

# Strategy Paper on the ECPGR Relationship with the European Union/European Commission

## 1 Introduction

At the twelfth ECPGR Steering Committee Meeting, 14-16 December 2010, Bratislava, Slovakia, it was agreed that the existing Task Force on EU matters would be revitalized and tasked with the preparation of a strategy paper. The objective of this paper is to specify the gaps and the needs of actions related to improve the relationship of ECPGR and the European Union/European Commission (EU/COM). The strategy summarizes the current status, existing gaps and proposed activities on a) policy framework b) *in situ* conservation, c) on-farm management, d) *ex situ* conservation and e) research.

The Task Force is composed of Jan Engels, Paul Freudenthaler, Lars Landbo and Fernando Latorre.<sup>1</sup>

## 2 Objectives and measures of ECPGR

ECPGR is a collaborative Programme among most European countries, aimed at contributing to national, sub-regional and regional programmes in Europe to rationally and effectively conserve *ex situ* and *in situ* Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA) and increase their utilization.

ECPGR currently has an annual budget of approximately €0.55M, with more than 40 European countries formally participating. The Programme is entirely funded by the member countries, paying annual contributions based on the United Nations scale of assessment. ECPGR is based upon national programmes and collectively operates through crop oriented and thematic networks. Oversight is provided by a Steering Committee composed of National Coordinators nominated by the member countries<sup>2</sup>.

During recent years, ECPGR has focused its work on two main priorities: development of a PGRFA information landscape that makes data about PGRFA collections easily accessible to users (EURISCO, European Plant Genetic Resources Search Catalogue, and the European Central Crop Databases); and efforts towards sharing of conservation responsibilities among countries (a European Genebank Integrated System, AEGIS). A strategy was adopted to establish a virtual European genebank, containing genetically unique and economically important accessions of all relevant crops in Europe. These accessions will be maintained in genebanks by the individual countries as part of their long-term commitments, applying agreed standards and ensuring that the material will be readily available to the members.

The twelfth meeting of the ECPGR Steering Committee (Bratislava, December 2010) agreed on a long-term goal to which ECPGR contributes and six outcomes that should be attributable to ECPGR within one Phase, as follows:

**Long-Term Goal:** National, Sub-regional and Regional Programmes in Europe rationally and effectively conserve *ex situ* and *in situ* PGRFA and increase their utilization.

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<sup>1</sup> Siegfried Harrer (BLE) has left his post and the Task Force but other BLE colleagues, in particular Frank Begemann and Mathias Ziegler contributed to the development of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> [www.ecpgr.cgiar.org](http://www.ecpgr.cgiar.org)

**Outcomes:**

1. AEGIS is operational and accessions in AEGIS are characterized and evaluated.
2. The functionality of EURISCO meets users' expectations and quantity and quality of data in EURISCO is increased, including in situ and on-farm data.
3. *In situ* and on-farm conservation and management concepts are agreed.
4. Commitment and regular resources of national governments is sustained or increased and commitments and resources of the European Commission, as well as of other potential donors towards ECPGR are increased.
5. Relationships with users of germplasm are strengthened.
6. Organizational structure and secretarial support are adequate to effectively sustain the operations of ECPGR.

The long-term goal of ECPGR and the outcomes are clearly in accordance with the principles of the European integration at large.

The Member Countries of ECPGR are represented in the ECPGR Steering Committee by “National Coordinators” who represent their respective countries within ECPGR on behalf of the respective Ministries, usually Ministries of Agriculture. In addition, the ECPGR Steering Committee observers consist of: Bioversity International, the European Seed Association (ESA), EUCARPIA, FAO, the Nordic Genetic Resource Center (NordGen), the South East European Development Network on Plant Genetic Resources (SEEDNet) and an NGO representative.

The European Commission is invited to nominate a representative as a full member of the Steering Committee but has not yet signed a formal letter of agreement in this respect.

**Major comparative advantages of ECPGR are:**

- Pan-European coverage of more than 40 countries
- More than 30 years of existence and experience, i.e. since 1980
- Formalised cooperation with governmental leadership and funding
- Network of technical experts
- Detailed knowledge of conservation and use of PGRFA
- Regional conservation infrastructure ‘A European Genebank Integrated System’ (AEGIS)
- Regional information infrastructure (EURISCO and ECCDBs)
- Platform for regional and inter-regional collaboration.

**Interaction between the European Commission (EU/COM) and ECPGR:**

- ECPGR replied to the questionnaire of the EU GEN RES programme
- ECPGR replied to the questionnaire on the EU green paper on research and innovation
- Invitation by the ECPGR Steering Committee to the EU/COM to become a permanent member of the Steering Committee of the ECPGR
- The ECPGR Working Groups have facilitated the drafting of numerous project proposals submitted to EU funding schemes
- Contacts with EU/COM (e.g. DG research/FP7, DG Agri/870/2004 and DG Sanco.)

