



Minutes of the 16th ECPGR Executive Committee meeting

14 December 2020,
online

Present:

Marianne Lefort (Chair)
Vojtěch Holubec (Czech Republic)
Küllü Annamaa (Estonia)
Benvindo Martins Maçãs (Portugal)
Beate Schierscher (Switzerland)
Lorenzo Maggioni (ECPGR Secretariat)

1. Introduction

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, this short meeting (ca. two hours) was held online via the Skype platform, mainly to evaluate the Grant Scheme proposals, to keep the ExCo updated about recent ECPGR developments and to take related decisions.

2. Evaluation of Grant Scheme proposals for the Fourth Call of Phase X

Three proposals were submitted as a result of the Fourth Call of the ECPGR Activity Grant Scheme, which was launched on 1 June 2020, with a deadline on 30 September 2020.

Following an evaluation of these proposals, based on the established criteria, the ExCo selected for funding the two proposals submitted by the WGs on Berries (with the objective to create an inventory of berries' genetic resources and transfer the respective data to EURISCO, as well as of elaborating crop-specific guidelines for genebank management of genetic resources), and by the WG on Cucurbits (aiming at improving passport, characterization and evaluation data of cucurbits' landraces and varieties). Some recommendations were included in the Letter of Award to the Cucurbits WG. The third proposal, submitted by the Wheat WG (aiming to promote on-farm conservation of wheat genetic resources), was not accepted in the present form due to various doubts about its feasibility and rationale, but mainly considering the lack of coordination with the On-farm Conservation and Management WG.

The approved proposals are listed in the table below. The full proposals and Letters of Award have been published on the ECPGR website (see: <https://www.ecpgr.cgiar.org/grant-scheme/call-for-proposals/outcomes-of-the-fourth-call-phase-x>).

Title of approved proposals	Working Group	Coordinator	Budget
1. Collaborative action for updating the documenting about berry genetic resources in Europe (EUROPE.BERRIES)	Berries	Monika Höfer, Germany	€ 20 000
2. Exploitation of Cucurbita local germplasm for sustainable agriculture (Cucurbitloca).	Cucurbits	Maria Ercolano, Italy	€ 20 000
Total Budget			€ 40 000

3. Update on European and Plant Genetic Resources Strategies' process

The ExCo was informed of the latest developments following on from the ad hoc Steering Committee meeting that was held 24-26 November 2020 to discuss the European Genetic Resources Strategy v3.1 and the draft objectives of the European Plant Genetic Resources Strategy. A few comments on both strategies had also been received via email from the ECPGR Steering Committee by the deadline of 8 December 2020. The comments on the overarching European Strategy had been compiled by the Secretariat and sent to the University of Birmingham (UoB) for consideration. Comments on the 'Plant Strategy' objectives and approaches would be shortly compiled and sent to the 'Drafting Team', composed of the ExCo plus four National Coordinators (from Belgium, Germany, Netherlands and Sweden).

➤ 'European Strategy'

It is evident that the comments to the Strategy expressed during the ad hoc meeting by the three Networks (animal, crop and forest) and other stakeholders would not be easy to reconcile into a final draft strategy by the University of Birmingham alone. It was therefore decided that a small group of GenRes Bridge project partners, including UoB and representatives from the three networks, would meet two or more times in January/February 2021 to work on a possible compromise and solve some of the key issues regarding the Key Commitments and the narrative of the European Strategy. The meetings will be chaired by BLE, Germany, as GenRes Bridge Work Package leader. ECPGR will be represented by Marianne Lefort, Lorenzo Maggioni and Frank Begemann; the animal network representatives will be Danijela Bojkovski, Coralie Danchin and Sipke Hiemstra; the forest representatives will be Michele Bozzano, François Lefevre and Mari Rusanen.

Some of the key points suggested by ECPGR were the swapping and slight restructuring of sections 3 and 4, as well as the proposal to establish a European office for genetic resources.

It will be important to keep the ExCo constantly informed about the development of the upcoming meetings in January and seek its inputs possibly on a short notice.

➤ 'Plant Strategy'

It is expected that the 'Drafting Team' (ExCo +4 NC) will share the task to revise and advance the various sections and sub-sections of the strategy to enable the production of a first draft by mid-February. The possibility to hire a Science Editor who could revise and improve the first and subsequent drafts was proposed to the ExCo. The Secretariat and the ExCo Chair had already been in contact with former Bioversity staff member, Vincent Johnson, and reported that his CV and budget requirements seemed to be suitable for the task and affordable. The ExCo agreed that the Secretariat proceed with the administrative steps to hire Vincent.

