



Minutes of the 34th ECPGR Executive Committee meeting

5 March 2026

Aranjuez, Spain

Present:

Jens Weibull (Chair)
Imke Thormann (Germany)
Petra Engel (Italy)
Dainis Ruņģis (Latvia)
Maja Boczkowska (Poland)
Lorenzo Maggioni (ECPGR Secretariat)

J. Weibull welcomed Maja Boczkowska as a new member of the ExCo.

1. Evaluation of Grant Scheme proposals

Four proposals were received for evaluation, respectively submitted by the Working Groups (WGs) on *Allium*, Berries Medicinal and Aromatic Plants, and Barley and Wheat together, as follows. The full proposals and the Letters of Award will be published on the ECPGR website:

Title of submitted proposals	Working Group	Coordinator	Budget
BerryTraits – Collaborative action for developing trait descriptors for berry genetic resources in Europe	Berries WG	Tuuli Haikonen, Finland	€ 29,997.00
EURO-URSI – Conservation and eco-geographical mapping of Ramsons (<i>Allium ursinum</i> L.) genetic resources in Europe	<i>Allium</i> WG	Helena Stavelikova, Czech Republic	€ 29,999.20
MAPEUROCOLLECTION 2.0 - Consolidation, expansion, gap analysis and further development of aromatic and medicinal plant genetic resources in Europe	Medicinal and Aromatic Plants WG	Ana Maria Barata, Portugal	€ 28,600
ValoResWB - Multi-environment validation, mapping and marker development for resistance to fungal diseases in barley and wheat	Wheat WG and Barley WG	Albrecht Serfling, Germany	€ 56,437.61
TOTAL			€ 145,033.81

The proposal from the Berries WG uniformly received high scores from the ExCo members. The activity proposes to consistently and logically continue activities initiated by the WG. The development of agreed descriptor lists would be the main product, together with the provision to EURISCO of harmonized characterization and evaluation data for five main berry species.

Objectives, methodology and deliverables were comprehensively described. The ExCo agreed to approve this proposal, with a recommendation to seek the collaboration of the FAO Plant Treaty office to ensure the contribution of global experts and the widest validation and recognition of the descriptors.

The proposal from the Allium WG was appreciated for its focus on an important crop wild relative and wild food plant. The objective of collecting seed of *Allium ursinum* from across Europe for deposit into a genebank was considered valuable. Conversely, a few weak or unclear points in the proposal were highlighted:

- It was remarked that IPK, Gatersleben, Germany, holds the majority of *ex situ* accessions of *A. ursinum*; however, they are not partners in the project. IPK is likely to have expertise in the management of this crop (germination, multiplication), which would be an essential element for the project. Should this expertise already be present within the project consortium, there would be no need to develop germination and regeneration protocols from scratch.
- The existence of a tested protocol for seed maintenance is considered an important precursor to the organization of seed-collecting expeditions.
- The lack of involvement of the Crop Wild Relatives WG was noted, observing that the expertise of members of that group might be important for identifying *A. ursinum* populations and properly planning the collecting missions.
- The requirements to legally collect this material in the various countries may be variable. It would be important to factor this challenge into the proposal, along with the required efforts to obtain legal permissions.
- No mention is made about the intention to include the newly collected accessions into the European Collection (AEGIS).
- The state of the art of the knowledge about the existing occurrence of *A. ursinum* is not specified. It is not clear to what level distribution maps are already available and what kind of effort would be required to improve this knowledge.
- Gaps were seen in the representation of countries in the project, compared to the presence of this species in the European region genebanks (e.g., Germany; the Netherlands).

The ExCo agreed to request a revision of the proposal with a clarification on the above points. The start of the proposal on the 1st of May would not be possible and thus the timeline of the activity should also be revised.

The proposal from the MAPs WG was praised for its intention to improve the conservation of important species underrepresented in European *ex situ* collections. However, several weaknesses were identified in the project proposal:

- The description of the activities, the work packages' methodology, the sharing of specific responsibilities, and the expected outcomes are too generic to enable a proper evaluation of the project's feasibility.
- The breadth of the project seems too wide. The identification of a set of species on which to focus would have been desirable.
- It is not clear on what basis of past achievements the project is building.
- It is not clear how the gap analysis will be carried out, which tools will be used, and how realistic its implementation is.
- The meaning of the proposed "integration of additional collection" is not clear.
- The geographical representation of the project partners seems too narrow. Depending on which species are targeted, the representation could be appropriately extended.
- It remains unclear whether protocols for regeneration of seeds of the species under study are available or should be developed, in which case appropriate funds are not factored in.

