



Minutes of the 31st ECPGR Executive Committee meeting

11 October 2024 (10:00-12:00)
Online (Teams)

Present:

Jens Weibull (Chair)
Birgitte Lund (Denmark)
Petra Engel (Italy)
Pavol Hauptvogel (Slovakia)
Imke Thormann (Germany)
Lorenzo Maggioni (ECPGR Secretariat)

1. Opening of the meeting

The ECPGR Secretary and the group welcomed Jens Weibull for the first time chairing an ExCo meeting after he was appointed ExCo Chair starting on 8 September 2024. The agenda was approved with a request by Imke Thormann to include a brief discussion on the developments and expectations for the establishment of the GRACE Research infrastructure.

2. Financial situation of ECPGR

L. Maggioni described the financial situation of ECPGR, reminding the group about the carryover from Phase X, already discussed in the previous ExCo meeting. A new addition of about €89,000 for Secretariat staff is embedded in the projects recently granted by the German Ministry for Food and Agriculture (New AEGIS and EVA Boost). The carryover combined with new funds from Germany will ensure the coverage of the missing funds from the Phase XI budget, related to the years 2027 and 2028. This is based on the assumption that all the countries enlisted in the table of expected contributions for Phase XI will honour their annual payments. Although a few countries have not yet joined Phase XI, the Secretary thought that most of them were on the way to completing the necessary administrative steps. The situation requires ongoing monitoring, and every effort must be made to encourage all countries to join.

3. Grant Scheme – launching a new call for proposals

Expenditures for ECPGR activities in 2024 amounted to ca. €60,000, which were assigned to two Grant Scheme proposals. Other ca. €27,000 were used for meetings and to support the Genebank Managers Network. Considering the ECPGR budget for Working Group (WG) activities, which is ca. €102,000 per year, the ExCo agreed to launch a second call for proposals for the Grant Scheme in early November, with a deadline in mid-February. Priorities proposed to be addressed in the first call for proposals were considered still valid for this new call. Also, the expected budget to be assigned remained around € 60,000.

4. Requests from Working Groups

The *Allium* and Berries WGs submitted proposals to hold WG meetings. The proposal from the Berries WG to hold its second meeting in Lithuania in June 2025 was accepted (with a budget of €15,000). This proposal had been formulated with clear objectives to follow up on the results of the first project for the various berry genera, including discussing the berries-specific standards for conservation and management. Additionally, the WG intended to build on this a second project proposal, aligned with the goals of the Grant Scheme call for proposals.

The *Allium* WG proposal aimed to leverage the planned *Allium* symposium and final meeting of the Garlic-CCS Activity, which involves part of the *Allium* WG, and invite a few more people, extending participation to ca. 20 WG members (with a requested budget of €7,000). Objectives of the meeting would be a discussion about safety duplication and inclusion of accessions into AEGIS, as well as the use of new technologies and cryopreservation for the maintenance of

the collections. The main outcome was to prepare a project proposal to submit to the ECPGR Grant Scheme. The ExCo was in principle favourable to expanding the number of participants to the planned event, but also thought that the time allocated in the draft agenda to the *Allium* WG meeting-specific discussion (3.5 hours) seemed insufficient to justify the gathering of the wider group. It was thus requested to slightly rearrange the agenda and make it clear that the dedicated time is sufficient to properly address the meeting's objectives, including the preparation of a project proposal.

5. Ornamental accessions in AEGIS

The ECPGR Secretary wished to receive advice from the ExCo regarding a query made by the German National Coordinator on the possibility of including accessions of ornamental plants in AEGIS, with the use of a *sui generis* MTA. The Federal Variety Office (AEGIS Associate Member in Germany) was ready to designate AEGIS accession of ornamental crops, but the German government indicated that the use of the SMTA was inappropriate, considering that ornamentals are not considered PGRFA by FAO. The proposal was that a transfer agreement could be used with the same terms and conditions of the SMTA, excluding the provision of obligatory benefit sharing in case of commercial exploitation of material derived from the given accessions.

The ECPGR Secretary reminded that the AEGIS Policy Guide specifies that AEGIS can include PGRFA as defined in the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) as well as medicinal and ornamental species. It is foreseen that the AEGIS SMTA be used for non-Annex I crops. This SMTA has been specifically prepared with a footnote specifying the legal implications of using the SMTA for the transfer of PGRFA other than those listed in Annex 1 of the ITPGRFA.

The adoption of a different MTA would raise an exception within AEGIS, which should be brought up for discussion at the level of the Steering Committee (SC).

It was therefore decided to keep the issue on hold, while the German coordinator, I. Thormann, would verify whether the use of the AEGIS SMTA could be acceptable in general.

6. Selection of new ExCo member for the sub-region North

At the end of the year 2024, the ExCo member for the North region, Birgitte Lund, will terminate her term of service within the ExCo. The traditional preference of this region is to alternate one ExCo member from the Nordic countries with one from the Baltic countries. After a short consultation, it was thus decided that the Chair would approach one of the NCs from the Baltic countries to verify the availability to join the ExCo. Submission of this name to the decision of the SC will then follow. Birgitte was thanked for her valuable commitment during the last four years.

7. Any other business

- The ECPGR Secretary wished to inform the ExCo that ECPGR Rule of Procedure 2.6 will be strictly enforced, meaning no funding will be provided to members from countries deemed ineligible to receive funds from ECPGR. This will be applied also to the EVA networks, whereas in the past some exceptions were made, to ensure a wide participation to the initiative in its beginning. It was acknowledged and agreed that only very well justified exceptions could be made, on a case-by-case basis.
- The Chair and the Secretary informed the ExCo about the developments of the PRO-GRACE project. A proposed draft structure and governance of a possible future Research Infrastructure (RI) on plant genetic resources is being finalized by the project partner NordGen. One key element of this structure will be the position of ECPGR, either included as one of the main actors and backbone of the structure, or as an external body. Some concern was expressed for the risk of creating two structures in competition for funding by European governments. This would be particularly true if the main RI structure consists of the network of genebanks, primarily dedicated to conservation and access, quality systems and standards.

PRO-GRACE partners are evaluating the possibility of collaborating for submitting an application to the EC for the inclusion of a GRACE-RI within the roadmap 2026 of the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructure (ESFRI), which is underway. The ExCo wished to be kept informed about future possible developments, considering the need to involve the entire Steering Committee, in case decisions should be made on the future role of ECPGR and its Secretariat within the ESFRI initiative.