### **3 Objectives, programmes and measures of the EU/COM related to PGRFA and activities suggested for collaboration with ECPGR**

The subject of PGRFA represents an interest that cuts across several areas of EU policy making. It is also highly fragmented. The main policy areas that influence PGRFA are: Agriculture and Rural Development, Consumer Protection, Environment, Research and International Cooperation. EU institutions have a significant role to play in the operation of a rational system on PGRFA in Europe, e.g. by providing the necessary policy framework and by supporting its implementation.

In this Chapter we briefly analyze the current status of a number of areas that are of common interest to both, the ECPGR and to the EU/COM, identify any existing or perceived gaps, list any proposed targets that should be jointly aspired over the next five years or more, and finally present for each of these areas recommendations.

#### **3.1 Policy framework for agrobiodiversity**

##### **3.1.1 Current status**

Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA) are covered in a number of policy areas, yet there is no coherent policy or strategy providing a more general vision by the EU/ COM about plant or other genetic resources for food and agriculture (GRFA). While there is an overall biodiversity strategy of the European Union, there is no special agricultural biodiversity programme for genetic resources (e.g. plants, animals, forests, aquatic and microbial resources), in which the conservation and the sustainable use of PGRFA (e.g. in breeding) are connected within a coherent policy framework. PGRFA are a key factor to allow for adaption to climate change and an important factor contributing to food security worldwide. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2020 recognizes food security and climate change challenges. Against this background the Council of the European Union *encourages conservation and sustainable use of all genetic resources, especially genetic resources for food, agriculture and forestry; highlights the valuable contribution of the Community Programme on Conservation, Characterisation, Collection and Utilisation of Genetic Resource in Agriculture; and looks forward to exploring, together with the Commission, the scope for developing a strategy for the conservation of genetic resources in food, agriculture and forestry.*<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly, the European Academies Science Advisory Council (EASAC) has recently published a Report on “Plant genetic resources for food and agriculture: roles and research priorities in the European Union, (2011)”<sup>4</sup> which after conducting an extensive consultation among stakeholders reaches very similar conclusions and recommendations, *inter alia*, calling for the “alignment of policy tools available in CAP reform, for giving greater prominence to PGRFA in the current process of setting EU research priorities for the period up to 2020 and, in general, in capitalising on plant genetic resources”.

Hence, EASAC concludes very much in line with the Task Force that “it is vital for policymakers in the EU and at the Member State level to recognize the crucial contribution that plant genetic resources can make to tackling the EU societal challenges across a broad front and ensuring policies are in place to support their enhanced conservation and use.”

The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) is a legally binding agreement specifically targeting the exchange of PGRFA. It is in harmony with the

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<sup>3</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/comm2006/2020.htm> Environment Council Conclusions of 19 December 2011, No 18862/11

<sup>4</sup> Available at: <http://www.easac.eu/home/reports-and-statements/detail-view/article/plant-geneti.html>

Convention on Biological Diversity and has established a multilateral system for facilitated access to a list of major crops and forage species, including by providing for a fair and equitable benefit sharing. The design and operation of this multilateral system for access and benefit sharing created by the International Treaty reflects an appreciation of the high degree of interdependence of countries on PGRFA and the specific requirements for their adequate conservation and sustainable use. It also calls its contracting parties to promote an integrated approach to the conservation and use of PGRFA. Participation and cooperation in genetic resources networks is specifically encouraged. International cooperation is called upon to maintain and strengthen institutional arrangements that are supportive of the multilateral system. The EU (as European Community) ratified the International Treaty on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2004 but has not adopted substantive measures for its specific implementation yet.<sup>5</sup> The Standard Material Transfer Agreement<sup>6</sup> (SMTA) is an important element of the ITPGRFA that specifies the conditions of access to the PGRFA and determines the level, form and manner of payments to the Treaty's Funding Mechanism in the case of commercialization of products arising from this material.

The EU seed legislation is also relevant for the conservation and use of PGRFA as the latter are an important component of the seed chain. The overall objective of the EU seed legislation is to provide the market with high quality seed and plant propagating material. Unfortunately, there is no coherent legal framework that considers the entire value chain from collecting to conservation, evaluation, pre-breeding and finally the use of PGRFA by breeders and/or farmers. The conservation and pre-breeding are only indirectly supported by the goals of the seed legislation and have been underlined in the preambles of some directives<sup>7</sup>. Council Directive 98/95/EC recognizes in its preamble (17) that *it is essential to ensure that plant genetic resources are conserved and that a legal basis to that end should be introduced to permit, within the framework of legislation on the seed trade, the conservation, by use in situ, of varieties threatened with genetic erosion*. Currently, the EU seed legislation is under revision and the European Commission will submit its proposals for the reform in autumn 2012. The Member States have the opportunity to offer their advice through the Standing Committee on Seeds and Propagating Material for Agriculture, Horticulture and Forestry.