The proposal was not accepted for funding, but the group is suggested to organize an online meeting, also involving representatives of the CWR WG, to better organize its ideas around a more focused project proposal. Eventually, it could be useful to request a physical meeting of the potential project partners to set up a well-thought-out project proposal for the next call.

The proposal from the Barley and Wheat WGs is a clear proposal, aiming to evaluate wheat and breeding lines of wheat and barley for disease resistance. There is a very good match between the project objectives and the ECPGR priorities, including a positive collaboration with the EVA Network. The aim of the project and the methodology to achieve the results through field and molecular evaluation are very well explained, indicating that the project is founded on the solid basis of previous work.

It is planned to make the data available in EURISCO. This aspect should be specified as a requirement. The project does not explain whether there is knowledge about the races of diseases under investigation, but it was understood that the evaluation will mostly rely on natural infections. The requested amount of funding was considered appropriate, considering that two WGs are involved.

The proposal was approved for funding.

2. Request for a Leafy vegetables WG meeting

The ExCo took into consideration the request of the Leafy Vegetables Working Group to organize a two-day meeting, hosted by the Regional Centre for Horticultural Diversity in Skierniewice, Poland. The purpose of the meeting is to revive the activities of the group, which last met in 2013. Discussions will focus on *ex situ* conservation standards and methodologies, as well as *in situ* conservation of crop wild relatives and wild food plants. A joint meeting with the EVA Lettuce Network will aim to establish new evaluation plans and potentially broaden participation in the evaluation network.

The ExCo agreed to fund the meeting with the participation of up to 20 funded WG members, within a maximum budget of €15,000. Considering that the meeting will be organized as a hybrid event, it was suggested to also invite representatives from the Crop Wild Relatives WG. The meeting is planned to take place between July and October 2026, with precise dates to be agreed upon by the organizing team.

3. Debriefing about WG Chairs meeting and their suggestions (implications for the 18th Steering Committee meeting agenda)

The ExCo discussed the recommendations made by the Chairs during their meeting held on 3 and 4 March. A long list of ideas and suggestions had been consolidated into one to three recommendations per topic category, with an indication of whether these were directed to the Chairs themselves or to the Secretariat. An approximate indication of the required budget effort (none, small, medium, or large) was also included. The ExCo generally approved all recommendations that were self-directed to the Chairs and provided comments on those directed to the Secretariat, including suggestions for implementation where considered appropriate. The outcome of this exercise is presented in the table annexed to this report (Annex I). Only the main recommendations filtered by the Chairs are included, along with the ExCo's responses. The full list of recommendations will be available in the report of the 'All Chairs' meeting.

It is expected that one or two National Coordinators who also hold a WG Chair position will present the Chairs' conclusions during the next Steering Committee meeting. The ExCo will also present its reactions to facilitate the Steering Committee discussion and approval of the deliberations.

4. Update on Steering Committee meeting agenda and status of preparation/background documents

The agenda for the Steering Committee meeting was revised, taking note that the start of the meeting was anticipated to be in the afternoon of 1 June, considering that most flights arrive in Tbilisi during the night or early morning. Background documents will need to be ready by the end of April and will consist of the following:

- Annual reports 2024 and 2025 (Secretariat)
- Financial report 2025 (Secretariat)
- Proposal for budget revision 2027-2028 (Secretariat)
- Mid-term report focused on the implementation of the ECPGR priorities (Secretariat)
- Follow-up actions on the PRO-GRACE project for ECPGR (Secretariat and co-authors)
- Proposal for a revision of the Table of priorities (ExCo)

P. Engel also offered to review the status of implementation of the ongoing Memoranda of Understanding between ECPGR and other international institutions (Crop Trust, Euroseeds, FAO-Plant Treaty).

5. Status of recruitment process for ECPGR Secretary

The advertisement for the recruitment of the new Secretary was published on 3 March, with a deadline of 16 March. Two members of the ExCo agreed to act as part of the selection panel. A third person may be necessary. The interviews will take place in Rome. Candidates will be invited to be physically present, at ECPGR's expense – this will be discussed once the shortlist is finalized. It is anticipated that interviews will be held in April, after Easter. On the occasion of the ExCo coming to Rome, an ExCo meeting will also be organized, focusing on the preparation of a proposed revised Table of Priorities.

