



European Cooperative Programme for Plant Genetic Resources (ECPGR)

Minutes of the 6th ECPGR Executive Committee meeting

8-10 December 2014, Maccaresse, Italy

Present:

Gert Kleijer, Switzerland, Chair of the ExCo

Zofia Bulińska-Radomska, Poland

Flavio Roberto De Salvador, Italy

Gordana Đjurić, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Jens Weibull, Sweden

Jan Engels, ECPGR Secretariat

Lorenzo Maggioni, ECPGR Secretariat

Eva Thörn (appointed Chair of ExCo as of 1 January 2015)

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

1. Opening

Gert Kleijer welcomed new participants to a meeting of the ExCo: Gordana Đjurić, who was not able to attend a previous meeting, Roberto De Salvador, recently appointed to the ExCo in replacement for Fernando Latorre, and Eva Thörn, who will act as the Chair of the ExCo as of 1 January 2015.

2. Recap of decisions of previous meeting

Lorenzo Maggioni summarized the progress made with the implementation of decisions 1-12 of the 5th ExCo meeting in 2013. Nearly all the decisions were implemented, with the following specifications:

- Decision 1: the provisions related to participation in ECPGR Activities in conformity with the Rules of Procedure were implemented.
- Decision 2: after the Trust retracted its offer to host the Secretariat, correspondence between the ExCo Chair and the Trust resulted in an offer by the Trust of a € 5000 compensation to ECPGR. Bioversity International had agreed to host the ECPGR Secretariat in Maccaresse at the same conditions as in the previous Phases, only with an overhead rate increased from 13% to 18.15%, reflecting the changed conditions at Bioversity International. It was not necessary to prepare a more detailed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) than that used in the past.
- Decision 3: the MoU between Bioversity and IPK was completed and eventually signed by the two Parties in April 2014.
- Decision 4: the cost to Bioversity of the transfer of EURISCO from Bioversity to IPK amounted to € 15 000 and these were paid by ECPGR to Bioversity. The transfer was completed in September 2014.
- Decision 5: a document listing all the benefits that a good operation of ECPGR could bring to individual countries was prepared by the Secretariat, but the Steering

Committee eventually opted for a shorter 'Fact Sheet', to be sent to the Implementing Agencies, together with the invitation to join Phase IX.

- Decision 6: G. Kleijer had searched for Foundations that could be approached to support the ECPGR activities, but did not find suitable ones. The Secretariat explored the possibility to mobilize funds from the Trust for regeneration of European accessions, but without success. The Secretariat got involved in the preparation of a proposal for submission under the EC Horizon 2020 Programme. The Secretariat offered advice and support to various consortia for the preparation of other Horizon 2020 proposals that would be in line with the ECPGR objectives.
- Decision 7: the ECPGR logframe document was finalized and endorsed by the Steering Committee, in a partial form. The *in situ* section¹ will need to be completed after approval of the *in situ* and on-farm concepts. It was understood that this logframe document is a guiding document and not an accountability instrument. The ExCo advised the Secretariat that, by the end of the current Phase, information should be gathered from all National Programmes regarding progress made towards the achievement of the ECPGR objectives. Reporting of the ECPGR Secretariat should be linked to the logframe for the mid-term and for the end-of-Phase Steering Committee meetings.
- Decision 8: the requested documents related to Phase IX were drafted by the Secretariat, with some delay compared to schedule, and they were then approved by the Steering Committee.
- Decision 9: the quota mechanism proposal was finalized by the Secretariat and then endorsed by the Steering Committee.
- Decision 10: a [Framework report on the use of plant genetic resources within ECPGR](#) related to the Task Force on "Engagement of users in ECPGR activities" initiative was prepared by the Secretariat (with some delay compared to schedule) and eventually endorsed by the Steering Committee.
- Decision 11: the two draft *in situ* and on-farm concepts were completed and circulated to the National Coordinators.
- Decision 12: the Secretary accepted the invitation and attended the PGR Secure Final Conference. The ECPGR position was presented during the final session. This was based on a document prepared by the Secretariat and approved by the ExCo.
- Decision 13: the Documentation and Information (Doc&Info) Working Group meeting was held in Prague, Czech Republic at a lower cost than originally expected (€ 22 500 vs. € 35 000).
- Decision 14: no action was undertaken, considering that ECPGR should first have its *in situ* and on-farm concepts approved as well as a longer-term strategy (see below).

