



European Cooperative Programme for Plant Genetic Resources (ECPGR)

Minutes of the 3rd ECPGR Executive Committee meeting

Maccarese, Italy, 26-28 September 2012

Present: Alvina Avagyan (Armenia), Zofia Bulińska-Radomska (Poland), Fernando Latorre (Spain), Jens Weibull (Sweden), Gert Kleijer (Switzerland), Lorenzo Maggioni and Jan Engels (ECPGR Secretariat)

The Agenda for this meeting is available at:

http://www.ecpgr.cgiar.org/executive_committee.html

1. Options paper

1.1. Operational structure of ECPGR

The document “The ECPGR Operational structure: analysis and recommendations”, prepared by “the ECPGR Task Force on the operational structure” was reviewed, taking into consideration all the comments received from National Coordinators. The ExCo developed its own position about the future operational structure of ECPGR, which is based on the following comments to the individual recommendations listed in the Task Force document:

- *Recommendation 1. To maintain all the existing WGs, to continue the Network on Documentation and Information as a Working Group, and to dissolve the other Networks.*

Recommendation 1 was accepted. It is proposed to accept the abolition of all the Networks and maintenance of the existing WGs plus the conversion of the Documentation and Information Network into a WG, and to keep under review how the new structure will work.

- *Recommendation 2. To abolish the country quota system and to establish pools of experts per Working Group, from which members can be drawn to organize and implement specified activities.*

It was accepted to establish pools of experts for each Working Group, from which members can be drawn to organize and implement specific activities, but some sort of a country quota system should be maintained. It is suggested to establish a “budget country quota”, whereby each country can benefit from a “fund quota” that is calculated along the lines of the current country quota and is used for participation of selected experts in meetings or for activities. Thus, participation of all member countries in ECPGR activities will be guaranteed, not in every single activity/meeting though, but in accordance with a proportionally balanced use of the entire budget, equitably allocated across all member countries.

- *Recommendation 3. To revise the way of operation of the WGs. The work of the WGs will be conducted by having the WGs taking the initiative for certain activities they have prioritized for their own WG workplan, in addition to requests to the WGs to undertake activities from the part of the SC. To limit participation to 12 members per activity. **To select, for each activity, 4 members on the basis of the importance of capacity building in those countries that lack such capacity yet.***

It was proposed to remove the last sentence (in bold above). Besides, the number of participants should not be restricted 'strictly' to 12 persons and the participation of self-funded participants should be allowed.

- *Recommendation 4. To establish an additional function for the Chair of a Working Group, i.e. the Chair to propose, after consultation of the Secretariat, members of the WG for a specified activity, taking into account the available expertise **and the need for capacity building**. On behalf of the Chair, the Secretariat will consult the NCs and seek their endorsement of the proposed membership. The ExCo will take a decision if no agreement can be reached.*

Recommendation 4 was accepted, with the exclusion of the words in bold above. It was stressed that the Terms of Reference of WG Chairs and the rules of procedures for their election will need to be revised accordingly. It was also recommended that when any given activity is related to accessing the material (*in situ* or *ex situ*) of a specific country, the NC of that country should be consulted to propose a member to the WG.

- *Recommendation 5. To request the WG members to formulate an "expression of interest", pledging their commitment and enabling accountability regarding the performance of an activity to which they can be or have been selected. Terms of Reference for WG members should be approved by the SC, **taking into account each type of agreed activity**.*

The principle of Recommendation 5 was accepted, although a clearer formulation needs to better specify the mechanism for its implementation. A clarification by the Task Force Chair during the meeting in Vienna will be welcome. General Terms of Reference for WG members should be approved by the SC only once and not every time that a new activity is planned. Consequently, it is suggested to delete the last words in bold above. The proposal from Germany that "expressions of interest" should also be signed by the Head of the respective institutions was appreciated, but considered as impractical in many country situations and therefore not recommended.