### 3.1.2 Gaps

There is currently no specific EU-strategy for the conservation and use of genetic resources in food, agriculture and forestry (GRFA) that provides a policy framework for action in conservation, use, research and breeding.

Furthermore, the EU has not adopted any specific measures to implement the ITPGRFA. For example, there is no legal base for the establishment or management of national genebanks in most European countries which could be helpful for their justification in some countries. Similarly, the establishment

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<sup>5</sup> However, as recently as 21 June 2012, the EU (Commission) announced a €5 million euro contribution to the Benefit Sharing Fund of the Treaty. See news link at: <http://www.planttreaty.org/news/ec-contributes-%E2%82%AC5-million-help-farmers-maintain-crop-diversity>.

<sup>6</sup> DG Health and Consumer Protection represented the EU in the negotiation process of the ITPGR at FAO; it supported discussions among member states and was actively involved in the negotiation of a draft SMTA.

<sup>7</sup> New directives:

COMMISSION DIRECTIVE 2009/145/EC of 26 November 2009 providing for certain derogations, for acceptance of vegetable landraces and varieties which have been traditionally grown in particular localities and regions and are threatened by genetic erosion and of vegetable varieties with no intrinsic value for commercial crop production but developed for growing under particular conditions and for marketing of seed of those landraces and varieties

COMMISSION DIRECTIVE 2010/60/EU of 30 August 2010 providing for certain derogations for marketing of fodder plant seed mixtures intended for use in the preservation of the natural environment

COUNCIL DIRECTIVE 2008/90/EC of 29 September 2008 on the marketing of fruit plant propagating material and fruit plants intended for fruit production

of AEGIS has not been recognized by the EU/COM as a direct contribution to the implementation of the International Treaty within the European Union.

### 3.1.3 Targets

- a) An EU specific *strategy for the conservation of genetic resources in food, agriculture and forestry* (GRFA) as a policy framework for action in conservation, use, research and breeding should be encouraged to be developed.
- b) An EU **programme** on PGRFA to describe and implement the wider *strategy for the conservation of genetic resources in food, agriculture and forestry* should be encouraged to be developed.
- c) An **ECPGR strategy** on conservation and use of PGRFA should be developed as to operationalize important elements of the EU programme on GRFA.
- d) The current review of the EU **seed legislation** could offer an opportunity to integrate the conservation of PGRFA *in situ* and *ex situ* as a fundamental element of the entire seed chain.

### 3.1.4 Recommendations

- a) If requested by the EU/COM, ECPGR could help in developing the *EU strategy on the conservation of genetic resources in food, agriculture and forestry* (GRFA).
- b) ECPGR should develop its strategy on conservation and use of PGRFA as to operationalize important elements of the EU programme on PGRFA.
- c) ECPGR should provide comments to the EU/COM in the ongoing revision process of the seed legislation.

## 3.2 *In situ* conservation of PGRFA

### 3.2.1 Current status

The most important EU legislation for *in situ* conservation of PGRFA is the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC). The Habitats Directive (together with the Birds Directive) forms the cornerstone of Europe's nature conservation policy. It is built around two pillars: the Natura 2000 network of protected sites and the strict system of species protection. Natura 2000 is the centerpiece of EU nature and biodiversity policy. It is an EU wide network of nature protection areas comprising habitat sites (i.e. Special Areas of Conservation) and bird sites (Special Protection Areas (for Birds)), divided into biogeographical regions. The provisions for species protection apply to the whole of a Member State's territory and concern the physical protection of specimen as well as their habitats (thus, it also covers vegetable species including CWR such as oats, brassicas, etc). All in all the Directive protects over 1.000 animal and plant species and over 200 so called "habitat types" (e.g. special types of forests, meadows, wetlands, etc.), which are of European importance. *In situ* conservation of PGRFA through protected areas or species protection is of particular importance for crop wild relatives (CWR). They occur inside and outside protected areas and part of them are covered by the aforementioned species protection measures.

The financial instrument supporting nature and environmental conservation is called LIFE. The current phase of the programme, LIFE+, was established by Regulation (EC) No 614/2007 and runs from 2007-2013 with a budget of over €2 billion. LIFE+ covers both the operational expenditure of DG Environment and the co-financing of projects. According to Article 6 of the LIFE+ Regulation, at least 78 percent of the LIFE+ budgetary resources must be used for LIFE+ project action grants. During the period 2007-2013, the European Commission will launch one call for LIFE+ project proposals per year. Proposals must be eligible under one of the programme's three components: LIFE+ Nature and Biodiversity, LIFE+ Environment Policy and Governance, and LIFE+ Information and Communication.