3. Progress on implementation of Phase IX

A presentation on progress with the implementation of the ECPGR Programme was given by L. Maggioni. This is available online ([here](#)).

Regarding the financial situation, it was noted that Phase IX contributions were received from 24 countries, totalling € 329 500, i.e. 64% of the amount expected for 2014 from 37 countries (€ 510 250). Owing to the receipt of a few outstanding contributions of Phase VIII and other small incomes and savings, the Secretariat estimated that about € 80 000 were available as "new funds" to be allocated according to Steering Committee

¹ Outcome 3

In situ and on-farm conservation and management of priority crop wild relative (CWR) and landrace (LR) populations are implemented throughout Europe.

Mechanisms are in place for more effective utilization of the conserved germplasm.

decisions. A more precise figure would only be available after the closure of the Bioversity financial balance for 2014.

Decision 1

Considering the availability of “new funds” for ECPGR, in the range of € 80 000, the ExCo proposed to allocate these funds as follows:

1. On-farm concept meeting, scheduled for March 2015: € 10 000
2. Meeting on Crop Portals, requested by the Doc&Info WG, to be scheduled in 2015: € 10 000
3. 50% of the remaining funds for the Activity Grant Scheme
4. 50% of the remaining funds as Reserve.

4. Selection of Grant Scheme proposals

A total of 13 proposals were submitted as a result of the First Call of the ECPGR Activity Grant Scheme. Following an evaluation of these proposals, based on the established criteria, the ExCo selected for funding 8 out of 11 of the eligible proposals. These approved proposals involve the following nine WGs: Barley, *Beta*, *Brassica*, Forages, *Malus/Pyrus*, Prunus, Wheat, Wild Species Conservation in Genetic Reserves and Documentation and Information.

Decision 2

The approved proposals were the following:

Title	Working Groups	Coordinator	Budget
1. Identification and updating of C&E data EDBD of AEGIS <i>Hordeum</i>	Barley; Doc&Info	Jan Svensson, Sweden	€ 15 000
2. Genetic diversity of <i>Patellifolia</i> species	<i>Beta</i> ; Wild species	Lothar Frese, Germany	€ 14 300
3. Collection, characterization and evaluation of wild and cultivated brassicas	<i>Brassica</i>	Ferdinando Branca, Italy	€ 15 000
4. EURISCO NFP regional training workshop for Southeast Europe 2015	Doc&Info	Stephan Weise, Germany	€ 15 000
5. ECPGR Working Group for Forages towards 2020	Forages; Wild species; Doc&Info	Anna Palmé, Sweden	€ 16 500
6. Building and promoting a European <i>Pyrus</i> collection - a Case study	<i>Malus/Pyrus</i>	Marc Lateur, Belgium	€ 15 000
7. Identification of a representative set of <i>Prunus domestica</i> accessions of European origin, well documented and characterized, to be included into the AEGIS system	<i>Prunus</i>	Stein Harald Hjeltnes, Norway	€ 15 000
8. Identification and update C&E data of AEGIS <i>Triticum</i> sp. accessions	Wheat	Francois Balfourier, France	€ 14 850

The ExCo also noted that the ratio between meetings and other activities was 38/62, that is very distant from the expected 75/25 ratio and hoped to see more proposals including meetings in the next rounds.

Decision 3

The ExCo decided that the Chair would send a letter with feedback to the Activity Coordinators of proposals that were not approved for funding. The list of approved proposals will be sent to the SC to allow for comments or objections regarding the proposed partnership in each Activity.

