



European Cooperative Programme for Plant Genetic Resources (ECPGR)

Minutes of the 9th ECPGR Executive Committee meeting

14-16 December 2016, Maccaresse, Italy

Present:

Eva Thörn (Chair)

Marc Lateur (Belgium)

Flavio Roberto De Salvador (Italy)

Jens Weibull (Sweden)

Jan Engels and Lorenzo Maggioni (ECPGR Secretariat)

Unable to attend:

Gordana Đjurić (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

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

1. Recap of recommendations and decisions taken at the Fourteenth meeting of the Steering Committee and progress with their implementation

Lorenzo Maggioni guided the ExCo through the decisions taken during the 14th SC meeting and reported progress made. The following comments and further decisions should be noted:

1.1. Outcome 1 – AEGIS

The recommendations agreed by the SC were mainly directed to encourage National Coordinators to promote the implementation of AEGIS at country level. Since the 14th SC meeting, only small progress could be reported, with the addition of two new Associate Members from Italy and Portugal and the inclusion of a small number (ca. 200) of new accessions into the European Collection.

It was acknowledged that small progress could be partially dependent from the lack of strong incentives and visible benefits for the genebanks (especially the smaller collections). It was reiterated that National Coordinators have an important role to promote the AEGIS principles within their countries.

A potential opportunity to receive funds from the Crop Trust for the safety duplication of AEGIS accessions was welcomed and the Secretariat was invited to verify and possibly pursue this opportunity.

The Secretariat noted that the implementation of the agreed reporting and monitoring system would only become meaningful when the European Collection had expanded to involve a larger proportion of the important collections in Europe. The proposal to experiment a voluntary review of genebanks' operations through visits of peer experts with an advisory function was welcomed. The submission by interested subjects of a related Activity proposal through the ECPGR Grant Scheme was encouraged.

1.2. Outcome 2 – EURISCO

The ExCo noted that the first EURISCO Advisory Committee meeting had taken place in October 2016 in Angers, France, including several recommendations and points for action (see [minutes of the meeting](#)).

1.3. Outcome 3 – *In situ* / On-farm

Progress of the 'ECPGR concept for On-farm conservation and management of PGRFA' was noted and the last changes made by the Secretariat to accommodate the comments received from National Coordinators were endorsed. Regarding the issue of the authorship of the document, the ExCo agreed that ECPGR documents receiving the endorsement of the Steering Committee and generally resulting from a wide range of contributions, should remain anonymous (quotation will be in this case: ECPGR, 2017). However, a prominent reference should be added in the acknowledgments to note the contribution of the Task Force who developed and published a first consolidated version of this concept.

The ExCo requested the Secretariat to circulate the last version of the concept to the SC with a deadline of two weeks for comments/endorsement.

1.4. Outcome 4 – Resources

Preparation of a communication and public relations strategy was still pending. The ExCo watched and appreciated the projection of promotional videos of the European Seed Association (ESA) [on biodiversity](#) and of the European Forest Genetic Resources Programme (EUFORGEN) on [forest genetic resources](#). They thought that these were good examples for ECPGR to get inspiration from.

The need to develop an ECPGR Communication strategy was reiterated. Marc Lateur offered to join the Task Force defined at the 14th SC meeting, comprising G. Đurić, J. Weibull and S. Csörgő.

1.5. Outcome 5 – Users

A voluntary contribution was provided by Germany to ECPGR for the organization of a workshop in June 2017 on "Private Public Partnerships for the use of PGRFA". The German funds (ca. € 82 000) would also cover the employment of a part-time research assistant for 6 months at the ECPGR Secretariat and the development of dedicated ECPGR webpages providing examples of public private partnerships on use of PGRFA. One of the expected outcomes of the workshop is a list of recommendations, prioritization and a feasibility analysis for an "Evaluation Programme on PGRFA in Europe".

The ExCo welcomed and appreciated this initiative and suggested the establishment of a technical organizing committee for the workshop.

1.6. Evaluation of WG Chairs

It was noted that two WG Chairs from the Barley and Cucurbits WGs had recently resigned and new Chairs were selected and appointed. Regarding the Chair of the Potato WG, information was received from Romania that Ms Baciú was not in condition to continue with her role due to other commitments. A letter of resignation was therefore expected from her soon.

The ExCo commented that the evaluation of the WG Chairs carried out in preparation for the 14th SC meeting through an online survey among the WG members should not be repeated. The ExCo rather preferred to evaluate WG Chairs performance in the future on the basis of factual achievements.