The Nature & Biodiversity component continues and extends the former LIFE Nature programme. It will co-finance best practice or demonstration projects that contribute to the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives and the Natura 2000 network. In addition, it will co-finance innovative or demonstration projects that contribute to the implementation of the objectives of Commission Communication (COM (2006) 216 final) on "Halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 – and beyond". At least 50 percent of the LIFE+ budget for project co-financing must be dedicated to LIFE+ Nature and Biodiversity projects.

The Environment Policy & Governance component continues and extends the former LIFE Environment programme. It will co-finance innovative or pilot projects that contribute to the implementation of European environmental policy and the development of innovative policy ideas, technologies, methods and instruments. It will also help monitor pressures on our environment.

The LIFE+ Information & Communication component will co-finance projects relating to communication and awareness raising campaigns on environmental, nature protection or biodiversity conservation issues.

EU-research projects with partners from ECPGR Networks were useful in strengthening the expertise in *in situ* conservation, e.g. "An Integrated European *In Situ* Management Work Plan: Implementing Genetic Reserves and On-Farm Concepts (AEGRO)", funded through Council Regulation 870/2004. The ongoing EU project "PGR Secure", funded through the research Framework Programme 7, was also initiated by the ECPGR *In Situ* and On-Farm Conservation Network which has a clear focus on protected areas for the conservation of CWR.

### 3.2.2 Existing gaps

Knowledge of the exact occurrence of CWRs and locations of high diversity (hot spots) inside and outside protected areas is limited. Thus, the *in situ* conservation of CWRs and their populations need special attention, either if they fall inside (specific genetic reserve management) or outside protected areas (complementary conservation measures).

At present, there is only limited participation of ECPGR in the Natura 2000 network.

### 3.2.3 Targets

A European *in situ* conservation concept for crop wild relatives should be developed as part of the EU programme on PGRFA to describe and implement the wider EU *strategy for the conservation of genetic resources in food, agriculture and forestry*.

### 3.2.4 Recommendations

a) The ECPGR *In situ* and On-farm Conservation Network should develop and present draft concepts for *in situ* conservation of CWR and landraces to the ECPGR Steering Committee for consideration and adoption.

b) The ECPGR Steering Committee should offer the ECPGR *in situ* CWR and on-farm landrace conservation concepts, after their adoption by the Steering Committee, to the European Commission for its consideration when developing a European *in situ* conservation concept for crop wild relatives and landraces as part EU programme on PGRFA to describe and implement the wider EU *strategy for the conservation of genetic resources in food, agriculture and forestry*.

### 3.3 On-farm management of PGRFA

#### 3.3.1 Current status

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) focuses on rural development by introducing a financial instrument and a single programme for the period of 2007 - 2013: the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD, EC Regulation 1698/2005)<sup>8</sup>. The EAFRD provides opportunities for supporting agri-environment measures, including for the on-farm management of PGRFA at the national level. Article 39 contains provisions for on-farm conservation of PGRFA. EC Regulation 1974/2006<sup>9</sup> provides detailed rules for the application of the above Regulation 1698/2005 and specifies in its Article 27.4 (b) the support *to preserve plant genetic resources naturally adapted to the local and regional conditions and under threat of genetic erosion*.

Under EAFRD, only measures at the national level can be implemented through national rural development implementation plans. Measures of EC Regulations 1698/2005, article 39 have been exploited with various degrees of success by a limited number of countries (e.g. Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary and Italy).

At present, it is uncertain to which extent the current provisions of Art. 39 and possibly additional considerations of relevance to on-farm management of PGRFA will be reflected in the revised EAFRD post 2013 instrument<sup>10</sup>.

Whereas landraces continue to be cultivated in Europe and numerous on-farm conservation projects and schemes have been initiated, including the 'PGR Secure' project, there is currently no detailed inventory of their occurrence at the European level and no regional monitoring system has been put in place.

#### 3.3.2 Existing gaps

Measures under EAFRD can only support activities at the national level. There is, however, a gap in knowledge on the existence of landraces that is required to meet the criteria as set by the above regulations and the national implementation plans. Furthermore, on-farm management of PGRFA requires sufficient seed quantities of landraces meeting the requirements of the regulation as well as national implementation plans. In many cases the amount of landrace seed available is not sufficient and would require seed multiplication first.

EAFRD payments are granted annually and cover additional costs as well as foregone income resulting from the commitment made of growing threatened genetic resources. Where necessary, they may cover also transaction costs. Nevertheless, they do not seem to be sufficient as an incentive to attract many farmers to engage in such on-farm management of PGR activities.

A regional approach for a comprehensive inventory of cultivated landraces and an effective monitoring system are currently lacking.

