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**2015**  
International  
Year of Soils



**GLOBAL SOIL  
PARTNERSHIP**

**Report of the Second working session of  
the European Soil Partnership (ESP)  
17-18 March 2015,  
FAO HQ, Rome, Italy**

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## **1. Agenda Item 1: Opening of the meeting**

Mr. Moujahed Achouri (Director of the NRL division, FAO) welcomed the participants to the meeting, the range of which underlined the commitment of the partners to the GSP. He stressed that the GSP was a platform that should be used to support sustainable soil management and trigger soil conservation actions at different levels. Mr. Achouri also mentioned the financial support given by some partners, including from the EU and Switzerland. Facilitation had been provided by the Secretariat to the establishment of 7 regional soil partnerships, the network of which now needed to be consolidated, while the ESP should be a good example to follow by other regional soil partnerships". Jes Weigelt (IASS) explained the role of IASS in the GSP and ESP and underlined the fact that his organization would be hosting the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Soil Week. He invited the participants to introduce themselves and their government/organization, specifying as appropriate whether they were focal points for their countries. Mr. Weigelt stressed the purpose of the meeting which was to finalize the set up phase of the ESP and move toward a fully operative phase.

## **2. Agenda Item 2: Adoption of the agenda and timetable and nomination of a rapporteur**

The agenda was approved and Lucrezia Caon was appointed rapporteur of the meeting

## **3. Agenda Item 3: Status of implementation of the GSP and its regional soil partnerships (including brief overview of the European Soil Partnership)**

Mr. Vargas (**GSP Secretariat, FAO**) briefly illustrated the role, objectives (e.g. the 5 pillars of action) and structure of the GSP. Additionally, he mentioned some of the activities organized (e.g. workshops, international consultations, etc.) so far.

Currently, the GSP relied on 400 registered partners, but there were also many volunteers providing inputs of various kinds. Additionally, many countries had nominated focal points. As regards regional soil partnerships and the ESP, he stressed that every region was different from the others, so that specificities should be taken into account, while generic guidelines were available for the establishment and consolidation of RSPs. In response to questions, he clarified in particular that FAO members are by the facto GSP partners and their focal points to the GSP are automatically ESP members as well. He has explained the genesis of the European Soil Partnership and thanked the committed institutions who had the willingness to establish it. Indeed, so far these institutions had been playing an ad-hoc role of steering committee and Secretariat. However, he explained that the aim of this workshop I to consolidate the ESP by appointing a steering committee and Secretariat that could facilitate the implementation of regional activities.

He stated that every region has specific requirements and frame conditions, leading to different priorities for implementation, thus different implementation plans. It is expected that every region will develop their Regional Implementation Plans including all GSP pillars. Only for Pillar 4 (Global Soil Information System) and Pillar 5 (harmonization), the GSP secretariat will provide a global level plan because of the global nature of many of the products and activities pursued there.

#### **4. Agenda Item 4: Sub-regional Eurasian Soil Partnership (EASP): status, activities and future perspectives**

Mr. Krasilnikov (Eurasian Center for Food Security) explained the rationale for the establishment of the sub-regional Eurasian Soil Partnership, in particular as it constituted a big area sharing the same specific soil issues. Key soil issues in the EASP included: salinization, land abandonment and erosion. Otherwise, the rest of the ESP is more affected by soil sealing, contamination and intensive agriculture.

Mr. Krasilnikov recalled that sub-regional rules of procedure had been developed based on the guidelines endorsed by the GSP Plenary Assembly and that an EASP website and web forum had been set up. Further actions were taken to raise attention on the IYS, e.g. soil “parades”, posters, booklets, badges, conferences, competitions, and youth seminars. Questions were raised about the economics of soil degradation report from this sub-region and the regional implementation plan, while the first version of the EASP report was already available on the EASP website. On the regional implementation plan, Mr. Krasilnikov informed that this is an ongoing process and they expect to have a final version by the upcoming GSP Plenary Assembly.

#### **5. Agenda Item 5: Consolidation of the ESP**

Mr. Jes Weigelt invited the participants to go through the “Guidelines for the establishment and consolidation of regional soil partnerships” which were endorsed by the second GSP Plenary Assembly. He then guided the participants through the “Berlin communiqué” which established the ESP during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Global Soil Week 2013. It was suggested to organize a regular ESP plenary workshop and to establish a steering committee and a Secretariat composed of individuals belonging to strongly committed institutions, for a specific period of time. Some participants pointed out how the GSP secretariat could be more effective in communication and promotion of activities to inform partners, involve new institutions and raise funds.

