

European Commission on Agriculture (ECA)

36/3 Meeting of the Executive Committee
21 November 2016

Agenda item 4 – Background note
Assessment of the European Commission on Agriculture
Detailed Terms of Reference, Draft

1 Introduction

1. The FAO European Commission on Agriculture (ECA) is one of the FAO statutory bodies for the Europe and Central Asia Region. It comprises all FAO members in the region; its Executive Committee (Ex Com) meets at FAO Headquarters and its Secretariat is hosted by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, located in Budapest. In 2014, FAO Member Nations agreed to modify the timing of the ECA sessions, to enhance its technical guidance role in the FAO Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) and better contribute to FAO's work in the region. Members also requested that an early assessment be conducted, of the results stemming from the change in ECA timing and focus. The first session of the ECA under the new model took place in September 2015.

2. This document proposes the detailed Terms of Reference for such an assessment, which draw on: interviews with the Acting Chair and members of the ECA Ex Com, the chair of the ERG; senior management of REU and SEC; and a preliminary analysis of relevant documents. The document also includes the methodology and time-schedule for the exercise. The draft ToRs are being shared with the key stakeholders for their comments and suggestions, before finalizing.¹

2 Background

3. The FAO European Commission on Agriculture (ECA) was established in 1949 under Article VI of the Constitution of the Organization. Over time, the ECA has taken several turns in terms of mandate, set-up, and name.² Its current purpose is *'To assist Member Governments to undertake joint action and to cooperate in technological agricultural problems, including research, education, extension, review of all nutrition questions, questions relating to agricultural economy not under the purview of the Committee on Commodity Problems, and related activities in or by Member Governments in Europe, as well as to encourage and*

¹ For full disclosure, the document was prepared by a senior consultant recruited by REU with the double task of preparing the ToRs and conducting the assessment itself.

² ECA was known as the European Committee on Agricultural Technology from 1949 to 1952 and as the European Committee on Agriculture until 1956.

*facilitate cooperation between international governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned with agriculture in Europe; and to make recommendations on all matters within its geographical and technical competence.*³

4. The Commission is open to all Members of the FAO Europe and Central Asia Region. As of 2016, its membership has the same composition as the ERC, with 53 Member Countries plus the European Union (EU) as a Member Organization and Faroe Islands as an Associate Member. Both the ERC and the ECA differ from the European Regional Group (ERG), which was created by FAO for balanced representation at Council for voting purposes. The latter is comprised of the Permanent Representatives of 50 Member Nations. The five ERC Member Nations that do not participate in ERG are: Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which are members of the Asian Regional Group; and Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, which are members of the Near East Group.

5. The difference in membership between the ERC and the ERG is that that the ERG, unlike all other FAO regional groups, cannot be the only body involved in making decisions, among others, about the agenda for the ERC, regional priority setting and the Region's position on specific topics.

6. The ECA is steered by an Executive Committee (Ex Com) composed of a Chairperson, a Vice-Chair person and six members elected in their personal capacity by the Commission from among the Permanent Representatives or senior officers from Permanent Representations. The Ex Com is the only body elected by the Membership of the Region, but since 1999, it is no longer a statutory body of the Organization.

7. The Commission also monitors the activities of the European System of Cooperative Research Networks in Agriculture (ESCORENA), and it used to oversee the work of the Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development (WPW), a statutory body that was abolished in 2014.

8. The first session of the ECA was convened in Rome in September 1949. Until 1959, the ECA was held every year, usually in Rome. Between 1961 and 1967, and 1987 and 1999, its sessions took place every two years, alternating with the ERC. Between 1968 and 1984, the ECA and the ERC were held in the same year, but in different locations and most frequently, a few months apart.

9. The 31st session of the ECA in October 1999 and the 22nd FAO Regional Conference for Europe in 2000, after lengthy discussions on the role, mandate and timing of the former, delegated decision-making in this respect to the ERG. By its 32nd Session in March 2002, the ECA's mandate had been revised and was '*geared towards reviewing technical aspects of importance to European agriculture and rural development, and to submit the outcome of discussions and recommendations to the FAO European Regional Conference*'⁴ for policy discussion and adoption. With regards to timing, the ECA convened two months before the ERC in 2002 and 2004, and back-to-back with the Regional Conference from 2006 onward.

10. As of mid-2012, the ECA had three functions:

- i. It acted as a regional technical statutory body which identified and discussed key technical issues related to agriculture and rural development with the objective of making conclusions and recommendations to the ERC on proposed agenda items;

³ FAO Governing and Statutory Bodies Web site, http://www.fao.org/unfao/govbodies/gsb-subject-matter/statutory-bodies-details/en/c/76/?no_cache=1.

⁴ Report of the Thirty-second Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA), Rome, Italy, 7-8 March 2002, at http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Europe/documents/ECA/Eca32_1.pdf.