#### 3.3.3 Targets

National inventories of *plant genetic resources naturally adapted to the local and regional conditions and under threat of genetic erosion* should be developed by the relevant national authorities as a basis

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<sup>8</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/index_en.htm)

<sup>9</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:368:0015:01:EN:HTML>

<sup>10</sup> [Note: The latest draft of 19 June 2012 includes similar provisions in Art. 29]

for national implementation plans to target potential support. An effective monitoring system for landraces grown in Europe is yet another target to be developed at the regional level, building on well-developed national monitoring approaches.

#### 3.3.4 Recommendations

a) The ECPGR Documentation and Information Network and the ECPGR *In situ* and On-farm Conservation Network could jointly develop and present draft national inventories of landraces maintained on-farm as defined by the respective national focal points as *plant genetic resources naturally adapted to the local and regional conditions and under threat of genetic erosion*.

b) Assistance in the development of national inventories of on-farm cultivated landraces and in the development of effective national monitoring schemes as well as of project proposals, could be offered by the respective ECPGR Networks and National Focal Points to the national authorities responsible for the EAFRD implementation plans.

### 3.4 *Ex situ* conservation, characterization and evaluation of PGRFA

#### 3.4.1 Current status

The collecting, conservation, characterization and utilization of genetic resources in agriculture is supported by the EU/COM through two different regulations: at national level through Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005, Article 39 para. 5 and for trans-national or regional activities through Council Regulation 870/2004.

While only a few activities are known to have been or being supported by EC Regulation 1698/2005 (EAFRD) Art. 35 para. 5 at the national (including provincial) levels, Council Regulation (EC) 870/2004 has funded 17 trans-national actions (projects), involving 178 partners located in 25 Member States and 12 non EU countries with a finance volume of approx. €8.9M<sup>11</sup>. The actions started in 2007 and had a maximum duration of 4 years. Members of many ECPGR crop Working Groups participated in the preparation, submission and subsequent implementation of the individual projects.

The Programme ended in 2011 with the completion of the ongoing projects and it has been recently evaluated by independent experts who recommended it to be continued. Member States have also recommended a continuation. In connection with this, ECPGR National Coordinators were alerted by the ECPGR Secretariat that it was important to encourage the Commission to propose a continuation of the Programme with increased funding and simplification of administrative rules. The European Commission Committee on the Programme met on 13 June 2012. At this occasion views in support of the Programme were expressed by the Member countries' delegates. So far no decision has been taken by the Commission on the continuation of the Programme but the Commission made reference to the potential of Rural Development Policy and the future Research and Innovation Framework Horizon 2020 to deliver on the conservation of genetic resources. The Commission will now submit the evaluation report together with the Commission's comments by means of a Communication to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee in the second half of 2012. The next meeting of the Committee on the Programme is foreseen on the first quarter of 2013.

#### 3.4.2 Gaps

Council Regulation (EC) No 870/2004 facilitated the European cooperation on genetic resources, in particular it facilitated the bridging of the gap between conservation and research. Hence, the comparative advantage and niche for a potential successor regulation of Council Regulation (EC)

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<sup>11</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/envir/biodiv/genres/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/envir/biodiv/genres/index_en.htm)



870/2004 would be in particular the sustenance of *ex situ* conservation, documentation, characterization and evaluation of plant genetic resources of specific crops at the European level through trans-national collaboration. This focus would nicely complement the measures of the EAFRD (on-farm management) and NATURA 2000 (*in situ* conservation) at the national level.

### 3.4.3 Targets

A new programme on conservation, characterization, collection and utilization of genetic resources in agriculture to succeed EC regulation 870/2004 should be established. Such a new programme should have a higher funding volume (possibly up to €100M), a duration of 10 years and allow funding of genebanks and documentation, characterization and evaluation of the genetic resources activities, but without a demanding administrative requirement. For such a Programme, ECPGR could become the implementing agency, possibly of a sub-domain on plants, i.e. PGRFA. If the service of ECPGR as an implementing agency would be accepted by the European Commission, this would be useful for supporting the ECPGR National Coordinators in their efforts to conserve and use PGRFA at the national level (i.e. national programmes) and thus would help to strengthen the collaboration at different levels:

- improved collaboration between European Commission and ECPGR,
- Improved collaboration of the respective ECPGR National Coordinator and other national focal points (NFP) with national authorities for relevant EU-programmes / national members in relevant EU Committees such as FP7, SCAR, ESFRI, EC 870/2004, Seed Legislation etc.