Focal points informed that they were not prepared for making a decision on being part or not of the steering committee and the Secretariat respectively. They also referred about the duration of the term of the steering committee. Therefore, it was suggested –with the agreement of the current members- to extend the current mandate of the steering committee and Secretariat till the next workshop (8-9 March 2016). **Agenda Item 6: Plenary discussion about the current soil challenges in the region**

Mr. Montanarella (European Commission) illustrated the major soil threats in Europe, and expected that the urgent challenges will be considered when developing the regional implementation plan. This was followed by a presentation by Mrs. Jaroslava Sobocká on pillar 1 at the European level. She underlined that the ESP feeds into global initiatives (e.g. Millennium development), however, in particular, feeds off European policies and projects (e.g. common agricultural policy). The regional implementation plan needs to identify the main areas for action towards sustainable soil management, including the better coordination of existing activities. She feels the necessity to more strongly highlight the role of soils in the agricultural sector. The presentation had then led to a debate about the political and economic framework related to soil degradation: soil degradation and socio-economic frame conditions such as land rights are important factors in decisions and actions. It

emerged that little is known about soil contamination and that soil sealing is currently not perceived as being the most dangerous threat to soils.

## **6. Agenda Item 7: Towards a regional implementation plan, including activities related to the International Year of Soils 2015**

While presenting pillar 2 in the context of the ESP, Mr. Arwyn Jones underlined how awareness drove politics and policies. In Europe there were already solid activities on soil awareness raisings, but on many different scales. However, to enlarge the scale and visibility of these efforts and utilize advanced and innovative communication technologies, significant and sustained investment is needed. Mr. Jones emphasized that Pillar 2 is not intended to replace existing initiatives by a single large European activity, but to strength them. Mr. Jones concluded his intervention by recalling that the implementation plan for pillar 2 was still under development.

Presentations were made by Allan Lilly on pillar 4 and Rainer Baritz on pillar 5 in the context of the ESP. Mr. Lilly pointed out that a global-level implementation plan has not yet been finalized. He elaborated on experience collected by the European Soil Bureau Network (ESBN). With respect to pillar 4, questions were raised on the continuity of datasets, monitoring data, the use of data for research and copyright issues. It was underlined how difficult it could be to enter monitoring data in a centralized system and keep them updated. It was also pointed out that, despite the availability of large pools of data, research was often done using limited data of insufficient quality.

With respect to pillar 5, Mr. Baritz presented the scope of harmonization at global and at regional level. He informed that the global implementation plan, that will be developed by the GSP secretariat, will provide generic guidance for developing regional implementation plans. Some global-level harmonization products will also be included, such as a revised handbook on soil profile description, a global soil data exchange standard, and an incentive to support ongoing activities towards a universal soil classification. In the following discussion, questions and comments were raised about the general need for, and benefit of harmonization and data quality. Participants put under discussion the need for harmonization at local level. It was stressed that harmonization is important at all levels, where information of cross-border importance is exchanged and evaluated, e.g. common criteria and indicators to identify erosion-prone areas. The need for harmonized soil monitoring data was stressed again in order to satisfy the information requirements coming from various European (and national) policies.

## **7. Agenda Item 2: Links with other European networks and initiatives**

### **a) European soil bureau network (ESBN) b) European network of soil awareness (ENSA)**

Both presenters (Mr. Lilly and Mr. Jones) provided a short introduction about the history and potential of the respective networks. While answering questions, Mr. Lilly (ESBN) invited partners to promote soil information exchange as the initial activity at regional level. The level and approach to implementation of both pillars in Europe is crucial because countries very often do not participate in harmonization activities – an important factor explaining the limited availability of soil information.

In this context, Mrs. Keesstra Chair of the Division of Soil Systems Science within the European Geophysical Society (EG) proposed to promote the GSP work at the European Geoscience Union 2015.

