

## **Terms of Reference of the European Soil Partnership (ESP)**

### **1. Background**

1. The GSP (Global Soil Partnership) is an action-oriented initiative launched in 2013 by FAO<sup>1</sup>. It is open to all FAO members (132 of which had appointed focal points by the end of 2015) and other interested non-state partners (203 institutions registered by end-2015). Its primary scope is to promote sustainable soil management and support national efforts to reverse soil degradation. The GSP also involves a network of interested partners through 9 regional soil partnerships (RSPs). One of these is the European Soil Partnership (ESP).

2. As specified in its Terms of Reference, the GSP activities revolve around five “Pillars”. For each of these five Pillars, the GSP Plenary Assembly has endorsed Plans of Action (PoAs) which are under active implementation. Global-level implementation plans cover overarching topics and data products of global dimension, while the regional soil partnerships develop and execute their own implementation plans, taking account of regional-level priorities and conditions. The Pillars are recalled as follows:

Pillar 1: Promote sustainable management of soil resources for soil protection, conservation and sustainable productivity.

Pillar 2: Encourage investment, technical cooperation, policy, education awareness and extension in soil.

Pillar 3: Promote targeted soil research and development focusing on identified gaps and priorities and synergies with related productive, environmental and social development actions.

Pillar 4: Enhance the quantity and quality of soil data and information: data collection, analysis, validation, reporting, monitoring and integration with other disciplines.

Pillar 5: Harmonize methods, measurements and indicators for the sustainable management and protection of soil resources.

3. In general, the factors shaping soil conditions today and in the future, are region-specific and cannot be addressed solely at global level. Details about Europe-specific soil issues can be found in the Status of the World’s Soil Resources report.

4. One of the core tasks of the regional soil partnerships is to facilitate cooperation and knowledge sharing within the respective region, consolidating regional information about the status of soils, their proper management, and the extent of associated threats to good soil health. Exchange of similarly structured and harmonized soil information shall be enabled globally in the context of some assessments and processes (e.g. Status of the World’s Soil Resources, SDG targets, UNFCCC-COP21).

5. The European Soil Partnership (ESP) should also play a significant role globally. The ecological footprint of Europe is not limited to the land available for food production and other ecosystem services. Incentives, policies and research in place or conducted in Europe may affect other regions in the world. For monitoring and improving soil quality in Europe, national actions are ongoing, and the sharing of experiences and knowledge about soils would

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<sup>1</sup> During its Twenty-third Session which took place from 21 to 25 May 2012, the FAO Committee on Agriculture (COAG) supported the establishment of the Global Soil Partnership. It was subsequently formally endorsed by the FAO Council in December 2012.

greatly contribute to developing future actions at European level in a cooperative design.

## **2. Genesis of the ESP**

6. The Terms of Reference of the European Soil Partnership (ESP) are based on, and consistent with the overall Terms of Reference of the GSP and its Guidelines for the establishment and consolidation of Regional Soil Partnerships (RSP)<sup>2</sup>.

7. On 31 October 2013, the ESP was launched during the second Global Soil Week (Berlin communiqué). The ESP-Secretariat was temporarily hosted by the European Commission – Joint Research Centre, while an ad-hoc steering committee was set up. The Sub-regional Eurasian Soil Partnership was established under the framework of the European Soil Partnership. The first Plenary Meeting of the ESP was organized by the European Commission at its Joint Research Center in Ispra, Italy on 21-23 May 2014. This meeting allowed for a first review of needs and ideas for future activities. The second Plenary Meeting was held on 17-18 March 2015 at FAO HQ, Rome, Italy. It allowed for an in-depth discussion on how the ESP should be organized, and about its main priorities for action. A full and detailed report is available at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-az890e.pdf>

## **3. Basic features**

8. The European Soil Partnership (ESP) is of a voluntary nature and does not create any legally binding rights or obligations for its partners or for any other entity under domestic or international law.

9. The ESP recalls Principle 2 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development which provides that States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental and developmental policies, and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environments of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.

10. Until now and in relation to the GSP Pillars, various networks exist in Europe, addressing soil-related topics and these might become involved in the development of the ESP, e.g. European Network on Soil Awareness (ENSA), European Geosciences Union (EGU) Division on Soil System Sciences (SSS), European Confederation of Soil Science Societies (ECSSS, with the EUROSIL International Congresses), other European research networks (e.g. FACCE JPI), national soil science societies, the EIONET National Reference Centres on Soil, the European Soil Data Centre (ESDAC) (operated by JRC), the European Soil Bureau Network (ESBN), etc.

## **4. Mandate**

11. The mandate of the ESP is to improve governance of the limited soil resources of the region in order to guarantee healthy and productive soils for a food secure world, as well as support other essential ecosystem services, in accordance with the sovereign right of each State over its natural resources. The ESP should become an interactive and responsive partnership.

12. Being a voluntary endeavor, the ESP should respect existing national or EU competences in particular concerning policy issues or soil-related legislations.

13. The ESP will also develop awareness and contribute to the development of capacities, build on best available science, and facilitate/contribute to the exchange of

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fao.org/globalsoilpartnership/regional-partnerships/en/>

knowledge and technologies among stakeholders for the sustainable management and use of soil resources.

14. The regional implementation plan provides the concrete framework for the ESP activities.

## **5. Objectives**

15. Through enhanced and applied knowledge and information about the soil resources in Europe, the ESP will:

a) support the implementation of the 5 GSP Pillars in Europe, in particular:

Pillar 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– address critical issues related to soil ecosystem services including food production</li> <li>– support the implementation of the voluntary guidelines for sustainable soil management in relation to the different soils considering their potentials and limitations, while taking into account national specificities and partners' development objectives</li> </ul>
Pillar 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– create and promote awareness on sustainable soil management as a precondition for human well-being</li> <li>– promote investment and technical cooperation (including technology transfer) in all related soil matters, so as to help addressing fundamental issues in different regions</li> <li>– promote adequate public and government-level awareness of the importance of soils, through celebrations of the World Soil Day and other soil awareness communication activities</li> </ul>
Pillar 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– support the acquisition of relevant soil knowledge and the implementation of targeted research in accordance with national conditions and needs to address challenges on the ground</li> <li>– promote links between existing multilateral initiatives and bodies to advance knowledge and scientific understanding of soil issues, capture synergies, while taking into account ongoing activities and efforts that are being undertaken at the multilateral level, and without duplicating or prejudging the work under the competent fora</li> </ul>
Pillar 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– promote access to soil information and advocate the need for new soil surveys and data collection</li> <li>– promote strengthening and capacity development of soil institutions at local, national, regional and interregional levels</li> </ul>
Pillar 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– support the standards-based provision of harmonized soil information, indicators and methodologies across Europe, in line with global level actions</li> </ul>

The attendant priorities will be established taking fully account of, and exploiting synergies with existing activities and initiatives at global, regional and sub-regional, and national levels.

b) support ESP region-specific aspects related to the work of the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS);

c) support other activities of the GSP through transparent communication, summary of outcomes, and reporting about ESP actions to the GSP Plenary Assembly.

## **6. Governance arrangements and ESP operations**

16. Governance and operational arrangements of the European Soil Partnership are composed of the following elements:

### ***6.1 Partners and plenary meeting***

17. Attainment of the ESP objectives will be facilitated by GSP partners in the region. Partners commit to engage actively in promoting participation and ensuring effective empowerment of the ESP; any interested party can join this partnership upon registration as GSP member.

18. The plenary meeting is the main forum of the ESP partners and will be held once per year. Urgent issues will be communicated via e-consultation. Participation through video links should be enabled where possible.

19. Roles:

The ESP Plenary:

- appoints the Chair, Vice-Chair(s) and Secretariat of the ESP. The terms of the Chair, Vice-chair(s) and Secretariat are for 2 years, renewable for one more term;
- allocates the agreed tasks and provides feedback to the steering committee, chair, co-chair(s), secretariat, and working groups;
- constitutes the decision making platform to guide execution of the implementation plan and to identify emerging issues;
- provides guidance on the mobilization of resources to support the ESP implementation.

### ***6.2 Steering Committee***

20. The Steering Committee consists of:

- the ESP chair,
- one or two ESP vice-chair(s) depending on available candidates,
- representative of the ESP-secretariat,
- representative of the GSP-secretariat,
- chairs of the ESP Pillar working groups,
- representative of the Eurasian Subregional Partnership (EASP),
- representative of ITPS (European members).

21. In order to ensure close linkage with the overall GSP activities, the GSP secretariat will be participating in the ESP Steering Committee. The roles of the Chairs of the Pillar working groups are specified in section 6.5 below. The role of the ITPS member is defined in the GSP ToR; while the European ITPS members are to select the representative to this Steering Committee on their own terms. Through this ITPS participation, scientific advice will be provided to the ESP implementation process.

22. The meetings of the Steering Committee are organized at least annually depending on needs related to the implementation process. The Steering Committee is led by the Chair of the ESP assisted by the Vice-Chair(s) and facilitated by the ESP Secretariat.

23. Roles:

- guides the implementation process by reviewing progress in the execution of the ESP implementation plan;
- prepares the report to the GSP Plenary Assembly;
- prepares the ESP plenary meetings.

### **6.3 Chair of ESP**

24. The Chair has the following roles:
- chairs the ESP Plenary meeting;
  - chairs the sessions of the Steering Committee;
  - represents the ESP upon request by partners or the GSP- or ESP-Secretariat;
  - interacts closely with the ESP and GSP secretariats;
  - reports to the GSP Plenary Assembly.

### **6.4 Secretariat of ESP**

25. The Secretariat of the ESP is appointed by the ESP Plenary. It should be hosted by a national or international institution from Europe that is willing to provide in-kind support for the activities of the Secretariat.

26. Roles:
- facilitates the execution of the ESP implementation plan;
  - facilitates communication among ESP partners;
  - supports the Steering Committee on activities related to the ESP implementation;
  - develops and maintains the ESP web site.

### **6.5 Working groups**

27. For each GSP Pillar, an open-ended working group will be established consisting of willing partners. Members of working groups should have particular experience and interest in the objectives and activities set under the respective pillar. Participation will build on progress in implementation through effective contributions. As participation may involve travel, it is advisable to coordinate this participation closely with the respective focal points of the partners.

28. Each Pillar working group will select its chair for a duration of two years, to be re-appointed based on working groups' decision. The chairs also participate in global-level implementation activities, as requested by the GSP Secretariat.

29. Roles:
- provides input to the ESP implementation plan;
  - through the Chair of the respective working group, reports to the Steering Committee and ESP Plenary about progress, limitations and needs for successful implementation;
  - contributes to the development of regional implementation plans and any other document;
  - contributes eventually to global initiatives related to the GSP pillars of action.

## **7. Financial Implications**

30. Financial implications of the work of the ESP rely on the principle of “partnership”. Each ESP partner is encouraged to contribute with different resources for the successful execution of the Regional Implementation Plan. The existing Healthy Soils Facility<sup>3</sup> (established by the GSP secretariat) shall be used as a mechanism via which the mobilized resources can be channeled through.

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<sup>3</sup> The Healthy Soils Facility is a dedicated financial facility (Umbrella Programme) following FAO's rules and regulations, requested to be established by the GSP Plenary Assembly in 2013, with the aim to streamline the various grants and contributions received by FAO for the GSP.