5. Planning for next call of Grant Scheme (budget, timing, adjustments)

The ExCo discussed the planning for the next call for proposals for the ECPGR Activity Grant Scheme. Based on the experience made with the first call, the following decisions were made:

Decision 4

- a. A second call for proposals will be launched at the beginning of April 2015, with a deadline at the end of June. Subsequently, a third and a fourth calls would be launched in 2016 and 2017 respectively.*
- b. Based on the estimate figures of the available budget provided by the Secretariat, the second call could include a budget in the range of € 145 000.*
- c. Staff costs as part of the Activity implementation should continue to be eligible for reimbursement.*
- d. Proposals will be welcome from all the WGs for Activities aimed at making progress with the agreed ECPGR objectives. Preference would be given to WGs that have not received funds previously, only in case the ExCo would have to decide between two equally ranked proposals.*
- e. The evaluation criterion no. 3 (Contributions (financial and/or in kind) of the applying Working Group and the selected Activity members to the total cost of the Activity as well as the cost effectiveness of the Activity in advancing the implementation of the ECPGR logframe) will be maintained as it is, with the understanding that it is a composite criterion that is not easily quantifiable, but depends on the subjective judgment of the evaluator.*
- f. The possibility for each Activity to diverge from the expected 75/25 ratio of 'meetings' vs. 'other Activities' will be maintained. However, for the third call, the ExCo will need to evaluate the necessity to either enforce some type of restriction or to change the country quota mechanism.*
- g. The scoring system used by the different ExCo members for the evaluation of the proposals will need to be harmonized. Whenever an ExCo member would feel like having a conflict of interest with regard to any specific proposal, s/he should abstain from evaluating that specific proposal.*
- h. The ExCo may start to use its discretionary quota, starting with the second call.*
- i. The announcement of the second call for proposals should be sent to all ECPGR members, stressing the point that any member can be proactive in submitting proposals, through the intermediation of the WG Chair.*

6. Selection of WG Chairs

Decision 5

After a thorough discussion and taking into consideration the Expressions of Interest submitted by candidate Chairs, the ExCo appointed Chairs for the following WGs:

- *Avena: Andreas Katsiotis (Cyprus)*
- *Barley: Ahmed Jahoor (Denmark)*
- *Brassica: Ferdinando Branca (Italy)*
- *Cucurbits: María José Díez (Spain)*
- *Fibre crops (Flax and Hemp): Martin Pavelek (Czech Republic)*
- *Forages: Anna Palmé (NordGen)*
- *Grain Legumes: Creola Brezeanu (Romania)*
- *Malus/Pyrus: Marc Lateur (Belgium)*
- *Medicinal and Aromatic Plants: Ana Maria Barata (Portugal)*
- *Prunus: Daniela Giovannini (Italy)*
- *Solanaceae: Willem van Dooijeweert (The Netherlands)*
- *Umbellifer Crops: Charlotte Allender (United Kingdom)*
- *Vitis: Thierry Lacombe (France)*
- *Wheat: François Balfourier (France)*
- *Wild Species Conservation in Genetic Reserves: Nigel Maxted (United Kingdom)*
- *On-farm Conservation and Management: Valeria Negri (Italy)*
- *Documentation and Information: Theo van Hintum (The Netherlands)*

In the cases of the *Allium*, *Beta*, Leafy Vegetables and Potato Working Groups, there were no candidates expressing interest to become Chair.

Decision 6

For WGs that remained without a Chair that could be appointed, the ExCo, in consultation with the previous Chairs and Vice-Chairs, will seek to identify suitable candidates from the list of WG members and propose their appointment as soon as possible, through email consultation within the ExCo and after consultation with the respective National Coordinator.

Decision 7

Performance of all Chairs will be evaluated by the ExCo, who will reserve itself the opportunity to propose changes at the Mid-Term Steering Committee meeting.

7. On-farm landraces and *In situ* crop wild relative (CWR) concepts. Where are we?

G. Kleijer informed the ExCo that he would contact Nigel Maxted and clarify what was hampering the revision of the *in situ* CWR concept. Hopefully the concept can then be finalized in the beginning of 2015.