## **8. Agenda Item 3: Way forward of the European Soil Partnership**

- a) The economics of ecosystem services provided by soil (linked to MAES Soil)**
- b) Soils in the post-2015 development agenda (SDGs related to soil and land)**
- c) Status report of European soil resources as part of the Status of World Soil Resources Report**

Mr. Montanarella provided an update on the decisions taken during the last ESP meeting at the JRC in Ispra. He gave attention to the ecosystem services provided by soils (under a qualitative and quantitative point of view) and the links of the ESP to other European initiatives such as the MAES project (Mapping of Ecosystem Services in Europe). Additionally, he stated that the Commission was working on the Economics of Land Degradation (ELD). In order to achieve sustainable land management, soils should be linked to other initiatives dealing with e.g. biodiversity. Hence, the importance of looking at soils in a cross-cutting way. In terms of current formulation of the Status of World Soil Resources Report, it was noted that the European Assessment Report section was almost finished.

## **9. Agenda Item 4: Date and venue of the next meeting**

It was agreed that the next ESP Workshop will take place on 8-9 March. The venue will be announced later as it could be FAO HQ in Rome, Italy or at the FAO Regional Office for Europe in Budapest, Hungary.

## Annex 1: List of participants

Name	Organization	Countries	Email
Martine Swerts	Environment, Nature and Energy department Land and Soil Protection, Subsoil, Natural Resources Division	Belgium	<a href="mailto:martine.swerts@lne.vlaanderen.be">martine.swerts@lne.vlaanderen.be</a>
MASSON Josiane	European Commission	Belgium	<a href="mailto:josiane.masson@ec.europa.eu">josiane.masson@ec.europa.eu</a>
Spyridon Ellinas	Permanent representative of the Republic of Cyprus	Cyprus	<a href="mailto:sorellinas@hotmail.com">sorellinas@hotmail.com</a>
Josef Kozak	Czech Soil Science Society	Czech Republic	<a href="mailto:kozak@af.czu.cz">kozak@af.czu.cz</a>
Geertrui Louwagie	European Environment Agency	Denmark	<a href="mailto:geertrui.louwagie@eea.europa.eu">geertrui.louwagie@eea.europa.eu</a>
Maryline DARMAUN	Permanent Representation of France to FAO	France	<a href="mailto:maryline.darmaun@diplomatie.gouv.fr">maryline.darmaun@diplomatie.gouv.fr</a>
Tranchant Simon	French Minister of Agriculture	France	<a href="mailto:simon.tranchant@agriculture.gouv.fr">simon.tranchant@agriculture.gouv.fr</a>
Jes Weigelt	IASS Potsdam	Germany	<a href="mailto:jes.weigelt@iass-potsdam.de">jes.weigelt@iass-potsdam.de</a>
Joachim BOLLMANN	Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture	Germany	<a href="mailto:523@bmel.bund.de">523@bmel.bund.de</a>
Sebastian Unger	IASS	Germany	<a href="mailto:sebastian.unger@iass-potsdam.de">sebastian.unger@iass-potsdam.de</a>
Rainer Baritz	Eurogeosurveys (EGS), BGR	Germany	<a href="mailto:rainer.baritz@bgr.de">rainer.baritz@bgr.de</a>
ELENI KALOPESSA	Interbalkan Environment Center	Greece	<a href="mailto:ellikalopesa@gmail.com">ellikalopesa@gmail.com</a>
Georgios Galanis	Interbalkan Environment Center	Greece	<a href="mailto:gegalani@hotmail.com">gegalani@hotmail.com</a>
Theocharopoulos Sideris	HAO-DEMETER	Greece	<a href="mailto:sid_theo@otenet.gr">sid_theo@otenet.gr</a>
Anetta SZILÁGYI	FAO, Regional Office For Europe and Central Asia	Hungary	<a href="mailto:anetta.szilagyi@fao.org">anetta.szilagyi@fao.org</a>
Judit Berényi Üveges	National Food Chain Safety Office	Hungary	<a href="mailto:berenyiuj@nebih.gov.hu">berenyiuj@nebih.gov.hu</a>
Zoltan Kalman	Permanent Representative of Hungary to FAO	Hungary	<a href="mailto:zoltan.kalman@mfa.gov.hu">zoltan.kalman@mfa.gov.hu</a>
Thorunn Petursdottir	Soil Conservation Service	Iceland	<a href="mailto:thorunnp@land.is">thorunnp@land.is</a>
Jonassen Jon	Permanent Representative of Iceland to FAO	Iceland	<a href="mailto:jej@mfa.is">jej@mfa.is</a>
Anna Luise	ISPRA	Italy	<a href="mailto:anna.luise@isprambiente.it">anna.luise@isprambiente.it</a>
Arwyn Jones	European Commission	Italy	<a href="mailto:arwyn.jones@jrc.ec.europa.eu">arwyn.jones@jrc.ec.europa.eu</a>
Ciro Gardi	Global Soil Biodiversity Initiative	Italy	<a href="mailto:ciro.gardi@gmail.com">ciro.gardi@gmail.com</a>
Damiano Di Simine	Legambiente	Italy	<a href="mailto:presidente@legambientelombardia.it">presidente@legambientelombardia.it</a>
Luca Montanarella	European Commission	Italy	<a href="mailto:luca.montanarella@jrc.ec.europa.eu">luca.montanarella@jrc.ec.europa.eu</a>
Michele Munafo	ISPRA	Italy	<a href="mailto:michele.munafo@isprambiente.it">michele.munafo@isprambiente.it</a>
Tiziano Cattaneo	Legambiente	Italy	<a href="mailto:tiziano.cattaneo@legambientelombardia.it">tiziano.cattaneo@legambientelombardia.it</a>
Anna Benedetti	CRA-RPS	Italy	<a href="mailto:anna.benedetti@entecra.it">anna.benedetti@entecra.it</a>
Raimonds Kasparinskis	Soil Science Society of Latvia, University of Latvia	Latvia	<a href="mailto:raimonds.kasparinskis@lu.lv">raimonds.kasparinskis@lu.lv</a>
Rahela Pupovic	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	Montenegro	<a href="mailto:rahela.pupovic@mpr.gov.me">rahela.pupovic@mpr.gov.me</a>
Pedro Miguel Costa da Silva Teixeira	Agriculture and Rural Development of the Ministry of Agriculture and Sea	Portugal	<a href="mailto:pteixeira@dgadr.pt">pteixeira@dgadr.pt</a>
Pavel Krasilnikov	Eurasian Center for Food Security	Russia	<a href="mailto:krasilnikov@ecfs.msu.ru">krasilnikov@ecfs.msu.ru</a>
Allan Lilly	James Hutton Institute	Scotland	<a href="mailto:allan.lilly@hutton.ac.uk">allan.lilly@hutton.ac.uk</a>

Jaroslava Sobocka	NAFC-UUPOP	Slovakia	<a href="mailto:j.sobocka@uupop.sk">j.sobocka@uupop.sk</a>
Marieta Okenkova	Permanent representative of Slovakia to FAO	Slovakia	<a href="mailto:marieta.okenkova@mzv.sk">marieta.okenkova@mzv.sk</a>
Luis Martin Fernandez	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment	Spain	<a href="mailto:lmfernandez@magrama.es">lmfernandez@magrama.es</a>
Erik Karlton	Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences	Sweden	<a href="mailto:erik.karlton@slu.se">erik.karlton@slu.se</a>
Elena Havlicek	Federal Office for the Environment - FOEN	Switzerland	<a href="mailto:elena.havlicek@bafu.admin.ch">elena.havlicek@bafu.admin.ch</a>
Rainer Nerger	Soil & More International	The Netherlands	<a href="mailto:rainer.nerger@soilandmore.com">rainer.nerger@soilandmore.com</a>
Saskia Keesstra	Wageningen University	The Netherlands	<a href="mailto:saskia.keesstra@wur.nl">saskia.keesstra@wur.nl</a>
Hans Brand	Minister of Economic Affairs, The Netherlands	The Netherlands	<a href="mailto:j.m.brand@minez.nl">j.m.brand@minez.nl</a>
Christian Duijst	Dutch Permanent Representation	The Netherlands	<a href="mailto:Chris.duijst@minbuza.nl">Chris.duijst@minbuza.nl</a>
Arkadiy Levin	Institute for Soil Science and Agrochemistry Research	Ukraine	<a href="mailto:alevin@ukr.net">alevin@ukr.net</a>
Professor Mark Kibblewhite	MK Soil Science Ltd	United Kingdom	<a href="mailto:mark@mksoilscience.eu">mark@mksoilscience.eu</a>
Feras Ziadat	FAO		<a href="mailto:Feras.Ziadat@fao.org">Feras.Ziadat@fao.org</a>
Lucrezia Caon	FAO		<a href="mailto:Lucrezia.Caon@fao.org">Lucrezia.Caon@fao.org</a>
Moujahed Achouri	FAO		<a href="mailto:Moujahed.Achouri@fao.org">Moujahed.Achouri@fao.org</a>
Ronald Vargas	FAO		<a href="mailto:Ronald.Vargas@fao.org">Ronald.Vargas@fao.org</a>