### 3.4.4 Recommendations

a) ECPGR should lobby for a new programme on conservation, characterization, collection and utilization of genetic resources in agriculture to succeed EC Regulation 870/2004 but with a substantial increase in funding volume and simplified administrative procedures.

b) Pending the decision by the ECPGR Steering Committee and with the understanding that it would not be a disadvantage to ECPGR and its bodies to serve as a competent technical advisorynd if adequate funding is provided for the agency role, ECPGR could offer to act as a implementing agency for project administration under the potential successor regulation of Council Regulation (EC) 870/2004 for the sub-domain PGRFA. If desired and appropriate, there should be a further discussion on how to proceed between the ECPGR and the European Commission.

## 3.5 Research

### 3.5.1 Current status

The existing policy frameworks in all relevant areas are generally enhanced by collaborative research in the European Research Area (ERA). The EU Seventh Framework Program (2007-2013) did provide and to some extent still provides ample opportunities for financing collaborative research and research infrastructures that are directly relevant for the objectives and the ongoing and planned activities of ECPGR. A number of research projects related to PGRFA have received funding from FP7.

Several mechanisms and processes such as the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) and Technology Platform ‘Plants for Life’ are in place to support, inform and influence the research priority setting processes in the long-term. The new Framework Programme for Research and Innovation is called “Horizon 2020”; the first call will be launched at the end of 2013. At present, there is a discussion ongoing about the future topics and the research priorities and ECPGR has been invited to participate in the brainstorming process. It is not clear to what extent the new Programme will be able to meet ECPGR needs and priorities.

### 3.5.2 Gaps

ECPGR has so far not been directly involved in the elaboration of the Horizon 2020 elaboration process. Although it has so far proven to be difficult to meet the specific requirements of the Framework Programme, as PGRFA conservation and use priorities are difficult to match with the expectations of the calls, it was felt important to continue the discussion with the EU/COM. Furthermore, the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR), which is formed by representatives of Member States, and presided over by a representative of the Commission, could be a good entry point to convey the ECPGR needs and priorities. Because of SCAR's (different collaborative Working Groups<sup>12</sup>) advisory role for the HORIZON 2020<sup>13</sup>, there might be some ECPGR needs communicated to the SCAR members and possibly further streamlined for priority setting in coordination activities of the European Research Area Networking (ERA-NET) scheme<sup>14</sup>. The objective of the ERA-NET scheme is to step up the cooperation and coordination of research activities carried out at national or regional level in the Member States and Associated States through the networking of research activities conducted at national or regional level, and the mutual opening of national and regional research programmes.

### 3.5.3 Targets

Strengthen funding possibilities and opportunities for research projects (further developing infrastructure and methods on conservation and sustainable use) in the EU research programmes (especially HORIZON 2020)

### 3.5.4 Recommendations

- a) ECPGR should start to lobby with their National SCAR Representatives for PGRFA needs in the HORIZON 2020 research programme. SCAR has a mandate by the Council to play a major role in the coordination of agricultural research efforts across the European Research Area. Therefore, a dialogue between the ECPGR National Coordinators and the National Representatives of SCAR should be revived and/or initiated.
- b) ECPGR should express its interests for the future Research Infrastructure area and start a discussion within the plant genetic resources community and with ESFRI members for which areas they should support topics to be included in future project calls of the EU.
- c) ECPGR should propose to include more research topics in the field of European cooperation on PGRFA as well as on capacity and infrastructure-building to conserve and utilize PGRFA. A future EU co-financing of preservation / expansion of collections should be discussed.
- d) The collaboration between ECPGR and botanic gardens as well as with public and private stakeholders should be a priority. ECPGR should offer to make presentations about the PGRFA needs, e.g. by participating in meetings of ESA, EUCARPIA, FAO, SEEDNet (note; they all have observers participating in the ECPGR Steering Committee meetings) and the Botanical Garden Conservation International (BGCI) network. Personal invitations from ECPGR to EU/COM representatives to participate in ECPGR Steering Committee meetings, in close consultation with a formally nominated EU/COM representative at the Steering Committee, could also be a next step to lobby for the PGRFA needs.
- e) ECPGR may wish to propose to the EU/COM the establishment of an ERA-NET for PGRFA for which ECPGR could play the role of the ERA-NET Coordinator.

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<sup>12</sup> At present more than 5 active CWG in different priorities like fisheries, IPM and reduction of use of phytosanitary products, sustainable forest management, AKIS.

<sup>13</sup> The draft Programme has already gone through Commission and Council and it should go now to European Parliament. Rapporteur/presenter of topic: Teresa Riera.

<sup>14</sup> The work developed within the SCAR CWG usually leads to the further development of different ERA-NET activities.

## 4 Recommendations and actions

At the twelfth ECPGR Steering Committee Meeting, 14-16 December 2010, Bratislava, Slovakia, it was agreed that the existing Task Force on EU matters would be revitalized and tasked with the preparation of a strategy paper. Consequently, this paper specifies the gaps and the needs of actions related to improve the relationship of ECPGR and the European Union / European Commission (EU/COM). The strategy summarizes the current status, existing gaps and proposed recommendations and actions on a) policy framework b) *in situ* conservation, c) on-farm management, d) *ex situ* conservation and e) research.