4. Selection of new member of the ExCo for the North region

The terms of service of the ExCo representative for the North Region, Kylli Annamaa, are expiring at the end of 2020 and a new member needs to be selected. The ExCo Chair proposed three potential candidates to replace her. Kylli pointed out that there was an informal agreement among the countries of the North region for an alternation every four years between a member from the Baltic and from the Nordic area. This point was considered. The ExCo agreed on three names and established in which order they should be approached to verify their interest to become ExCo members. As soon as possible Marianne will inform the entire Steering Committee of the ExCo proposed candidate and will seek the Committee's endorsement. In the meantime, Kylli agreed to maintain her presence in the ExCo during January to facilitate the transition.

The ExCo thanked Kylli for her very constructive and invaluable contribution over the past four years.

5. Selection of new Chair of the Documentation and Information Working Group

The ExCo was informed of the intention of the Chair of the Documentation and Information Working Group, Theo van Hintum, to step down from this position as of 1 January 2021. This decision triggered the Secretariat to invite submission of Expressions of Interest. This invitation had been sent to all the National Coordinators and the members of the Working Group. Only one candidacy (Ludmila Papouskova, Czech Republic) was received. The ExCo considered appropriate to appoint Ludmila as Chair of the WG, but also wished to ask Theo van Hintum to remain supportive, helping the Chair during a transition time of one year, after which the proper functioning of the Working Group would be verified by the ExCo¹.

6. Possibility to extend some ECPGR tasks to Jan Engels' Bioversity Honorary Fellowship

Lorenzo Maggioni informed the ExCo about the opportunity to assign some ECPGR tasks to the Bioversity Honorary Fellow, Jan Engels (former AEGIS Coordinator), with a contribution from ECPGR towards the honorary fellowship contract. The proposed tasks were related to helping the WGs in the development of crop-specific standards and the AEGIS Associate members in the preparation of genebank operational manuals. Jan could also provide strategic advice to the ECPGR Secretariat/ExCo on occasional basis.

The ExCo agreed on the validity of seeking the contribution of Jan Engels, considering his past expertise and the current staff limitations at the ECPGR Secretariat. At the same time, being conscious that the honorary fellow would only work on a very limited time basis, the ExCo set a limit of Euros 2,500 to the ECPGR budget that could be spent in the year 2021 for this purpose.

8. Move of the ECPGR 'Maccarese office' to Rome (storage space)

Lorenzo Maggioni informed the ExCo that the office of Bioversity International (now 'The Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT') will move its headquarters from Maccarese to the centre of Rome, in the 'Aventino' neighbourhood, near FAO, as of March 2021. The new building will not offer individual offices to the ECPGR Secretariat and no storage space is available or foreseen for paper documents or any other material. This situation forced the Secretariat staff to eliminate large parts of its paper archive of documents, books and publications. However, the ExCo encouraged the Secretariat to maintain a minimum number of historical documents, publications and paper files. The Secretariat identified a storage room of four square meters in Rome that could be rented at the cost of ca. Euros 1,500 per year, plus the cost of the transportation of the items.

Also considering the urgency to free the Maccarese building (by the end of January 2021), the ExCo agreed that the Secretariat proceed with renting the storage space.

¹ There was no time to officially communicate the decision of the ExCo with a Letter of Appointment, since on the same day of the meeting (14 December 2020) Ludmila Papouskova withdrew her expression of interest to become the Chair of the Doc&Info WG, for personal reasons.

In a follow up consultation between the Secretariat, the ExCo Chair and Theo van Hintum, a possible way out was proposed, consisting in decoupling the tasks of chairing the EURISCO Advisory Committee (AC) and the Doc&Info WG. This would reduce the burden of the WG Chair and at the same time avoid that the Chair maintain responsibility on the functioning and development of EURISCO. It was thought that such revised terms of reference could encourage more expressions of interests for the position of WG Chair. Theo accepted to continue chairing the EURISCO AC for another year, with the intention to find a new AC Chair during this timeframe. The Secretariat and ExCo will need to develop the new terms of reference for the Chair of the Doc&Info WG and the EURISCO AC, to be submitted to the ECPGR Steering Committee for approval. In the meantime, the position of Doc&Info WG Chair will remain vacant.