



Minutes of the 3rd ECIC Task Force meeting



27 March 2023
Online (Teams): 14:00-16:00

Present:

ECPGR:

Szonja Csörgö, Euroseeds
Marianne Lefort, Chair of ECPGR Executive Committee
Lorenzo Maggioni, ECPGR Secretary
Jens Weibull, Swedish Board of Agriculture, Sweden (Observer)
Johanna Wider, BLE, Germany

ERFP:

Montserrat Castellanos Moncho, Chair of ERFP, Spain
Coralie Danchin, ERFP Secretary
Sipke-Joost Hiemstra, CGN-WUR, The Netherlands
Jeanne Bormann, ASTA, Luxembourg

1. Welcome introduction

M. Lefort opened the meeting, welcoming Johanna Wider, representing BLE and replacing F. Begemann who had retired. Jens Weibull was also welcomed as an observer invited to receive information from the TF and in the context of the Swedish EU Presidency, on a possible route to establish the European Coordination and Information Centre on Genetic Resources (ECIC).

This meeting is mainly dedicated to listening and discuss the presentation prepared by Jeanne Bormann and Szonja Csörgö on the EU legal framework and suitable options to establish the ECIC. The presentation had been circulated in advance to the Task Force and opened for comments on an online shared document: [Task Force Meeting European coordination centre 20230130.docx](#)

2. Analysis of the existing legal framework aimed to identify whether the ECIC could be developed on the basis of existing EU or national legislation or whether new legislation would need to be promoted

J. Bormann and S. Csörgö presented three existing legal acts/frameworks that could possibly serve as a source of inspiration, considering that ECIC must be anchored into an existing legal basis at EU level:

- Council Regulation (EC) No 870/2004 and Council Regulation (EC) No 1590/2004 on the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture
- The EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste
- The EU Observatory on Infringements of IP Rights

Assuming that the Council Regulations are still in force, they would require to be renewed/adapted. A 'fitness check' of the EU Platform on food losses and food waste and of the Observatory on Infringements of IP Rights indicated that a similar model could cover some of the tasks and functions of ECIC, as specified in the Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe (GRSE), i.e. those related to assist in developing policies, creating awareness and providing technical advice, but probably not the coordination of project implementation, the functions of

a paying agency and the hosting of the GR Secretariats. The Observatory on Infringements of IP Rights is possibly a more advanced model, which has evolved in time from simply gathering data and providing information into a more formal structure promoting practices and success stories and providing solutions and recommendations.

In order to follow a similar route for ECIC, a 'justification' would be required for a possible Council Conclusion, calling on the Commission to first establish the Centre as a Platform or similar loose structure, based on existing Commission structures. This justification could be based on various Sustainable Development Goals, the 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework with its focus on conservation and sustainable use, and the Genetic Resource Strategy for Europe. A resolution from the European Parliament, also soliciting the Commission to work on the same issue, would be useful. In response to the Council (and Parliament) recommendations, the Commission could adopt a Communication to establish the ECIC based on existing Commission structures (like the Platform on food losses and food waste or the Observatory in its first form), with a mandate to carry out some of the tasks foreseen for ECIC, depending on the actual requests from Council and Parliament.

As a future outlook, during its operational period, the platform or observatory alike structure (as an interim structure) could investigate the possibility to set up a separate legal framework for genetic resources as cross-cutting legislation, which inter alia could lay down the foundation for the creation of the ECIC as a permanent EU reference centre based on existing models.

Pros and cons of the various options were outlined and offered for discussion.

3. Collective discussion to examine which way to pursue on this matter

M. Castellanos reported that she enquired with the EC about Council Regulation 870/2002 and the reply was that the Committee for conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in the agrarian sector is no longer alive. The Regulation was created for the CAP 2004-2006, but from CAP 2007 onwards, the conditions applicable to commitments to preserve on farm endangered breeds and plant varieties under threat of genetic erosion, and to activities for the conservation, the sustainable use, and the development of genetic resources in agriculture and in forestry, were included in CAP regulation directly as a rural development measures member states might opt for. Although 870/2004 was not formally repealed, it is considered no longer functional.

M. Castellanos mentioned the possibility to establish a link with the [Biodiversity Information System for Europe](#) (BISE), which is fully embedded in the [Knowledge Centre for Biodiversity](#). Although these initiatives are under the umbrella of DG ENVI, which is probably not a desirable situation, it might be easy to establish a section on Agricultural Genetic Resources and thus start some form of centralization, coordination and knowledge.

M. Lefort remarked that we established a separate GR Strategy since there was not enough recognition for agricultural genetic resources in the F2F and Biodiversity Strategies and it would be important to continue seeking a specific recognition, with a clear link to the GRSE. Others also expressed the preference to seek a link with DG AGRI rather than DG ENVI.

The idea to start with a loose entity that might evolve in time into a more formal structure was generally appreciated by the Task Force, acknowledging the need to clearly formulate a justification for the implementation of the GRSE. The Montreal indicators (such as Target 10) were considered a strong basis in this direction. The next step would be to obtain a strong statement from the European Council (in the form of a Conclusion or Resolution) and the European Parliament, which would force the Commission to take action.

4. Information on the follow-up of the GRSE on the EU political agenda

Jens Weibull informed the group about the ongoing process to maintain genetic resources high on the agenda of the Council Working Party (CWR). The Swedish Presidency has planned to send a questionnaire to member countries with the main objective of finding out what the desired balance between EU and Member states responsibilities is in terms of implementation of the GRSE. A first meeting of the CWR is scheduled for 8 May and will dedicate two hours to discuss the answers received, as well as to prepare text for the next FAO Commission on Genetic Resources. A summary of the conclusions will then be proposed by the Swedish Presidency for adoption during a second meeting of the CWR on 7 June, to be forwarded to the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) and the European Commission.

The question was raised whether aquatic resources would also be included in the questionnaire prepared by Sweden. However, the questionnaire is focused on the GRSE, which is currently not including aquatic resources.

M. Castellanos confirmed that the next Spanish Presidency will be carefully following and participating in the process organized by Sweden, with the intention to maintain the issue of genetic resources alive on the agenda of the next semester. However, it will be difficult to make significant progress, since many other priorities are currently higher on the agenda of the policymakers (such as the new breeding techniques).

The Task Force members wondered what the best way would be to promote the adoption by the EU Council of a Resolution on genetic resources. It is difficult to determine whether there is a linear way that could be pursued, but it was recommended to try influencing the members of the COREPER at national level, wherever possible.

It was discussed whether it would be appropriate to establish a small group to formulate text outlining which activities could be included in a loose structure (platform) on genetic resources, leading to ECIC, so that recommendations for its establishment could be better motivated. This draft text could better orient the CWR during its meeting in May. Other opinions were that this activity is premature.

Conclusions

The Task Force was in agreement that the establishment of a Platform/Observatory as a loose structure to coordinate knowledge gathering and sharing activities on agricultural genetic resources at regional level could be a realistic first step towards the establishment of ECIC and the implementation of the GRSE. The right steps to move in this direction are not immediately evident, but it is clear that political initiative from COREPER and the Parliament would be necessary, based on a strong justification. A Council Conclusion or Resolution and a European Parliament recommendation would be the first necessary targets.

The Task Force will be looking forward to the actions undertaken by the Swedish Presidency in the next three months to verify the support of EU member countries for the GRSE, including the establishment of ECIC.

In the meantime, M. Lefort with the support of few TF members will try to prepare a document outlining which activities could be included in a loose structure (platform) on agricultural genetic resources, leading to an ECIC.