1.7. Objectives of ECPGR

A number of adjustments to the ECPGR objectives' logframe had been proposed by the Secretariat at the 14th SC meeting, but were not discussed owing to lack of time. The

Secretariat still needs to request from the SC the endorsement of the proposed changes and is expected do so before the launching of the next Grant Scheme call for proposals.

1.8. Recommendations for Phase X

See below, 'Planning for the End-of-Phase SC meeting'.

1.9. Documentation of *in situ* conservation

It was noted that the Chairs of the Doc&Info WG and of the Wild Species Conservation in Genetic Reserves WG were aware of their task to agree on a minimum data exchange format to include in EURISCO the data of *in situ* CWR conserved in genetic reserves. This task might become part of a project under submission to a Horizon 2020 call for proposals with deadline February 2017.

1.10. Collaboration on PGR policy issues

The ExCo suggested that the Secretariat create an ECPGR policy mailing list based on the existing WG members with declared expertise in 'Policy and law'.

1.11. ECPGR Strategy for PGRFA in Europe

A letter following up on the conclusions of the EU Preparatory Action, according to the plans made at the 14th SC meeting, had been sent on 18 November 2016 to the attention of Mr Mihail Dumitru, Deputy Director General, DG-AGRI, European Commission, in coordination and with joint signatures of the four European genetic resources networks on plants, animals, forest and microorganisms. No reply or acknowledgment had been received as yet.

As the final report of the EU Preparatory Action had not yet been published, the ExCo wished to encourage National Coordinators from the EU countries to request the Commission, through their country delegates, to publish such report.

2. Financial situation of ECPGR

By the end of November 2016, Phase IX contributions received were totaling € 1 418 250. The availability of cash at the Secretariat was positive, with an estimate balance of ca. € 247 000 by the end of 2016. Outstanding contributions amounted to € 148 500. The receipt of Phase IX contributions was considered at risk from four countries (Azerbaijan, Israel, Poland and Spain), amounting to a value of € 176 259 (net of overheads) over the five years. In particular, Israel made it officially clear that they were not in condition to continue their participation in Phase IX.

An estimate of the amount of funds that could be allocated to the Grant Scheme was made, considering the initial budget allocated for the Grant Scheme, the estimated expenditures after three awarded calls, the cost of EURISCO training in 2018, which was granted by default by the SC in its 14th meeting, the available funds from the ECPGR budget that have not been precisely allocated, the under-expenditures for staff, travel and EURISCO accumulated during the years 2014-16 and the contributions considered at risk over the 5 years. The balance of the above estimate was ca. € 164 500. This amount was considered sufficient to cover the cost of the Fourth Call of proposals, as well as of a Fifth Call, to be launched in 2017. The Fifth Call may be more or less generous, depending on receipt of outstanding and other possible voluntary contributions from the member countries.

3. Selection of Grant Scheme proposals

A total of eight proposals were submitted as a result of the Fourth Call of the ECPGR Activity Grant Scheme. Following an evaluation of these proposals, based on the established criteria,

the ExCo selected for funding five proposals (see below). Marc Lateur did not participate in the evaluation of the proposal “Pomefruit – C&E”, due to a conflict of interests. Another proposal (BETANET from the *Beta* WG) was considered questionable in some respects and requiring a partial re-elaboration and resubmission. Two proposals (WILDBRAS from the *Brassica* WG and LESSFORMORE from the Grain Legumes WG) were not accepted for funding.

The approved proposals, listed in the table below, will be sent to the SC to allow for comments or objections regarding the proposed partnership in each Activity. The Activity Coordinators of all the submitted proposals will receive a letter from the ExCo Chair, informing them about the results of the evaluation, including justification for rejection, in case of no success. Successful proposals and the corresponding Letters of Award will be published on the ECPGR website.