- *Recommendation 6. To facilitate bottom-up WG initiatives to undertake activities responding to the ECPGR outcomes throughout phase implementation by reserving part of the ECPGR budget for such activities, in addition to activities requested by the SC.*
- *Recommendation 7. To invite NCs to nominate representatives of the user community for the WG pools, and to request WG Chairs to take the representation of users in WG initiatives into consideration.*
- *Recommendation 8. The SC is suggested to consider the establishment of a Task Force that considers how the engagement of users in ECPGR activities can be enhanced.*
- *Recommendation 9. To increase efforts on the part of the SC members to communicate with the stakeholders in their country about optimal engagement of the*

country in ECPGR activities and about the use or application of outputs produced by ECPGR activities (to be reflected in revised ToRs of NCs).

Recommendations 6, 7, 8 and 9 were accepted.

- *Recommendation 10. To maintain the current size of the Secretariat but to change the functions of the staff, giving priority to fund raising as one of the activities to which the Secretariat should contribute.*
- *Recommendation 11. To keep the position of the Secretary as it is, and to establish the position of Executive Director for the Chair of ExCo.*

Alternative recommendations from the Secretariat:

- *Recommendation 10 bis. To maintain the current functions and responsibilities of the Secretariat, but giving more emphasis to the joint effort with the ExCo and the SC for a lobbying and fund raising function, without reducing the Secretariat's supporting function to WG activities.*
- *Recommendation 11 bis. To revise the ToRs of the Executive Director/ExCo Chair, i.e. strengthening the ambassadorial function of this position, and to provide an operational budget line to support travel and lobbying activity.*

The ExCo preferred the Secretariat's recommendations 10 bis and 11 bis. It was thought that the visibility and efficiency of the SC has recently improved thanks to the establishment of the ExCo with a Chair and to the increasing collaboration of the Secretariat with the ExCo Chair for the preparation of various documents and ExCo meetings. It might be difficult to find a SC member who can take the role of Executive Director, but it should be possible to assign more responsibilities to the ExCo Chair, provided that a specific budget line, even if small, is introduced to cover the Chair's operations. The ExCo Chair should also maintain the supervision of the Secretariat. As regards the lobbying activity with the EU, the continuation of a specific Steering Committee's Task Force is proposed in order to strengthen this important responsibility.

- *Recommendation 12. To timely prepare, through ExCo, a tender procedure in which Bioversity and other organizations in Europe can offer to host the ECPGR Secretariat in the next phase, through a well-defined process.*

The implementation of Recommendation 12 started prior to this SC meeting, after having obtained the endorsement from the SC. The concluding steps were discussed during this meeting considering additional information reported below.

- *Appendix*

The Appendix to the ECPGR operational structure, which schematically describes the proposed operational structure and its functioning, was modified to bring it in line with the ExCo proposals, as reported below. The maximum budget level per activity was reduced from € 25 000 to € 15 000, to allow implementation of an estimated 11-12 activities per year if the current ECPGR budget level for WG operations, i.e. about € 175 000 per year, is maintained.

Revised Appendix

The new proposed operating structure consists of:

- **Steering Committee** (one NC per country + observers)

- **Executive Committee** (composed of 5 NCs with sub-regional representation – the leader of the ExCo takes the role of “ECPGR Ambassador” as input-in-kind and maintains the supervision of the Secretariat).
- **Secretariat**
- **Working Groups (21)**
 - WGs are composed of pools of experts proposed by the NCs and by the Chairs, on the basis of their expertise and/or interest.
 - WGs carry out activities mandated by the SC or proposed by the WG and approved by the SC (or ExCo).
 - Activities (as defined in the text above) are carried out with a budget that normally should not exceed € 15 000 per activity and that can be used for various activities including meetings (normally not involving more than 12 persons).
 - Participants in an activity are selected on the basis of an “expression of interest”, where the potential participants indicate their commitment.
 - Selection of the participants for an activity is made by the WG Chair from the established WG pools, after consultation of the Secretariat and in collaboration with the NCs that are consulted for endorsement. In case of objections by a NC, the ExCo will take final decisions.
 - Proposals for activities will be evaluated and approved every 6 months by ExCo. Proposals should indicate objectives, outputs, budget and active partners with their roles.
 - Normally each WG cannot carry out more than one activity per year, i.e. not spend more than € 15 000 per year.
 - Activities can also be carried out jointly by more than one WG.
 - Outputs of activities are circulated to the entire relevant WG(s) for information and comments.
- **Collegium of the Working Group Chairs** (composed of the WG Chairs, who are members of a dedicated list server and may be invited to meet electronically, or physically immediately before the SC meetings).

