



Food and Agriculture
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United Nations



Report of the Ninth Plenary Meeting of the European Soil Partnership

Online meeting, 5 May 2022

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Introduction

The ninth meeting of the European Soil Partnership (ESP) took place on 5 May 2022 (see agenda in Annex I). Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was held virtually on the online platform Webex. Forty-six participants attended the session I of the meeting, including 15 country focal points, representatives of the European Commission, and representatives from the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) Secretariat, while 36 participants attended the session II (see Annex II).

The meeting was chaired by the ESP Chair, Mr Rainer Baritz (European Environment Agency), with the support of the ESP Secretariat, Ms Nicole Wellbrock (Federal Research Institute for Rural Areas, Forestry and Fisheries).

Session I: 10:00 – 13:00

1 Opening (Welcome, agenda, tour de table)

Statement of the Chair “Support and solidarity to the Eurasian ESP members especially to the Ukraine”.

The agenda was adopted.

2 Overall status and challenges

The ESP Chair recalled the mission and objectives of the ESP, which is to facilitate and contribute to the exchange of knowledge and technologies about soils, its sustainable management and monitoring with a view to improve soil functioning for food security, ecosystem services, and for mitigating climate change and other hazards. The ESP offers a common umbrella to discuss and exchange soil-related issues across the whole continent, institutions, expert networks and the civil society including practitioners. Currently, the ESP is still in an early growth stage towards these needs, while soil issues are largely dealt with in specific niches, however, hardly exchanged and mainstreamed.

Important recent activities by the chair were to participate in the GSP’s Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG), and to support the creation of the Western Balkan Subregional Partnership. [many thanks also to other OEWG participants from the ESP: 5 European country focal points, and the chairs of INSII and NETSOB].

The sub-regional partnerships are a key element of the ESP to address region-specific challenges, and to reach out effectively to stakeholders. Currently, particularly, the Eurasian Region will need special attention, since likely, a new secretariat will need to be found, and specific needs of the Ukraine to be addressed (e.g. decontamination of soils). This can be achieved by bilateral outreach of engaged ESP partners. The ESP secretariat can be contacted in case any soil-related contacts are needed.

3 Information from the Sub-Regional Soil Partnerships

3.1 Alpine Sub-regional Soil Partnership

The representative of the Alpine Subregional Soil Partnership (AlpSP), Mr Borut Vrscaj (Agricultural Institute of Slovenia), informed the ESP that a regional soil congress is planned for 2022: Alpine SOILutions 2022, and a new project will hopefully be funded: Act4Soils (Interreg Alpine Space call, February 2022). This project is expected to reinforce soil awareness raising activities, support the annual AlpSP meetings and local activities, as well as promote cooperation (Alpine Convention WG soil, ELSA, EUSALP AG6). The ASRP is supported by Swiss, Austria, Germany and Slovenia.

3.2 Pyrenean Sub-regional Soil Partnership

Ms Rosa Poch (University of Lleida, Spain), Chair of the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) and representative of the Pyrenean Subregional Soil Partnership (PyrSP) informed that the PyrSP is currently developing its working focus and looking for funding opportunities within the EU funding mechanisms for research.

3.3 Eurasian Sub-regional Soil Partnership

Mr Hakki Erdogan (Turkey) spoke on behalf of the chair of the Eurasian Subregional Soil Partnership (EASP), Ms Gulchekhra Khasankhanova (Uzbekistan), and mentioned that 2021 was a less active year; the highlight being the publication of a book on Sustainable Soil Management in Eurasia. It is planned to hold a meeting of the sub-region later this year in order to ensure continuity of the partnership.

3.4 Western Balkan Sub-regional Soil Partnership

Mr Dushko Mukaetov (University of Skopja, North Macedonia) explain to the ESP that Western Balkan countries are preparing the formalization of the Western Balkan Subregional Soil Partnership. Under the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, the creation of a sub-regional soil partnership is foreseen. Mediated by the project “Agriculture Policy Dialog Germany – Western Balkan”, a regional expert advisory working group on soil management has been established, with background papers prepared, and a roadmap in discussion.

After the presentations, ESP members supported that every sub-regional soil partnership shall define its own priorities and operate under its own governance. Participants stressed the need to establish information flows and coordination among the sub-regional partnerships, national partnerships and the ESP. Currently, this is difficult because the ESP secretariat relies solely on in-kind support from Germany, while additional support is needed to extend its portfolio. However, sub-regional partnerships are essential building blocks of the ESP, with more sub-regional initiatives hopefully to come.

4 Global activities of the GSP with participation from ESP members

The GSP secretariat, represented by Mr Yusuf Yigini (FAO, Italy), provided an overview of last year's activities and relevant publications. His presentation focused mainly on the activities related to mapping and soil information. Currently, the GSP secretariat works on 6 data products, of which 4 are based on national data sets; gaps are usually filled for global data sets, in the case of Europe with modelling using LUCAS Soil point data. Any product can be continuously updated by new or revised national data sets.