Regarding the on-farm concept, a meeting is scheduled for March 2015 in Maccaresse, aimed at reaching a clarification between the contrasting view points and an agreement for regional ECPGR activities inspired by a consensus concept.

8. Outcome of the Doc&Info Workshop in Prague

L. Maggioni reported about the outcome of the meeting that was attended by 49 participants from 29 countries. The new EURISCO Coordinator introduced himself to the meeting and he received feedback on the proposed elements of his workplan. The meeting reiterated the decision to include characterization and evaluation data into EURISCO, as well as to include data on CWR populations that have been nationally designated for *in situ*-managed conservation. On the other hand, no consensus was reached on the inclusion of on-farm information. It was recommended to re-establish the EURISCO Advisory Group.

Regarding Central Crop Databases (CCDBs), the managers were encouraged to develop CCDBs into Crop Portals under the ECPGR umbrella and this decision was subsequently endorsed by the SC. It was also proposed to organize a meeting on the concept of ECPGR Portals and the Secretariat was requested to identify the necessary funds.

The ExCo expressed its hopes for a smooth transition of EURISCO to IPK. Some concerns were expressed regarding the costs involved in the upgrading of CCDBs into Crop Portals, considering the often insufficient national resources made available by the countries as in-kind contribution to manage the CCDBs.

Decision 8

The proposed meeting of the Doc&Info WG on Crop Portals was recommended for approval by the SC, with a budget of € 10 000 (see above, Decision 1).

Decision 9

The composition of the EURISCO Advisory Group, that will be proposed by the Doc&Info WG Chair, should be validated by the ExCo.

9. AEGIS – The White Paper

J. Engels presented the *White paper on the slow rate of inclusion of accessions in the European Collection*, an internal document prepared by the Secretariat and circulated to the Steering Committee with the intention to receive advice. Only few SC members sent their feedback and these were reported.

ExCo members expressed their points of view on the issue:

- a. In the Nordic countries it has been a difficult task to obtain consensus on the European Collection at political level, while on the technical level not enough priority was given towards a quick implementation.
- b. The better the European Collection is in terms of quality of available material, the more interest there will be from the outside world. In this way, each participating genebank should become more valuable, being part of a larger collection and initiative.
- c. Current insecurity of budgets in national institutes remains a problem. In addition, people have less time to respond to questions related to ECPGR.
- d. There is a perception of extra work (and costs) that AEGIS will generate.
- e. It is important to elaborate and show the benefits of AEGIS for the European region as well as for other regions of the world.

Decision 10

In order to support the development of AEGIS, the ExCo encouraged the Secretariat to write a paper highlighting with clear evidence what the benefits of AEGIS would be for the member countries. The Secretariat was also invited to liaise with countries in the process of implementing AEGIS with targeted help and provision of information on the necessary steps. The possibility of making a presentation on AEGIS during Expo 2015 should be explored.

10. Horizon 2020. Role of ECPGR

The ExCo supported the current engagement of the Secretariat in the preparation of a project proposal for the Horizon 2020 Call SFS7-b 2015 “Management and sustainable use of genetic resources”. The preparation is coordinated by PNO Consultants, The Netherlands,

with technical support of CGN, The Netherlands. ECPGR had paid a partner fee of € 1500 to PNO for their services.

11.A European Strategy on PGRFA

J. Engels introduced the subject of the need for ECPGR to elaborate a long-term vision to address all relevant aspects related to the conservation and use of PGRFA in Europe in a comprehensive and coherent manner. Such a document could serve as a guide to the ECPGR membership and its governance bodies in making more strategic and future-oriented decisions.