1.2. Legal status

A document was prepared by Gerald Moore as part of the Options paper and circulated to the SC. The issue is linked to the location and hosting of the Secretariat. A proposal regarding legal status could be presented to the SC together with the results of the tender. In any case, an open discussion will need to take place during the SC meeting in Vienna.

1.3. Rules of procedure

A draft document was prepared by ExCo and circulated to the SC as part of the Options paper. It will be open for discussion in Vienna.

1.4. ECPGR objectives

These had been discussed during the previous meeting of ExCo and the comments received from the SC were taken into consideration in a revised version that was attached to the report of the Second meeting of the ExCo. The document is still incomplete and might need further adaptations after the discussion on related matters of the SC in Vienna. The objectives will need to be adopted in Vienna for implementation during Phase IX, with the suggestion to revise them at the mid-term SC meeting of Phase IX.

1.5. ToRs of ExCo and ExCO Secretary

Drafts were circulated as part of the Options paper and will need to be discussed and approved in Vienna.

2. Preparation of SC meeting in Vienna

The various agenda items, timing and Chairs of the sessions were discussed and a final draft programme was agreed.

- Preparatory meeting. The ExCo will hold a preparatory meeting in the afternoon of Monday 3 December in Vienna, starting at 14:00. Items for the agenda will be the presentation of the ExCo position on the operational structure, the evaluation of the tender, the opportunity to re-position in the agenda the discussion on “legal status”, the proposed budget for Phase IX and any other issues. The ExCo will also meet every evening after the SC meeting for short debriefing sessions.
- Presentation by the ExCo Chair. G. Kleijer will send for comments to the ExCo a Powerpoint presentation related to the report of the ExCo Chair on the ExCo activities during the last two years.
- Session on International Treaty. Topics of interest to ECPGR such as the implementation of the SMTA, especially in light of the Nagoya protocol, and also regarding transfer of material for direct use and for other uses should be considered by S. Bhatti during his presentation on the International Treaty.
- Operational structure. After the introductory presentations, the SC will be split in four groups to discuss in separate session the recommendations of the Task Force for the operational structure. Within each group an ExCo member will lead the discussion on the 12 recommendations and, after collecting points of view and verifying the level of agreement, will try to reach a consensus conclusion. G. Kleijer will circulate to the ExCo the proposed draft lists with the composition of the groups. Rapporteurs will need to be identified for each group.
- Tender for hosting. The results of the tender will be presented with a ranked list of the three best offers to host the Secretariat, as well as of the three best offers to host EURISCO. A decision by consensus will need to be made by the end of Wednesday 5 December.
- Legal status. The discussion on legal status of ECPGR will likely be influenced by the decision on the hosting arrangements.
- ToRs of ExCo and Executive Secretary. The draft ToRs have been circulated as part of the Options paper. If the ToRs of the Executive Secretary are not necessary, this item can be dropped.
- Relationship with EU. The document prepared by the TF will be sent by F. Latorre on behalf of the TF and of the ExCo to the SC, asking for comments and possible endorsement of the recommendations. Depending on the level of consensus obtained through email discussion, this item of the agenda will be focused on any remaining decisions to be made, such as whether the TF on relationship with the EU should be continued.
- Objectives of ECPGR. There will be no time to enter into much detail, but it will be important to define the process to handle, during 2013, the finalization of the objectives at all levels of implementation. The ExCo should steer this process. It should also be useful to circulate the final proposal to the WG Chairs as it will provide the basis for the workplans of the WGs.
- Budget for Phase IX. A draft budget should be presented by the Secretariat for discussion. Since the cost of staff and other costs will depend on decisions made during the SC meeting, the budget will need to be adjusted and completed during the SC meeting in Vienna (see more details below).