The Steering Committee should consider the document (specially the following Recommendations and Actions) and decide on the future of the Task Force.

The Task Force will submit the present draft Strategy paper through the ExCo to the ECPGR Steering Committee and considers with this submission to have completed its task.

### A Policy framework for agrobiodiversity

- If requested by the EU/COM, ECPGR could help in developing the *EU Strategy on the conservation of genetic resources in food, agriculture and forestry* (GRFA).
- ECPGR should develop its strategy on conservation and use of PGRFA as to operationalize important elements of the *EU Programme on PGRFA* developing the aforementioned *EU Strategy*.
- ECPGR should provide comments to the EU/COM in the ongoing revision process of the seed legislation.

#### Actions

- The ECPGR Secretariat should send invitation letters, to the various contacts in DGs of the Commission (Research (RTD), Agriculture (AGRI), International Cooperation Health and Consumers (SANCO) and Environment (ENV)) to participate in the next SC. Timing: as soon as possible.
- The ECPGR Secretariat, in close consultation with Frank Begemann and Paul Freudenthaler, should prepare a letter as soon as possible to be sent by the ECPGR National Coordinators to the national representatives of the Standing Committee on Seeds encouraging the inclusion of the PGRFA conservation (ex situ and in situ) concept in the new seed legislation. This letter should also be sent by the Secretariat to ESA for their support. Timing: as soon as possible.
- After a decision is taken by the ECPGR SC on its legal status, structure and hosting arrangement which should clarify who would be representing the ECPGR in other fora and in charge of its external relations, this person or body, should approach the Commission to explore the development of an EU Strategy on PGRFA and offer ECPGR assistance in developing it, and implementing any programme on PGRFA. Timing: once a decision on representation of ECPGR is taken at the next SC (December 2012), as soon as practicable.
- The SC should consider, and if appropriate, mandate the Executive Committee, a Task Force or Secretariat to draft a strategy on conservation and use of PGRFA as to operationalize important elements of the *EU Programme on PGRFA* developing the aforementioned *EU Strategy*. Timing: a decision must be taken at the next SC (December 2012), and the work carried out as soon as practicable.

## **B In situ conservation of PGRFA**

- The ECPGR *In situ* and On-farm Conservation Network should develop and present a draft concept for *in situ* conservation of CWR to the ECPGR Steering Committee for consideration and adoption.
- The ECPGR Steering Committee should offer the ECPGR *in situ* CWR and on-farm landrace conservation concepts, after their adoption by the Steering Committee, to the European Commission for its consideration when developing a European *in situ* conservation concept for crop wild relatives and landraces as part of the EU programme on PGRFA to describe and implement the wider EU *strategy for the conservation of genetic resources in food, agriculture and forestry*.

### Actions

- The In situ and On-farm Conservation Network should develop and present a draft concept for *in situ* conservation of CWR and landraces for consideration and adoption to the ECPGR Steering Committee. Timing: 2013.
- The ECPGR Steering Committee, through the appointed person or body to represent the ECPGR, should offer the adopted ECPGR *in situ* conservation concept of CWR to the European Commission for its consideration when developing a European *in situ* conservation concept for crop wild relatives as part of the wider EU *strategy for the conservation of genetic resources in food, agriculture and forestry*. Timing: possibly not earlier than 2014.

## **C On-farm management of PGRFA**

- As a follow up to the concept to be adopted by the ECPGR Steering Committee (see above), the ECPGR Documentation and Information Network and the ECPGR In situ and On-farm Conservation Network could jointly develop and present draft national inventories of landraces maintained on-farm as defined by the respective national focal points as “plant genetic resources naturally adapted to the local and regional conditions and under threat of genetic erosion”.
- Assistance in the development of national inventories of on-farm cultivated landraces and in the development of effective national monitoring schemes as well as of project proposals, could be offered by the respective ECPGR networks and National Focal Points to the national authorities responsible for the EAFRD implementation plans.

### Actions

- As above. Timing: First, when the Documentation and Information Network and the In situ and On-farm completes the above mentioned task on national inventories of landraces. Second, once the task is completed, EAFRD national authorities should be contacted. All this is not likely to be completed before 2014 or 2015.

## **D Ex situ conservation, characterization and evaluation of PGRFA**

- ECPGR should lobby for a new programme on conservation, characterization, collection and utilization of genetic resources in agriculture to succeed EC Regulation 870/2004 but with a substantial increase in funding volume and simplified administrative procedures.
- Pending the decision by the ECPGR Steering Committee and with the understanding that it would not be a disadvantage to ECPGR and its bodies to serve as a competent technical advisory body and if adequate funding is provided for the agency role, ECPGR could approach the Commission to explore whether it would be at all possible to offer to act as a implementing agency for project

administration under the potential successor regulation of Council Regulation (EC) 870/2004 for the sub-domain PGRFA. If desired and appropriate, there could be a further discussion on how to proceed between the ECPGR and the European Commission.