A Strategy document would build on the past achievements and experiences, and also on earlier recommendations supporting the formulation of a European Strategy. Such recommendations were solicited in various ways:

- The [*Strategy Paper on the ECPGR Relationship with the European Union/European Commission*](#) prepared in 2012 by the Task Force on EU matters recommended that *'...this person [i.e. the ECPGR representative] or body should approach the Commission to explore the development of an EU Strategy on PGRFA and offer ECPGR assistance in developing it [i.e. the Strategy]....'*
- During the preparation process of the evaluation of the GENRES Programme, at various informal occasions, EC officers expressed interest to understand what would be the (long-term) vision of ECPGR for European PGRFA.
- The recently published discussion paper *Towards a European Plant Germplasm System – The third way* produced by the EU-funded PGR Secure Project, hinted at the need for an integrated Plant Germplasm System.

The ExCo members expressed their points of view on the issue:

- a) It is important to develop a Strategy and make it well known among the germplasm users. Small breeding companies continue to rely on and need support from genebanks; therefore the Strategy should be able to provide a convincing answer to this need.
- b) It is important that the Strategy has the buy-in from all the ECPGR member countries. They need to be part of the process in generating the Strategy.
- c) The absence of a coherent EU policy on genetic resources could be an entry point. If one of the purposes of the Strategy is to present it to the EC as a contribution to the outstanding EU Strategy, we should not wait too long. The possibility to present the Strategy to the European Parliament was also mentioned.
- d) A small Task Force representing different stakeholders could be set up for the preparation of the Strategy and part of the reserve funds might be employed to speed up the process.
- e) Among the items to be considered, the following were mentioned as non-exhaustive examples: long-term goal of AEGIS, collections of private breeders, molecular characterization, GMOs, botanic gardens, policy area.

Decision 11

The ExCo agreed on the need to prepare an ECPGR Strategy providing a vision for the next ten years that would enable progress towards the long-term goal of ECPGR. The Secretariat was invited to prepare a Letter to the attention of the SC, including background, scope, list of items to be considered and a proposal for the creation of a Task Force aimed at the elaboration of the ECPGR Strategy. A possible road map for implementation should also be outlined.

12. Regional representation of the ExCo

G. Kleijer pointed out that, given the composition of the ExCo in 2015, the Western European region would not be represented by a member belonging to the geographic West. Therefore, the geographic representation would need to be re-adjusted at the end of 2015.

13. Planning for Mid-Term Steering Committee Meeting

The ExCo discussed the suitable dates for the Mid-Term SC meeting. The possibility for a country to offer the hosting of the meeting as an input-in-kind should be considered as a way to facilitate (and replace) the payment of annual contributions to ECPGR.

It was reminded that the hosting of the Secretariat at the end of Phase IX should be included as an item in the agenda.

Decision 12

The Mid-term Steering Committee meeting was scheduled for Spring 2016. The end-of-Phase SC meeting should then be scheduled for Spring 2018. The Secretariat should explore convenient options for suitable locations.

14. Any other business

- a. Output 4.3² of the ECPGR logframe was discussed, related to establishing collaborations with the Treaty and the FAO Commission. The ExCo was in doubt about the effectiveness and usefulness of seeking an observer status within the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources. Although the National Coordinators attending the FAO Commission do not attend the meetings on behalf of ECPGR, they still have the ECPGR situation in mind and this should be sufficient. Regarding the Treaty, there are common issues to be dealt with by AEGIS and the Treaty regarding availability of accessions. Although the channel of communication between the ECPGR Secretariat and the Treaty Secretariat is open, it has proven in the past to be difficult to establish collaboration in formal terms. The relationship should continue to be maintained on an informal level.
- b. Z. Bulińska-Radomska informed about the difficulty to obtain funds from the Polish Government for the ECPGR programme and she asked for support from the Secretariat, such as writing a letter to the Polish Government, reminding about the need to sign the Letter of Agreement, stressing the importance of the Programme.
- c. This was the last meeting for the ExCo Chair Gert Kleijer, who would be retiring at the end of 2014. He received notes of thanks and appreciation from the ExCo and the Secretariat, also on behalf of the SC, for his long-lasting dedicated work for ECPGR. Eva Thörn will start her term as new ExCo Chair on 1 January 2015.

² 4.3. Increased collaboration between ECPGR and the International Treaty for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) and the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA)