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ECPGR Phase VIII establishes a European Collection

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About this Newsletter

Bioversity International is one of the 15 Centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). Bioversity'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."

Bioversity'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).

Bioversity publishes two issues of the Newsletter for Europe a year. 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 Bioversity Web site: www.bioversityinternational.org

A Russian version of this Newsletter is being produced and disseminated in collaboration with the N.I. Vavilov Research Institute of Plant Industry (VIR), St. Petersburg.

We invite you to send your ideas and contributions for this Newsletter to Bioversity's Regional Office for Europe by Email to bioversity-europe@cgiar.org. Please send all contributions for Issue 38 by **20 March 2009**.



*Dried okra (Abelmoschus esculentum) fruits sold at the vegetable market in Sarajevo.
Photo: L. Maggioni, Bioversity International*

In September 2008 the city of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina played host to the Eleventh meeting of the Steering Committee (SC) of ECPGR. The Steering Committee approved the launch of the eighth Phase of ECPGR (2009-2013) and Phase VIII plans were adopted with an overall budget of €2 759 000. More than 40 countries are expected to participate in Phase VIII. The meeting was attended by representatives of 34 member countries and observers from three potential member countries; FAO, the Global Crop Diversity Trust, the Secretariat of the Governing Body of the International Treaty, NordGen, SEEDNet and a representative of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also participated.

High on the agenda of the meeting was the adoption by the SC of the Strategic Framework of the European Genebank Integrated System

(AEGIS) as a guiding policy document. The text of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the establishment of AEGIS was also adopted by consensus, subject to further consultation with the Nordic countries concerning the wording of one article related to non-Annex I crops. As of 2009, the MoU is expected to be circulated for signature, thereby formalizing the entry into force of this AEGIS agreement. In practical terms, this means that during Phase VIII, the concept of a European Collection will be put into practice. This Collection will be composed of accessions that each member country will commit to maintaining in the long-term, under agreed standards, and to making available under the terms and conditions of the Standard Material Transfer Agreement of the International Treaty. At the discretion of the members, accessions that are plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, as well as medicinal

and ornamental plants, will be eligible to be registered as European Accessions. The European Collection is a new concept of "virtual genebank" and its accessions are expected to remain in the respective holding institutions.

In parallel with the start of the process for a formal establishment of AEGIS, all the ECPGR Crop Working Groups will be engaged in the identification of Most Appropriate Accessions to be registered as part of the European Collection, as well as in the definition of agreed minimum standards for conservation and setting up of crop conservation work plans. A specific budget line is dedicated to AEGIS activities and will be available for the Networks under a competitive grant scheme. This opportunity is expected to facilitate the establishment of the European Collection and the management of the European Accessions.

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Management of European collections of fruit genetic resources

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An international meeting of the ECPGR Fruit Database (DB) Managers (*Vitis*, *Prunus*, *Malus* and *Pyrus*), as well as an *Ad hoc* meeting of European Experts on Fruit Synonyms were organized at Gembloux, Belgium on 23-25 June 2008 at Centre Wallon de Recherches Agronomiques (CRA-W).

The meetings of European Experts on Fruit Synonyms & Database Managers took place under the umbrella of ECPGR and aimed at harmonizing and sharing progress in the management of European fruit tree collections.

Firstly, the European Central Crop Database managers of *Vitis* (Julius Kühn-Institute, Siebeldingen, Germany), *Prunus* (INRA, Bordeaux, France), *Malus* (University of Reading, UK) and *Pyrus* (CRA-W,

Gembloux, Belgium) compared the databases and evaluated their progress. Exploring techniques that would allow a harmonization of the DBs and comparing experiences in DB management, a vision of the future development of the DBs on-line was developed. The SynoPyrus software, developed by O. Roger and M. Lateur was demonstrated and all DB managers agreed to use it in the future.

Many fruit varieties are known in the same region or in the same country by a large number of names (certain varieties have more than 70 synonyms!). This poses important problems in the management of collections, as well as in the elaboration and use of the DBs.

European fruit tree experts from Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Macedonia FYR, the Netherlands, Switzerland and UK subsequently analysed the DB accessions for *Malus*, *Pyrus* and *Prunus* with the objective of validating lists of synonyms, according to the best reference books for each crop, in order to identify the Most Appropriate Accessions (MAAs) to be included in the European Collection, currently being defined by the AEGIS initiative. They also checked the traceability of bibliographic encoded references.



Illustration of a diversity of pears.
Image: "Nos Poires", Ets Horticoles Louis Van Houtte, courtesy of J. Bosschaerts, Anvers-Antwerpen, Belgium

More than 1400 pear and 600 cherry accession names were examined by the respective expert groups with the view to defining their most appropriate names, country of historic origin, synonyms linked with bibliographic references and a reference description that could be used for the validation of the accession identity.

Participants also agreed on and defined common rules and methodologies for the introduction of photographs for each accession within the DB, using standardized models as much as possible.

The meeting was concluded with an interesting visit of the cherry collection at CRA-W.

For more detailed information on the outcomes of the meeting, please contact Marc Lateur (lateur@cra.wallonie.be)



The pear experts group working on the list of pear synonyms.
Photo: M. Lateur CRA-W, Gembloux, Belgium

ECPGR Phase VIII continued

(continued from page 1) Apart from task sharing and capacity building, other priority areas for ECPGR activity during Phase VIII will also continue to be addressed. These will include "Characterization and evaluation", "In situ and on-farm conservation and management" and "Documentation and information".

Two new Working Groups, namely the WG on "Wild species conservation in genetic reserves" and the WG on "On-farm conservation and management" were specifically established for this purpose, raising the number of ECPGR Working Groups in Phase VIII to twenty.

In the documentation and information area, ECPGR will collaborate with a global project funded by three international bodies (Global Crop Diversity Trust, International Treaty and Bioversity International). This project, called GIGA (Global Information on Germplasm Accessions-see box on page 19 of this Newsletter), intends to create, among other things, a gateway to accession level information. The well established European EURISCO Catalogue, which is hosted and maintained by Bioversity International on behalf of ECPGR, is expected to become an important source of data within this global initiative. In the European plant genetic resources landscape, EURISCO is increasingly seen as "the European information hub", providing access to all the relevant passport and related information from all European National Inventories. The SC also agreed on the use of EURISCO as a service to the International Treaty, by approving a proposed mechanism of registration of accessions in the Multilateral System, as well as an interim reporting procedure at the national level for reporting on the use of Standard Material Transfer Agreements.

The SC meeting in Sarajevo also provided an opportunity to strengthen collaboration with other relevant international institutions and fora, namely FAO, the Trust, the International Treaty Secretariat, NordGen and SEEDNet. It was, however, noted that a consistent engagement with the European Union had not yet taken place and the overall collaboration between ECPGR and the EU will need to be substantially strengthened in this coming Phase. A strategy for collaboration with the EU will be further developed.

As ECPGR draws closer to its 30th anniversary in 2010, the time has come for a thorough evaluation of its scope, objectives, mode of operation, structure and governance. Consequently, the SC will commission an independent external review of the Programme and resolved to raise funds and make detailed plans for this review in the early part of Phase VIII.

All the Sarajevo meeting details are available in the meeting report at: www.ecpgr.org/SteeringCommittee/SC11/SC11_FinalReport.pdf.