- Global map of salt-affected soils: well covered in the EASP region, only 9 ESP countries have provided data.
- Global black soil distribution map: 5 ESP countries have contributed
- Global soil organic carbon map: 17 national submissions, 7 countries prefer to have their territory not gap-filled.

The participation in the GSP global maps with own national data products is **low**. It was referred to the activities in the International Network of Soil Information Institutions (INSII) network and ESP Pillar 4 (see below).

5 ITPS ongoing activities with needed input from ESP members

The ITPS chair, Ms Rosa Poch (University of Lleida, Spain) reported about the procedure foreseen to develop the European Chapter of the 2nd edition of the Status of the World's Soil Resources Report to be published in 2025 (SWSR2025). Several committees and boards are foreseen to be founded for all regional chapters.

The new ITPS has been selected and awaits confirmation during the upcoming GSP Plenary Assembly. From the European region, Ms Taina Pennanen, Ms Claire Chenu, Ms Adele Muscolo, Ms Rosa Poch, and Mr Pete Smith have been proposed.

During the discussion, participants raised the point that, in principle, any new board for the European chapter of the SWSR2025 seems not needed because various assessments and networks already operating at European level, whose input can be easily coordinated by the ESP Steering Committee. All new ITPS members are very much welcomed and will be supported by the ESP.

6 Initiatives related to Pillars/action areas

6.1 Pillar 1: Current activities towards defining sustainable soil management in Europe

Ms Elena Havlicek (BAFU, Switzerland) explained that the new GSP action framework is needed in order to plan next steps.

6.2 Pillar 2: New EU soil governance affected by the EU Soil Strategy 2030, including role of the European Soil Observatory to support ESP activities

Mr Arwyn Jones (EC DG JRC) presented the European Soil Observatory (EUSO) and its network as a tool to implement the EU Soil Strategy 2030 and EU soil research programmes.

6.3 Pillar 3 (Research): unique soil research landscape in Europe

(a) European Joint Programming Soil

Mr Gergely Toth (University of Pannonia, Hungary) reported that a review paper has been published with an analysis of research priorities as indicated by the European national soil science societies.

Ms Saskia Keesstra (WUR, The Netherlands) gave an overview of the European Joint Programming Soil (EJP Soil (2020-2024)). Joint programming is a partnering instrument which allows links between national and EU research programmes. The EJP Soil aims to develop knowledge, tools and an integrated research community to foster climate-smart sustainable agricultural soil management. Various work packages have high value for supporting countries in developing and delivering their data sets in the context of the European and Global data infrastructures (in particular: Global Soil Information System – GLOSIS).

(b) Germany: Soil research programme for the Bioeconomy

Ms Ute Wollschläger (UFZ, Germany) presented the latest results from the German BonaRes programme (Soil Research for the Bioeconomy), a 9-year programme with 16 research consortia and a data centre. The programme has developed a metadata platform for long term agricultural experiments, which is now also used by the EJP Soil. A new product will soon be ready for use in Europe, the BonaRes Knowledge Library. All ESP members and beyond will be encouraged to use and expand the knowledge available there.

6.4 Pillar 4 and 5: level of participation, objectives, products, from ESP members, data exchange

(a) INSII

In the context of INSII and Pillar 4 (data products) and 5 (harmonization), Ms Maria Fantappiè (CREA, Italy) summarized technical initiatives and activities in the EJP Soil which are relevant for countries in the context of the GSP. The effects of the GSP action framework on INSII and Pillar 4 are not clear yet.

(b) EUROSOLAN

The activities of the European Soil Laboratory Network (EUROSOLAN) were presented by its chair, Ms Marija Romic (University of Zagreb, Croatia). She informed that a lot of activities have taken place during the last year, including the GLOSOLAN proficiency test in 2021, in which 46 laboratories from Europe took part.

Session II: 14:00 – 17:00

7 Invited talks

7.1 Action area - Soil governance and advocacy on soil health: Developments of EU soil-related policies, and its impact and challenges towards the whole ESP

Mr Mirco Barbero (EC DG ENV) presented the EU Soil strategy 2030. Currently, as committed in the strategy, a Healthy Soil Law is being prepared. The possible implications and challenges for the ESP were raised as a network, which would play a key role in the envisioned EU Coalition4HealthySoils. During the following discussion, the role of the sub-regional partnerships was highlighted. There, the EU macroregional strategies, conventions and other regional programmes can be strategic frameworks to further regionalize soil action in the ESP.