- ii. It was directly linked to the ERC, and the results of discussions and recommendations stemming from the ECA were submitted to the ERC for policy discussion and adoption;
- iii. The ECA Ex Com, acting as an intersession body, was involved in the preparation of the agenda of the ERC and facilitated the communication with the ERG.⁵

11. In 2013, the ‘Evaluation of FAO’s Regional and Sub-regional Offices for Europe and Central Asia’⁶ recommended, among other things, to “*reinvigorate the technical role of the ECA by focusing on the pressing issues of interest to the Region as a whole. In order to best do this, the sessions of the ECA should be held in alternate years to the ERC.*” This was accepted by FAO Senior Management and Governing Bodies, as well as by the 38th Session of the ECA and the 29th Session of the ERC in Bucharest in 2014, which added the provision that ‘*ECA (should be) held at least six months in advance of the ERC in order to enhance the ECA preparatory activities and technical support in preparation for the ERC.*’

12. The 2014 ECA and ERC could not agree on a permanent location for future ECA sessions and decided that each Session should choose the location for the following one. The 39th Session of the ECA, the first to be held separately from the ERC since 2006, convened in September 2015 in Budapest. The same location was retained for the 40th session to be held in September 2017.

13. The 29th session of the ERC also agreed to review whether the objective of revitalizing the ECA had been achieved after the first separate session in 2015. The 39th session of the ECA in 2015 and the 30th Session of the ERC in May 2016, confirmed this recommendation and expanded the scope of the assessment to include ECA’s contribution to FAO’s work.

14. Finally, the 30th session of the ERC held in Antalya, Turkey in May 2016, agreed to the proposal that the reports from two other FAO Technical Commissions for Europe, namely the European Forestry Commission (EFC) and the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC), become an integral part of the ERC as of 2018. This was approved with the understanding that the three Technical Commissions should, to some extent, coordinate their agendas and discussions, to provide relevant inputs to the ERC.

3 Purpose and scope of the assessment

15. The main purpose of the assessment is to provide an analysis of the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the ECA, with a focus on the initial results of the reform process approved in 2014. Should it be appropriate, the assessment will also formulate suggestions for the way forward, for consideration by ECA and ERC members and the FAO Secretariat, to enhance the quality of the contribution of the ECA to the discussion and decision-making process of the ERC.

16. The assessment will analyse the evolution of the mandate and role of the ECA since 2006, when the pattern of the ECA held back-to-back with ERC first became operational. Within this period, attention will mostly concentrate on ECA’s role and function since 2010, when FAO Regional Conferences became Governing Bodies of the Organization through the reform process linked to the approval of the Immediate Plan of Action. Whenever considered necessary to strengthen any of the planned quantitative analysis, information from previous sessions will also be sought.

⁵ Point iii) was the only one that had not been formalized.

⁶ <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/027/mf581e.pdf>, January 2013.

4 Overarching questions, criteria and issues for the assessment

17. The overarching question for the assessment has been defined as follows: **“To what extent is ECA providing relevant and useful inputs to FAO European Regional Conference on agriculture-related issues in Europe and Central Asia, and what is its added value in this task?”**

18. The assessment of the ECA and its reform process will be conducted based on the following criteria:

- **Relevance:** this will entail analysing to what extent ECA meets a need of FAO Membership in the Europe and Central Asia region, as a platform to discuss agriculture-related issues;
- **Efficiency:** this will entail analysing the extent to which the FAO governance machinery in Europe and Central Asia has been streamlined with the ECA reform, the clarity and simplification of current communication flow and timeliness of decision-making based on meetings’ discussions and reports;
- **Effectiveness:** this will entail analysing the overall usefulness of ECA, especially since its reform, focusing on its role of technical discussion and guidance for ERC and for the whole of FAO Membership in the region.

19. A sub-set of key issues, listed below, emerged from the first round of consultations. More may emerge during the work, and these will be given due consideration in line with the purpose, scope and criteria for the assessment, depending on the resources available.

- i. The function, agenda and format of the ECA within the reformed governance mechanism;
- ii. The link between the ECA and the ERC, and consequences for the timing of the ECA within the FAO governance cycle;
- iii. The role and function of the ECA Executive Committee within the reformed governance mechanism;
- iv. The potential for coordination among the ECA, the EFC and EIFAAC and possible mechanisms to enable a smooth process in this respect;
- v. The link between the Ex Com and the preparation of the Informal Consultations within the reformed governance mechanism;
- vi. The link between the ECA and the FAO Committee on Agriculture (CoAG).

5 Stakeholders, approach and methodology

20. The primary stakeholders for the assessment are:

- Representatives to FAO from Europe and Central Asia Member Nations, who are members of the ECA, the ERC and the ERG;
- FAO Regional and Sub-regional Offices for Europe and Central Asia, in their double capacity as Secretaries of all the Governing Bodies and Statutory Bodies of the Organization and first ports-of-call for the Member Nations in the region, with respect to direct assistance from FAO.

