



Minutes of the 1st ECIC Task Force meeting



3 March 2022
Online (Teams)

Present:

ECPGR:

Frank Begemann, BLE, Germany

Szonja Csörgö, Euroseeds

Marianne Lefort, Chair of ECPGR Executive Committee

Lorenzo Maggioni, ECPGR Secretary

ERFP:

Montserrat Castellanos Moncho, Chair of ERFP, Spain

Coralie Danchin, ERFP Secretary

Sipke-Joost Hiemstra, CGN-WUR, The Netherlands

Jan Hendrik Schneider, BMEL, Germany

Jeanne Bormann, ASTA, Luxembourg

1. Welcome and context leading to convening this Task Force

The ECPGR Secretary, L. Maggioni, welcomed the participants to The Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe (GRSE), developed by the three Networks on animal, forest and plant genetic resources within the context of the EU-funded Gen Res Bridge project, was published and presented to the EU Commission on 30 November 2021 in Bruxelles, Belgium. A chapter of this Strategy, 'Enabling Transformative Change', identifies weaknesses within the current European landscape and the first meeting of the Task Force for the European Coordination and Information Centre for conservation and sustainable use of agricultural genetic resources (ECIC). policy framework, such as lack of focus and of specific policy devoted to agricultural genetic resources and absence of coordination at European level, which lead to insufficient funding and inefficiencies related to conservation and sustainable use of agricultural genetic resources. The establishment of ECIC is proposed as one of the most significant steps to remedy the existing weaknesses. This is also stressed in the domain-specific strategies developed by ECPGR and ERFP (but not EUFORGEN).

Following the presentation of the genetic resources' strategies in Brussels, ECPGR and ERFP agreed to continue working together to promote the implementation of the strategies at national and European level and, specifically, to brainstorm about ways and options to establish ECIC. A specific Task Force was thus promoted, composed of 4-5 members selected within each network, i.e. the participants in this first meeting.

2. Introduction about the proposal to establish ECIC

After self-introduction of the participants, F. Begemann introduced the need for dedicated coordination and information at European level in a presentation made available to all the participants. Examples were made of the scattered and dispersed landscape and high number of actors and activities for conservation and use of GR in Europe with responsibilities at national or EC levels. The German organizational structure for genetic resources was given as example of a potential structure also for ECIC. In Germany, the *Information and Coordination Centre for Biological Diversity (IBV)* acts as the central coordination unit of a scattered and distributed system of actors and activities, with a facilitation, documentation, communication and advisory function but no dedicated budget line for direct implementation. The possible tasks and functions of ECIC were listed, as well as the potential legal framework elements that

could ensure status and legitimacy to the Centre. Options for follow up action considered either the (preferred) establishment by the European Commission, or the establishment as an international organization by a country.

3. Brainstorming discussion about possible follow up actions

During the discussion, the following points of attention were raised:

- The territorial scope of the Centre should be defined, enabling it to serve both EU and non-EU countries of Europe (see example of the European Patent Office or the Community Plant Variety Office, which follow from patent and seed legislations).
- The support of the EU would be necessary to guarantee long-term sustainability to the Centre.
- A clear, agreed and spelled out concept of what the scope, function, ownership, governance and budget of the Centre should ideally be, would be useful as starting basis to discuss options for implementation.
- In parallel with the specific activity of this Task Force, other lobbying and other initiatives promoting the implementation of the entire Strategy should be followed up.
- A hook within the existing legal framework would be essential to enable the formation of the Centre (for example, the EU Reference Centre can be created thanks to a reference to it in the Regulation on Animal Breeding). Either ECIC could be connected to an existing centre/agency/institution with formal legal status with an expansion of its scope, or new legislation should be promoted. An analysis of the legal options would be useful.
- Based on the envisaged possibilities offered by the legal framework, a list of implementation options with their pros and cons should be developed:
 - These include the establishment of the Centre by the EU or one country could establish a Centre, acting as an international or European organization.
 - The possibility to create an interim Centre under the umbrella of the two networks with specific staff and budget was also proposed.
 - ERFP is working towards the establishment of the EU Reference Centre as defined in the EU Animal Breeding Regulation. This requires that a country submit a proposal to the EU for a given institute to take up this role. Depending on which institute will become the Reference Centre, there might be an option to attach to it also the functions of ECIC.
- Available calls for proposals should be continuously monitored, in case they offer the opportunity to start creating ECIC (i.e. COST actions, Horizon Europe calls). These opportunities require the identification of a project coordinator and the effort of undergoing a heavily competitive and administrative process.
- Regarding the lobbying process to promote the Strategy on GR, a few ongoing initiatives to be supported were mentioned:
 - Within the framework of the French Presidency of the EU, the French Ministry of Agriculture is considering to include a presentation of the Genetic Resources Strategy within the agenda of the next meeting of the Working Party on GR and Innovation in Agriculture, tentatively scheduled for 26 April 2022. The French Ministry may informally consult with country representatives and the EC to verify the level of interest for this initiative.
 - Need to keep in mind the EU Council statement inviting the EC to present a strategy for genetic resources for aquaculture, forests and agriculture. The issue should be raised with European Parliament representatives.
 - German initiative to include a presentation on the GRSE on the agenda of a forthcoming meeting of the European Parliament Committee on Agriculture.
 - Need to continue lobbying at various levels with relevant EC Directorates.

4. Agreed action points for the Task Force

- A Working Document compiling existing recommendations on the scope and functions of the ECIC, as well as options for action and lobbying (**prepared and distributed by Montse**), could be used as a starting basis to prepare:
 - agreed concept about the scope, function, ownership, governance and budget of ECIC (**to be assigned**)
 - Options for implementation of ECIC, with pros and cons and recommendations for a roadmap (**to be assigned after previous item is completed**)
- Analysis of existing legal framework, aimed to identify whether ECIC could be developed on the basis of existing EU or national legislation under the condition that it operates as an international organization, or whether new legislation would need to be promoted (**Szonja and Jeanne to collaborate with a tentative deadline of 15 April 2022**).
- Task Force to closely follow up the initiative of the French Presidency and get together again in due time before the event, to agree on key messages to be conveyed at that occasion (**Marianne to keep the TF updated about the event**).
- Task Force members to reciprocally alert in case specific opportunities arise for lobbying, public awareness or project preparation requiring the Task Force advise (**all**).

5. Conclusion

The Task Force agreed not to select a Chair for the time being and to reconvene as soon as appropriate. The Secretariats of ERFPA and ECPGR will alternate for secretarial support.