding the formation of an Executive Committee. This was dealt with immediately and the ECPGR SC elected the members of the Executive Committee, a strategic decision long overdue and one which will strengthen the day-to-day operation of the Programme. It was also felt that the appointment of an Executive Director would be less urgent (if at all) once the Executive Committee was in place and fully functional.

The decision to adopt the route through the preparation of an options paper to be prepared by the Executive Committee, was another wise decision. It will provide the opportunity to look for expertise in the Steering Committee (or outside) in developing a solid proposal (or rather alternative proposals), how to proceed with the implementation of each given recommendation, in particular the more complex ones, and provide a well argued basis for the SC to decide on how best to go forward. Such options should, where relevant and necessary, be underpinned with legal and/or economical data and considerations.

One such example of a more complex



recommendation is the hosting arrangement where a number of factors, viewpoints and management implications exist that need to be systematically addressed and assessed before a final decision is made. The parallel session that dealt with hosting arrangements produced a number of criteria that should be used in the development of options and discussed the pros and cons of the current hosting of the Secretariat by Biodiversity International which will provide a good basis for the development of options.

Increased responsibility and accountability of ECPGR at a regional level is expected to be established through the definition of clear targets for the new objectives. The future visibility and representation of ECPGR to the external world is expected to improve through the establishment of the Executive Committee with the re-definition of the role of Executive Secretary.

The SC gave clear confirmation that they regarded AEGIS as a pillar for the implementation of ECPGR objectives and requested the Working Groups to be more achievement oriented, such as in defining the European Collection and the crop quality standards for conservation.

Future strengthening of ECPGR is not expected to derive from increased national contributions. Its success will depend on raising external (regional) funds and/or on the streamlining of its mode of operation (i.e. possible reduction of the number of network/WG meetings and focusing on very specific and targeted actions).

Box 1. ECPGR Steering Committee meeting outcomes

The Executive Committee was asked to prepare an 'Options paper', to be tabled at the XIII SC meeting in 2012, addressing the following items:

- Elaboration of the ECPGR objectives, based on the long-term goals and outcomes agreed in this meeting (see Box on the next page)
- Legal status of ECPGR (including pros and cons)
- Establishing the position of Executive Director/Executive Secretary and defining the Terms of Reference (including pros and cons)
- Rules of Procedure (elaborating a first draft)
- Internal ECPGR operational structure (including pros and cons)
- Hosting arrangements (including pros and cons)
- Any cost implications of the various options.