3. Tender for hosting the Secretariat

The draft letter requesting a tender was revised by the ExCo, taking into consideration all the comments received from the SC members. In particular, the proposal from Germany to split the tender into three sections, i.e. 1) EURISCO, 2) Administrative functions of the Secretariat, 3) Technical functions of the Secretariat, was only partially accepted. Specifically, it was decided to split the tender in two parts (EURISCO and ECPGR Secretariat), since this request had been shared also by other NCs. On the other hand, the proposed split of the functions of the Secretariat in two separate bids did not receive support from other NCs and was in principle considered by the ExCo as not conducive to an efficient performance of the Secretariat, since such split of two fully complementary functions would lead to a dysfunctional Secretariat. It was agreed that the institutions offering to host the Secretariat will be encouraged to present two options in relation to the legal status of ECPGR, either offering ECPGR to operate under the legal umbrella of the hosting institution, and/or allowing its operation as a legal entity of its own.

The final text of the letter was agreed and the letter will be sent on 2 October by the ExCo Chair to the NCs and to six international institutions (Bioversity, CPVO, ESA, FAO, IAEA and Trust). The letter will also be published on the ECPGR Web Site.

It was agreed that the ExCo will take the responsibility to define the tender criteria and to evaluate the proposals received accordingly. The criteria for the evaluation of the tender were discussed and agreed. Excel files for each of the tenders and reflecting the criteria will be prepared by the Secretariat for use by the ExCo during their evaluation. G. Kleijer will coordinate the evaluation process, providing to the ExCo members the offers received by the deadline of 20 November 2012. He will then collect and compile the scores and the ranking assigned by the ExCo members to the various offers. It was clarified that the ranking could remain relatively independent from the actual numerical scoring, if justified by specific arguments raised by the evaluators. The Secretariat will not participate in the evaluation, but the ExCo Chair will seek comments from the ECPGR Coordinator on the selected offers prior to the SC meeting.

Whatever will be the decision taken by the SC on the preferred host for the Secretariat and for EURISCO, there will need to be a process of verification that the offer can effectively be implemented. At this regard, the ExCo Chair and the ECPGR Coordinator will need to visit the selected location(s) and conclude written agreements with the selected host(s).

4. Budget for Phase IX

The ExCo gave some indications to the Secretariat regarding the preparation of a draft budget for Phase IX (2014-2018). The proposed annual contributions of countries should be based on the last available Resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations on the UN scale of assessments, which was adopted in December 2009 (the next Resolution will be adopted in December 2012). All the current members of ECPGR should be included as contributors to the budget, which may need to be revised at the mid-term meeting, in case of non-payment of membership fees for 2 years by any country.

An increase of the contributions should be proposed only to (partially) cover the inflation rate. Considering that the average inflation rate since the start of Phase VIII in 2009 has been slightly above 2% within the Euro area, it was proposed to increase the annual contributions of $2\% \times 5 \text{ years} = 10\%$. The budget lines to be proposed by the Secretariat should reflect the proposed new operational structure and also keep into account the possible cost of the move of the Secretariat to a different location. Suggested lines to be included in the Budget for Phase IX, apart from the cost of staff, were the following:

- WG activities
- Staff travel
- Steering Committee meetings (2)
- ExCo meetings (3)

- ExCo Chair's travel for lobbying with EU and others
- Transfer of office (including cost of negotiation with selected host and preparation of Memorandum of Understanding)
- Consultancies (lawyers, other?).

5. Other business

- G. Kleijer will conclude his collaboration with ECPGR as National Coordinator for Switzerland at the end of 2012 and therefore he will also leave the ExCo. A new member for the European sub-region "West" and a new ExCo Chair will need to be selected at the SC meeting in Vienna.
- J. Engels mentioned the offer received from the EU DG Research & Innovation, Research Infrastructures, to participate in a consultation for preparing future EU activities for integrating and opening existing national research infrastructures. Jan informed about the difficulty to fit the envisaged AEGIS proposal into a scheme that has proven not to be very suitable for a genetic resources networking approach and explained that the Secretariat plans to send a constructive reply to the EU office.