Title of approved proposal	Working Groups	Coordinator	Budget
1. ECPGR Networking	All	Jelka Šuštar-Vozlič, Slovenia	€ 15 000
2. SafeAlliDiv	<i>Allium</i>	Helena Stavěliková, Czech Republic	€ 30 000
3. Pomefruit - C&E	<i>Malus/Pyrus</i>	Marc Lateur, Belgium	€ 30 000
4. CarrotDiverse	Umbellifer Crops	Charlotte Allender, UK	€ 29 400
5. GRIN-Global	Doc&Info	Ludmila Papoušková, Czech Republic	€ 15 000
Total Budget			€ 119 400

The ExCo was made aware that, within the last group of awarded proposals, a number of countries had requested an overall number of quotas exceeding their limit. In order to obviate this problem, it was decided to: 1) redistribute the quotas of Israel to all the other countries; 2) distribute new quotas to all countries, should voluntary contributions for the support of the Grant Scheme be received from Germany (an informal pledge in this direction was received by the Secretariat); 3) promote bilateral donations of quotas from countries that are not using them; 4) consider any remaining problem on a case-by-case basis, with the possibility to use the ExCo discretionary quota.

The ExCo also discussed the revised table of Activity Partners received from the Activity Coordinator of SMARTLEG (Third Call for proposals) and the explanation on which basis they intended to select accessions of *P. coccineus* from partner genebanks. The proposal was reconfirmed for funding, also encouraging the consortium to focus characterization on accessions originating from a geographical range that is as wide as possible.

4. Planning for a Fifth Call for proposals under the ECPGR Grant Scheme

A Fifth Call for proposals should be launched in June 2017 with deadline end of September 2017. The ExCo will evaluate the proposal during its meeting in October 2017. The call should be open only for those groups that are not working in 2017 on a two-year-proposal already spanning through 2018. A few more instructions to increase the chances of writing a successful proposal will be provided, such as using a Gantt Chart, explaining the rationale for the choice of partners, describing the target genetic material to be used/conserved in more detail (list of accessions as far as possible) and explaining clearly who is expected to do what, as part of the Activity.

5. Planning for the End-of-Phase Steering Committee meeting

The ExCo started planning the preparation for the End-of-Phase (15th) SC meeting, with the following decisions:

- a. The meeting should be held at the best suitable time to guarantee maximum participation, to be selected through a 'doodle survey', in the second half of May 2018.
- b. Secretariat should explore the availability of a couple of countries suggested by the ExCo as potential hosts of the SC meeting, or otherwise invite SC members to offer a hosting location.
- c. The following background documents should be prepared according to the process outlined below and should be made available to the Steering Committee one month prior to the meeting:
 - I. Draft revised and updated objectives of ECPGR. Process: Secretariat will prepare a preliminary revised list of outcomes/outputs and put them in circulation in March-April 2017, seeking comments from both the SC and the WG Chairs (and the WGs' membership). Based on comments received, the Secretariat will prepare a second draft, to be tabled for discussion at the WG Chairs meeting that is planned for October 2017 within the framework of the Activity "ECPGR Networks". Finally, the Secretariat will prepare a draft of the complete revised Objectives logframe, to be tabled at the 15th SC meeting
 - II. Proposed Mode of Operation for Phase X. Based on the principles agreed at the 14th SC meeting, the Secretariat will prepare a preliminary draft to be presented to the WG Chairs' meeting for discussion and comments. The Secretariat will then prepare a final draft to be tabled at the 15th SC meeting.
 - III. Results of questionnaires sent to NCs regarding progress in the implementation of the ECPGR Objectives (second round of the same questionnaire circulated for the 14th SC meeting)
 - IV. Reports from WG Chairs on activities carried out during Phase X. A template for the WG Chairs' reports should be provided by the Secretariat in order to harmonize the reports. The reports should also include some statistics pre-compiled by the Secretariat about how many members were brought into action, how many proposals were submitted, how much funds were generated, etc.
 - V. Technical and Financial reports about Phase IX (Secretariat).

Based on the mandate received from the SC, the ExCo decided to plan a meeting with Bioversity's DG at the next suitable occasion, as well as to communicate with IPK in order to negotiate the continued hosting arrangements respectively of the Secretariat and of EURISCO during Phase X.

6. Any other business

- a. The ExCo extended warm thanks to Jens Weibull for his very good and appreciated contribution to the Committee in the past four years. His role as representative of the Northern region in a broad sense, would be taken by Külli Annamaa, Estonia, as of January 2017.
- b. The ExCo sincerely thanked Jan Engels who concluded his appointment as AEGIS Coordinator and congratulated him for his excellent contribution throughout several

years dedicated to ECPGR. Considering that all the documents establishing the AEGIS framework had been completed and the AEGIS coordinating tasks were currently somehow reduced, the former responsibilities of Jan were expected to be absorbed by the remaining Secretariat staff, under the Secretary's guidance. Jan also offered to remain available for small consultations should the need arise.