

Agricultural biotechnologies in Europe and Central Asia: New challenges and opportunities in a view of recent crises and climate change - Summary report of the ABDC-10 parallel session¹

Although having experienced a similar historical past under the former centralised political system, the countries of the Eastern European and Central Asian (ECA) region are now facing considerable divergence with regard to development and implementation of their national biotechnology and biosafety strategies, policies and, when necessary, regulatory frameworks. These biosafety policies, drafted or officially adopted, existing often only on paper but not implemented, are hardly embedded in a larger context of a sustainable biotechnology strategy. Almost all ECA countries failed in developing or enforcing functional frameworks that allow taking advantage of a wide range of biotechnologies and particularly to bring locally developed biotechnology inventions in the farms and on the market.

The countries from ECA have traditionally good secondary and high education systems, which address different aspects in biotechnology research: in crops, forestry, livestock, fisheries and food. The transition period in their economies however, severely influenced the process of depletion or loss of intellectual and technical personnel, especially in the young generation. The disinclination of the policy-makers to implement adequate strategies prioritizing biotechnology research, or adopting too restrictive, overregulated biosafety legislations caused additional reflux of highly qualified young experts from biotechnology vocation.

During the session a priority list of actions for the Region, the European Union (EU) and international organizations has been developed and discussed. Some actions defined are specific for the Region, the EU or international organizations, others may concern all players.

Region

1. Develop and implement a national strategy for agricultural biotechnology in every country of the Region
2. Establish and make effective use of competent biosafety authorities in every country for independent and science-based environmental risk assessment
3. Improve and strengthen the East-East cooperation by establishing regional centres of excellence, exchange of genetic resources and methodologies
4. Set priorities for R&D in biotechnology, focused on local strengths and needs
5. Develop and implement educational programs on biotechnology, biosafety and intellectual property rights
6. Develop and implement strategies for science – society communication to raise public awareness on agricultural biotechnologies
7. Provide conditions that local biodiversity is fully explored in breeding programs

EU

1. The EU is seen as role model by many countries of the Region, therefore attention should be paid:
 - to base political decisions on verifiable scientific data
 - to implement agricultural biotechnology developments
 - to execute regulatory procedures in a consistent and timely manner
2. Support technology transfer, coupled with capacity building on intellectual property rights

¹ This is the summary report of the parallel session organized by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia on the third day of the FAO international technical conference on Agricultural Biotechnologies in Developing Countries (ABDC-10) that took place in Guadalajara, Mexico on 1-4 March 2010 (<http://www.fao.org/biotech/abdc/parallel/en>). An Issue paper was also prepared for this session - see ABDC-10/ECA at <http://www.fao.org/biotech/abdc/backdocs/en/>

3. Support the establishment of public-private / public-public partnerships in biotechnology research and innovations in agriculture by exploring existing technology platforms like “Plants for the future”
4. Improve the awareness and participation of research institutions and SMEs (small and medium sized enterprises) located in the Region in EU-funded research programs on agricultural biotechnology

International organizations

1. Support networking in the region and internationally
2. Support capacity building in agricultural biotechnology research, extension, application and communication with focus on the needs of farmers of the Region
3. Advocate for the establishment of national strategies for agricultural biotechnologies in every country in the Region