

AEGIS is in the process of obtaining a legal “basis”



www.ecpgr.cgiar.org/AEGIS/AEGIS.htm

Since the publication of the last Newsletter in December 2008, a number of new developments in the establishment of AEGIS have occurred.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the establishment of AEGIS, signed by Bioversity International on behalf of ECPGR, was posted by the ECPGR Secretariat to all European countries for their signature. The MoU includes all important aspects of AEGIS that have been discussed

and agreed upon over the past years, as detailed in the Strategic Framework for the Implementation of a European Genebank Integrated System (AEGIS) (for details see www.ecpgr.cgiar.org/AEGIS/Docs/AEGIS_StrategicFramework_PolicyGuide.pdf).

Albania, Estonia, Slovakia, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Ukraine have returned their signed MoUs to Bioversity.

As a follow-up to the ECPGR Steering Committee (SC) meeting in Sarajevo in September 2008,

the Secretariat, in close collaboration with Theo van Hintum (CGN, the Netherlands) finalized the AQUAS (Quality Management System for AEGIS) discussion paper. Details of this discussion will be placed on the AEGIS website in due course.

Another important element that the ECPGR SC approved during its 11th meeting as part of the establishment phase of AEGIS, is the formation of a small, competitive grant scheme. A Task Force 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 Euro has been set aside during Phase VIII of ECPGR. An announcement on the launch of the scheme has been made by Email and on the AEGIS website, inviting ECPGR Networks and Working Groups to submit proposals for funding of AEGIS related activities.

Over the past year the ECPGR Secretariat, together with Bioversity staff and the ECPGR SC, have been working on the development of project ideas for the European Commission resulting in a number of concrete topics that will be included in the future 2009 FP7 calls. The topic that is directly relevant to AEGIS is “Integrated research infrastructure for a rational *ex situ* conservation and use of European plant genetic resources for food and agriculture”, published under the Research Infrastructures Scheme in July 2009.

Considering that AEGIS will soon have a legal basis for its operations through the signed MOUs, that a number of technical elements have been developed and approved, and that there is a very good chance of obtaining substantial additional funding for the actual establishment of processes and procedures at the regional and national level, it seems that AEGIS' future is looking very bright.



*Durone di Cesena variety of cherry fruits.
Photo: J. Engels, Bioversity International*

ECPGR Programme to undergo external review

Following a proposal made at the 11th Steering Committee (SC) meeting in September 2008, the SC agreed to arrange for an independent external review of the ECPGR Programme to be carried out.

After nearly 30 years from its foundation, it was thought that the time had come to review whether its objectives and strategy were still in line with recent trends and developments in the PGR sector. The review will extend to all aspects of the Programme, including its structure, funding mechanism, governance, management and hosting arrangement for the Secretariat.

A regionally balanced Task Force (TF) was established to facilitate the review process, composed of National Coordinators from Sweden (leading the Group), Macedonia (FYR), the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, in collaboration with the Secretariat. At Bioversity, a support team was set up to assist in the process of preparation for the review.

Terms of Reference and cost estimates for the independent external review were prepared and eventually endorsed by the Steering Committee. The selection of the three panel members who will carry out the review is currently ongoing. The review will take place in 2010 and provide recommendations that will have to be taken into consideration at the Mid-Term Steering Committee meeting in 2011.

Finland, the Nordic Countries, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom have already contributed or pledged funds directed to cover the cost of the external review.