### Actions

- The ECPGR Secretariat should contact all National Coordinators and vice-versa, when and as appropriate, to reciprocally inform them of any communications by the Commission regarding the future of Regulation 870/2004 and, in response, try to reach a common approach by the country delegates on the future of the Regulation. Timing: as soon as possible and when new information from EU/COM is available.
- The ECPGR external relations representative should approach the Commission to explore whether it would be at all possible to offer to act as implementing agency for project administration under the potential successor regulation of Council Regulation (EC) 870/2004 for the sub-domain PGRFA. Timing: once a decision is taken at SC on ECPGR representation in general or for this particular task, and the future of the Regulation is clarified, this action should take place as soon as practicable.

## **E Research**

- ECPGR should start to lobby with their National SCAR Representatives for PGRFA needs in the HORIZON 2020 research programme. SCAR has a mandate by the Council to play a major role in the coordination of agricultural research efforts across the European Research Area. Therefore, a dialogue between the ECPGR National Coordinators and the National Representatives of SCAR should be revived and/or initiated.
- ECPGR should express its interests for the future Research Infrastructure area and start a discussion within the plant genetic resources community and with ESFRI members for which areas they should support topics to be included in future project calls of the EU.
- ECPGR should propose to include more research topics in the field of European cooperation on PGRFA as well as on capacity and infrastructure-building to conserve and utilize PGRFA. A future EU co-financing of preservation / expansion of collections should be discussed.
- The collaboration between ECPGR and botanic gardens as well as with public and private stakeholders should be a priority. ECPGR should offer to make presentations about the PGRFA needs, e.g. by participating in meetings of ESA, EUCARPIA, FAO, SEEDNet (note; they all have observers participating in the ECPGR Steering Committee meetings) and the Botanical Garden Conservation International (BGCI) network. Personal invitations from ECPGR to EU/COM representatives to participate in ECPGR Steering Committee meetings could also be a next step to lobby for the PGR needs.
- ECPGR may wish to propose to the EU/COM the establishment of an “ERA-Net for PGRFA” for which ECPGR could play the role of the ERA-Net Coordinator.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The Task Force believes there is a need and room for an ERA-NET for PGRFA given that existing and potentially related ERA-NETs do not really cover PGRFA: RURAGRI is more oriented towards rural development and SUSTFOOD although related to sustainable food production is aimed at agrofood industries. However, the proposed ERA-NET AGRICULTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE is now integrated with the Joint Programming Initiative (FACCE – Food Security, Agriculture and Climate Change) where certain aspects of PGRFA and agrobiodiversity might be included, but it is a matter to be discussed with SCAR Representatives. It is estimated that until mid 2013 there will no possibilities to propose new ERA-NETs so there is sufficient time to explore and discuss the proposal at ECPGR.

## Actions

- The ECPGR Secretariat should send a letter to National Coordinators with the urgent request to forward to and ideally discuss this with their SCAR representatives and ESFRI members to raise awareness about PGRFA and the need to have it included in HORIZON 2020 in the related areas, as soon as possible. In particular, initially through this letter, ECPGR should express its interests for the future Research Infrastructure area to conserve and utilize PGRFA. A future EU co-financing of preservation / expansion of collections should be proposed.
- ECPGR National Coordinators should approach their SCAR Representatives to raise awareness for the need to include PGRFA related activities in the HORIZON 2020 research programme so that a dialogue between ECPGR and SCAR is initiated. A discussion should also be initiated between ECPGR National Coordinators and ESFRI members indicating for which areas they should support topics to be included in future project calls of the EU. Timing: once the abovementioned letter is sent, as soon as possible.
- Upon the establishment of a closer and hopefully regular contact with DG Research, the ECPGR external relations representative should explore a proposal to the EU/COM for the establishment of an “ERA-Net for PGRFA” for which ECPGR could play the role of the ERA-Net Coordinator. Timing: sometime in 2013.
- The ECPGR Secretariat and the ExCo Chair should contact the Community Plant variety Office (CPVO), ESA, the EU Technology Platform (ETP) “Plants for the Future”, EUCARPIA and possibly Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) to discuss and explore opportunities to improve mutual understanding of the respective tasks and better cooperation, in view of joint lobbying of the EU/COM with regard to the conservation and utilization of PGRFA. Timing: to kick off this action, the ECPGR Secretariat and the ExCo Chair should seek meeting with CPVO, ESA, ETP and BGCI, early 2013.