



Minutes of the 18th ECPGR Executive Committee meeting (with ad hoc meeting of the ECPGR Drafting Team)

1 December 2021

S.A. Thon Stanhope Hotel, Brussels, Belgium

Present:

ExCo:

Marianne Lefort (Chair)
Beate Schierscher (Switzerland)

Drafting Team:

Marc Lateur (Belgium)
Frank Begemann (Germany)
Imke Thormann (Germany)
Dainis Rungis (Latvia)
Theo van Hintum (The Netherlands)
Jens Weibull (Sweden)

ECPGR Secretariat

Nora Capozio (ECPGR Secretariat)
Sandra Goritschnig (ECPGR Secretariat)
Lorenzo Maggioni (ECPGR Secretariat)

Unable to attend

ExCo:

Vojtěch Holubec (Czech Republic)
Birgitte Lund (Denmark)
Benvindo Martins Maçãs (Portugal)

Drafting Team:

Küllli Annamaa (Estonia)

1. Introduction

This meeting followed the final meeting of the project GenRes Bridge, with the launch on 30 November 2021 of the Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe and the domain-specific genetic resources strategies, including the Plant Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe (PGR Strategy). The presence in Brussels of a large part of the ExCo and Drafting Team that collaborated in the previous months to draft the PGR Strategy justified this gathering, with the purpose of debriefing about the events of the day before, particularly the reactions of the European Commission representatives, and brainstorming on the role of ECPGR for the future implementation of the strategies.

M. Lefort, Chair of the ECPGR Executive Committee, welcomed all participants, including observers from the ECPGR Secretariat, and asked for a roundtable of opinions and impressions about the recent GenRes Bridge final events.

2. Roundtable debriefing about GenRes Bridge final event

Most of the participants were not very surprised by the statements made the day before by the representatives of the European Commission (EC) in reaction to the launch of the Genetic Resources Strategies presented by the GenRes Bridge project partners. However, a sense of

severe disappointment was shared that the EC representatives did clearly not intend to seriously take into consideration the need for the proposed transformative changes, although they were expected to exercise vision and facilitate the necessary step change. In particular, EC representatives had said that there was no space for the establishment of a new EU strategy on genetic resources, and that the documents provided by GenRes Bridge would only be seen as supportive of the existing Green Deal strategies (i.e. the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and Farm to Fork Strategy), but not as new add-ons. Such statements were inconsistent with the invitation made by the European Council to the European Commission “to present an EU strategy for genetic resources for aquaculture, forests and agriculture that is based on the work of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture of the FAO.”

National Coordinators in the group agreed about the need to continue exercising pressure on the European Commission, Council and Parliament, involving the respective governments of EU member states, considering the urgency to take responsibility for the implementation of the strategies, particularly the PGR Strategy. At the same time, the document could be used also to revise and align ECPGR members’ national strategies along the principles expressed therein. The PGR Strategy document that was recently endorsed by the ECPGR Steering Committee would be a good basis to use as a policy instrument to leverage funding at national level.

In this regard, it was suggested to develop a short communication document (4-page flyer) to increase policymakers’ awareness. The existing chapter “Need for urgent action” in the PGR Strategy is very well written and can be adapted for this purpose. Translation into national languages could be taken care of by individual countries, where useful. A second communication product directed to a more general audience would also be useful.

In order to consolidate the actions of the Steering Committee, it was proposed to organize a short webinar to inform them about the outcome of the GenRes Bridge final meeting and to recommend lobbying at national level.

Another immediate step to take would be to encourage the next Presidency of the European Union (i.e. France) to include the genetic resources strategies among the priorities for the next semester and to lobby for a genetic resources event during the French presidency. A message had been already drafted by a few French participants in the GenRes meeting, to be sent to the attention of the French Ministry of Agriculture.

Efforts to bring the attention of the Council Committee on Agriculture on this issue will be made by Germany, possibly convening a meeting during which the strategies could be promoted. To further support the strategies’ case, examples of success stories in organizing and funding efficient systems to manage genetic resources could be presented by USDA, Trust and CGIAR invitees.

It was comforting to realize that many other participants in the GenRes meeting had also been disappointed. Specifically, the representative of Euroseeds was ready to invite its members to address a letter to the European Commission, expressing the urgency to take into consideration the recommendations included in the strategies.

It was disappointing to realize that the GenRes Bridge consortium of the three genetic resources networks was not sufficiently united to continue the lobbying effort together. However, considering the common interest shown by the animal genetic resources’ sector, it would be important to consolidate a strong alliance with them. The first action to be undertaken with colleagues from the animal genetic resources sector would be to combine efforts for the establishment of a Coordination and Information Centre on genetic resources. It was proposed to organize a group of 8-10 persons committed to bringing this initiative forward. It would be necessary to also involve persons with expertise in related legal issues and administrative

structures. This Centre might be connected with the new [Knowledge Centre for Biodiversity](#), established by the European Commission in 2020 as mandated in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. However, this Centre has a different agenda, and integrating with it would risk diverting or diluting our own agenda. A connection could also be explored with herbaria and botanic gardens that receive funds from EU Research.

3. Mid-term Steering Committee meeting

L. Maggioni informed the meeting that Lise Lykke Steffensen, Director of NordGen, had made an offer to host the next meeting of the ECPGR Steering Committee in Alnarp, Sweden, at the Swedish University for Agricultural Sciences campus. NordGen is going to inaugurate soon a new building made of wood and would be happy to offer its facilities for the ECPGR meeting. The offer was appreciated by the group and the most suitable dates were identified, being 7–9 June 2022.

Participants then brainstormed on the preparation of the mid-term Steering Committee meeting.

It was suggested not to look much backward, but rather prepare a transition towards the new objectives listed in the PGR Strategy, and focus on deciding priorities for the next Phase. It was also stressed that since the PGR Strategy was built elaborating on past objectives, the transition already happened during its preparation. Now the most important exercise is to discuss and decide on priorities. To facilitate this discussion, a draft proposal on how to prioritize should be prepared and presented at the Steering Committee meeting.

The role of the Working Groups and the value of ECPGR's current structure and mode of operation for the implementation of the strategy should be discussed and it would be useful to consult the Working Groups about this. Different objectives may require different approaches.

It was remarked that some relevant issues that currently need attention are not crop oriented, such as legal issues, access to genetic resources, quality management, phytosanitary issues, etc. Community building could be implemented in a crop-based or theme-based fashion and in some cases, we may need a different structure.

It was suggested to establish a bridge with eco-farming and thus open discussion on the issue of organic certified field collections. One reaction to this proposal was that this issue would be much more important for the animal than the plant sector.

The Mid-term meeting could be used not only for simple reporting about the achievements of Phase X but also to receive the Working Groups' feedback and to brainstorm on the most suitable mode of operation. It will also be important to reflect on how to effectively liaise with other entities, such as the CGIAR Genebank Platform, the Crop Trust and its strategies, EUCARPIA, etc.

It was suggested that a moderator could be useful to facilitate part of the meeting. It would be important to have a very clear understanding of the limits and opportunities of what could and should be changed, considering that creating a programme with two speeds could cause the loss of some current member countries.

The ECPGR Secretary reminded the group that the Mid-term Steering Committee should also be used to clarify the National Coordinators' intentions about the continuation of the current hosting arrangements, since the Secretariat can prepare a draft budget for a new Phase only once these arrangements are settled.