6. Any other business

It was noted that Italy has not yet joined Phase XI of ECPGR and will lose the right to vote and access to funds as of 1 April. Unless a positive signal comes from Italy, it may become necessary to replace the Italian ExCo member with another representative from the South region. The ECPGR budget will also need to be closely monitored, should the missing contribution from Italy in Phase XI remain unconfirmed.

Annex I - ECPGR Chairs Discussion Summary

Proposals to strengthen ECPGR Secretariat and WG coordination				
Topic Nos	Topics	Who Enacts	Additional funding required	ExCo comments
1	<i>How to better promote interaction between crop WGs.</i>			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold regular short online meetings within the WGs (minimum 1 x year) • Summarize highlights/workplans/priorities of WGs on an annual basis • Encourage NCs to revise the lists of active WG members (maybe 2x per year) and indicate their specialization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairs • Chairs & Secretariat to upload • Secretariat 	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed • Agreed • Agreed to seek periodical confirmation of lists
2	<i>How to better promote interaction between crop and thematic WGs.</i>			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage joint Grant Scheme proposals requiring participation from at least one crop and one thematic WG (or GMN) • Approach thematic WGs early to maximise joint opportunities for projects and initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretariat • Chairs 	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed to clearly indicate in the Call the possibility of joint proposals to maximise collaboration between crop and/or thematic working groups – indicating that it is not necessary to request the maximum budget • Agreed
3	<i>How to better promote interaction between WGs and Genebank Managers Network (peer review, SOPs, risk management, etc.)</i>			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite representatives of other WGs (crop, thematic, GMN) to attend meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairs & Secretariat 	Small/None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed, maximum two representatives from other WGs in physical meetings, with corresponding budget increase

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage co-authored technical guidelines/protocols between WGs and GMN • Emphasize GMN, EURISCO, AEGIS and the EVA at the ECPGR website and give short explanations for new users + retrieve feedback regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairs • Secretariat 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed • GMN does not qualify to have a special button; include on the home page the video on the WGs role and add another general video about the ECPGR structure (AEGIS, EURISCO, EVA)
4	How to enhance the external communication and visibility of WG outputs			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECPGR should proactively engage in advocacy for PGR conservation and use, and should make concerted efforts to influence policy both at EU and national levels • A dedicated ECPGR communication strategy is required, including professional infographics, key indicators, videos, coordinated social media communication etc. presented at FAO, EU biodiversity and breeding events. • Promote the use of the ECPGR logo to enhance visibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretariat • Secretariat • Secretariat and National Coordinators 	Medium-High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is currently not a Secretarial task; ExCo will consult at the SC level the possibility to explore ways to improve the lobbying function as a joint effort of Secretary, ExCo Chair and observers in the SC (NGOs, Euroseeds, others) • A Communication Strategy already exists, infographics, videos and social media communication are already implemented. The Strategy will be reviewed/updated; members should be encouraged to subscribe to LinkedIn and benefit of the ongoing social media communication. Agreed to explore possibility to organize side events at FAO Commission meetings and FAO-Plant Treaty Governing Body meetings, to present ECPGR and its pillar initiatives. • Agreed on the need to encourage about displaying the ECPGR banners in national institutes and remind members to use the ECPGR logo and maybe QR codes.
5	Post-PRO GRACE deliverable implementation via ECPGR			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No recommendations 			
6	Expanding the funding options, ensuring chances			