21. Additional stakeholders and key informants include:

- Other participants from Member Nations who attend FAO technical and governance meetings for the region, including Civil Society representatives;

- FAO staff who support the technical and programmatic debate in ECA and ERC with technical inputs;
- The Chairs and Secretaries of the European Forestry Commission (EFC) and of the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC), in consideration of their new reporting line to ERC;
- Chairs and secretaries of other FAO Technical Committees that are relevant to the assessment, such as the Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission (CACFish), the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and CoAG.

22. The assessment will follow a consultative and transparent approach that will include frequent interaction with all key stakeholders listed above. Comments and suggestions on the draft versions of the Terms of Reference and of the Report will also be shared.

23. The assessment will be formative, forward-looking and based on the triangulation of the information, data and evidence gathered on the key issues and against the agreed criteria. These will be used to draw conclusions, identify gaps and/or needs for remedial action and formulate relevant suggestions for the way forward. The assessment will mostly be based on qualitative information, supported by quantitative analysis whenever possible, and collected through a variety of tools including:

- In-depth desk-review of documents and reports, including independent and internal reviews and evaluations, by: FAO Governing Bodies and Member Nations; FAO Senior Management, Secretariat and Office of Evaluation; this will include:
 - Analysis of patterns of attendance of ECA and ERC sessions between 1999 and 2016;
 - Analysis of ECA and ERC agendas, reports, technical documents;
- Comparison of ECA agendas, formats and attendance with those of other technical committees, based on interviews with respective Secretaries and Chairs;
- Semi-structured interviews, face-to-face or by phone/skype, with the Permanent Representations of all available ECA and ERC members, supported by check lists and quantitative scoring exercises;
- Group discussions with Representatives of Member Nations, on the occasion of regional and sub-regional informal groups' coordination meetings, at various points along the assessment process;
- A questionnaire for other ECA participants and observers, if necessary, supported by semi-structured interviews with a selected sample of recipients;
- Observation of selected sessions of the ERG and ECA Executive Committees.

6 Organization and time-table

24. The assessment will be conducted by a senior consultant, recruited by REU, based on separate ToRs. Senior Management in EU and SEC, ECA and ERC Secretaries, and REU and SEC staff, will support the assessment with information, documents and time for interviews and discussions, throughout the process. This will also include facilitating access to key stakeholders and informants in those Member Nations that do not have Permanent Representations in Rome.

25. The Permanent Representations of ECA members will support the process, by making time available for interviews with the senior consultant, and by facilitating access to relevant documents as well as to other stakeholders and key informants in their respective countries.

26. Box 1 below proposes a timetable for the assignment. Adjustments may be necessary, according to the availability of key stakeholders for interviews.

Box 1. Indicative Timetable for the Assessment

Activity	Responsibility	Period/deadline
<i>Preparatory phase interviews</i>	Consultant	17-24 October 2016
<i>Draft Terms of Reference for the Assessment</i>	Consultant	31 October 2016
<i>REU comments</i>	REU	7 November 2016
<i>Circulation draft ToR to Ex Com</i>	ECA Secretary	9 November 2016
<i>Discussion of draft ToRs at ExCom meeting</i>	Ex Com, REU, consultant	21 November 2016
<i>Final version ToRs circulated</i>	Consultant, ECA secretariat	24 November 2016
<i>Desk-review of documents, interviews</i>	Consultant	December 2016-January 2017
<i>Questionnaire (if any)</i>	Consultant	January 2017
<i>Circulation of draft report to REU</i>	Consultant	10 February 2017
<i>Comments to consultant</i>	REU	6 March 2017
<i>Integration of comments and circulation of revised draft to Executive Committee</i>	Consultant	13 March 2017
<i>Comments to consultant</i>	Executive Committee	27 March 2017
<i>Integration of comments and circulation of revised draft to ERG</i>	Consultant	3 April 2017
<i>Comments to consultant</i>	ERG members	24 April 2017
<i>Integration of comments</i>	Consultant	5 May 2017
<i>Circulation of final report to all stakeholders</i>	ECA Secretary	9 May 2017
<i>Presentation of final report to ECA</i>	tbd	September 2017

7 Tentative outline for the report

27. The outline below is fairly accurate in terms of contents of the report, but still rather tentative regarding section titles and structure.

- I. Introduction
- II. Purpose, scope and methodology
- III. Brief history of ECA
- IV. Analysis of the role and profile of ECA and its Executive Committee over the period 2002-2016: contents of the agenda, attendance, calendar, links to ERC, etc.
- V. Stakeholders' views on the key issues: synthesis of the views of FAO Member Nations in Europe and Central Asia, including both Permanent Representations and other participants and observers; and of FAO Secretariat.
- VI. The way forward: conclusions and suggestions for the future of ECA.

28. Annexes will include at least: Terms of Reference for the assessment, tables synthesising data on attendance of ECA sessions and analysis of the agendas and people interviewed.