	<i>are not missed</i>			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a small “funding intelligence group” within the Secretariat to lobby funding agencies, to inform potential consortium partners of new calls and aid application submission, as well as promote co-funding models o aid application preparation • Encourage ECPGR members to submit proposals to the Grant Scheme funds, particularly invite junior researchers and multi-working group applications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretariat + Chairs + Steering Committee 	Large	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed to keep the ECPGR web page on funding opportunities updated; It can be regularly asked to an AI agent to look for relevant calls for proposals. The NCs should also be encouraged to provide information to the Secretariat about national funding opportunities for display on this web page. • Agreed that the Chairs encourage engagement of junior researcher in WG activities and encourage NCs to revise lists of members, including juniors
7	<i>WG activity reviews in relation to European PGR Strategy and ECPGR Phase Targets</i>			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WG activities for each Phase should be designed, published and shared at the outset, explicitly aligned with the objectives of the European PGR Strategy and ECPGR Phase Targets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairs 	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a good practice that is already recommended in the Chairs ToRs
8	<i>WG Chairs contribution to Steering Committee decisions</i>			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote a deeper knowledge of what ECPGR is expecting from each Chair (and member) and stronger connection between Chairs and the ExCo, review and update the nominations of the WG members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretariat 	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will make the WGs video available and improve information flow to the Chairs by sending them the minutes of the ExCo meetings
9	<i>WG and ECPGR links to other PGR and Biodiversity communities</i>			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalize strategic links with scientific key actors working in biodiversity conservation and sustainable use (e.g. FAO Commission on GR, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretariat, Chairs & ExCo 	Small	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECPGR already has links with relevant actors. An additional link with EPPO can be explored, which

	<i>Crop Trust, CGIAR genebanks, EU Biodiversity Strategy actors, Plant Health authorities), targeting both cultivated and wild plants</i>			could be relevant for the Cryo WG and the genebank managers' network. Agreed to check the implementation status of the various MOUs Regarding the EU Biodiversity Strategy, it is related to the Ministries of Environment. It seems most appropriate that these links are established primarily at the national level.
10	<i>Increasing ECPGR funding, desirable and how?</i>			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>ECPGR could provide stronger position in influencing the EU policy National coordinators through the Ministry of each country. It could propose a presence of ECPGR at EU level and propose topics to H2020 projects better related to ECPGR activities to ensure funding increase</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretariat & ExCo 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These efforts were made throughout the years, with limited success. The Secretariat will seek to identify an appropriate representative from the EU Commission to be invited to the Steering Committee meeting.
11	<i>Cost / benefit analysis of ECPGR activities</i>			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Share knowledge to the community on the activities done by ECPGR (e.g. varieties maintained, characterized in the years, proposed projects, involvement in EU projects etc)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretariat & Chairs 	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several occasions are constantly created by the Secretariat to share knowledge (webinars, e-Bulletin, Annual reports, web site). Side events should also be organized based on opportunity and convenience. The Secretariat should also organize a webinar for the Chairs to go through the ECPGR web site and explain where to find information and how the communication strategy is implemented. It is also a task for the Chairs to share knowledge.
12	<i>More directed WG Chairs actions, e.g. expectation of at least one WG virtual meeting per year to advance</i>			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Be more proactive in the involvement of WG members, a) make annual virtual meetings and organize meetings in the frame of other</i> 	Chairs	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed

	<i>meetings/congresses, b) propose surveys, c) check members that are still active, d) have at least a member for each country/species that is active, e) distributing newsletter to members</i>			
13	<i>ECPGR Phase Target achievement improvement, to include ECPGR Annual WG Action Plans</i>			
Topics		Who Enacts	Additional funding required	ExCo comments
Enhanced role for junior WG members to ensure buy-in to WG objectives				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Propose a mentoring system with the WGs to ensure buy-in to WG objectives</i> 		Sect./Chairs	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Already discussed under point 6
Training requirement and provision for WG members, e.g. technical Summer Schools				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Enhanced role for junior WG members to ensure buy in to WG objectives</i> <i>Training requirements and provision for WG members, e.g. technical Summer Schools</i> <i>Review and provide training for WG members, involving summer schools, junior working groups, mentorship, grant scheme mobility and social media</i> 			Large	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no funding for this task which is currently not part of the ECPGR agenda.
Common risks and threats to European PGR conservation – and how to respond together				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Erratic and generally insufficient financial support to achieve PGR conservation and sustainable us; raise public awareness about the risks connected to food security (pathogens outbreaks and yield loss), also considering climate change and the geopolitical instability (example reported by Maxted for UK)</i> 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is not a core role of ECPGR to provide these documents, but studies are published by various agencies and can be circulated to encourage use of existing arguments whenever public awareness events are held or messages are prepared.

Addressing and meeting PGR standards using agreed criteria, strict or passive application			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Prepare along the long document a concise and precise one with the priorities to follow and synthesized as bullet points</i> 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ExCo finds it difficult to understand to what document the Chairs are referring. In the case of the AQUAS standards, these can be exemplified in a webinar