7.2 Action area - Promote knowledge on soil: The soil research landscape in Europe driven by the EU Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe, including relevance for EU neighbours

The EU soil missions were presented by Ms Annette Schneegans (EC DG AGRI). It is foreseen to establish 100 living lab and lighthouses to lead the transition towards healthy soils. She explained the roadmap of the mission, and encouraged ESP members to closely follow up and to participate. Researchers and practitioners with demonstration projects, e.g. on sustainable soil management, are explicitly targeted.

7.3 Action area - Assess, map, and monitor soil health: A data base of peatland soils in Europe

Ms Franziska Tanneberger (Greifswald Mire Centre) presented the European peatland map and its data sources. She also informed about the Global Peatland Initiative.

8 Preparations for the GSP Plenary Assembly - Discussion of all decision-making points, and how these affect the ESP

The agenda for the GSP Plenary Assembly and its background documents have now been published (including GSPPA: X/2022/2 in the agenda of the 10th GSP Plenary Assembly) on the new Action framework. Because this material became only available during this plenary meeting, the chair summarized the key points, and then offered to share more detailed comments after the meeting (bilaterally to those interested).

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GSPPA: X/2022/2 asks FAO members and GSP partners:

- to **adopt** the GSP Action Framework 2022-2030.
- to provide recommendations for the attention of the 28th Session of the COAG

Within the background document), further detail is provided about the actions that the GSP Plenary Assembly is invited to:

- to decide whether or not to make the following recommendations for COAG's decision:
 - a. to proceed with submitting a proposal to the FAO Committee on Agriculture (COAG) to formalize the GSP into a FAO statutory body; and
 - b. if the decision is to proceed with the formalization proposal, which option would be proposed (see Section D.1 (Article VI Body), Section D.2 (Article XIV Body), and Section D.3 (COAG Sub-committee)).

Further in the discussion of this ESP Plenary Meeting, it was suggested that the ESP chair should make a statement at the GSP Plenary Assembly. The ESP chair explained, that he can only do so once the ESP Plenary Meeting decides on a position. In the given amount of time, this was unfortunately not possible due to the tight timing

9 Summary, and future objectives of the ESP

The ESP has no funding at the moment. The ESP members wished for a stronger coordination of GSP-related activities within Europe by the ESP Chair.

10 ESP Secretariat (nominations and vote)

Ms Nicole Wellbrock, the ESP Secretariat, explained that the main focus of the ESP secretariat is capacity building and the development of the ESP webpage in 2022.

11 Closing remarks

The ESP Chair concluded this meeting with his deep appreciation about the interest and participation of ESP members. The ESP is currently in a waiting position for the decision of the 10th GSP Plenary Assembly about the new GSP Action Framework and the GSP institutionalization. The upcoming implementation phase will require more commitment by ESP stakeholders and members. Such commitment needs to be facilitated, and that needs capacity in the ESP Secretariat and in the ESP Steering Committee.



9th EUROPEAN SOIL PARTNERSHIP PLENARY MEETING

5 May 2022 10:00 – 13:00 and 14:00 – 17:00 (Zoom meeting)

Chair: Rainer Baritz (European Environment Agency)

Secretariat: Nicole Wellbrock (Federal Research Institute for Rural Areas, Forestry and Fisheries)

Registration: <https://thuenen.limequery.com/161987?lang=en>

Session I: 10:00 – 13:00

1. Opening (Welcome, agenda, tour de table)

2. Overall status and challenges: Chair

3. Information from the Sub-Regional Soil Partnerships:

- Alpine, Pyrenean, Eurasia, steps towards a new Western Balkan partnership

4. GSP: global activities with participation from ESP members

5. ITPS: ongoing activities with needed input from ESP members

- Europe Chapter of the 2nd Status of the World's Soil Resources Report

6. Initiatives related to Pillars/action areas:

- Pillar 1: Current activities towards defining sustainable soil management in Europe
- Pillar 2: New EU soil governance affected by the EU Soil Strategy 2030, including role of the European Soil Observatory to support ESP activities
- Pillar 3 (Research): unique soil research landscape in Europe: (a) European Joint Programming Soil; (b) Germany: Soil research programme for the Bioeconomy
- Pillar 4 and 5: level of participation, objectives, products, from ESP members, data exchange: (a) INSII, (b) EUROSOLAN

Session II: 14:00 – 17:00

7. Invited talks

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- 7.1 Action area: soil governance and advocacy on soil health: Developments of EU soil-related policies, and its impact and challenges towards the whole ESP
- 7.2 Action area: Promote knowledge on soil: Soil research landscape in Europe driven by the EU Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe, including relevance for EU neighbours
- 7.3 Action area: Assess, map, and monitor soil health: A data base of peatland soils in Europe

8. Preparations for the GSP Plenary Assembly

9. ESP Secretariat (nominations and vote)

10. Closing remarks

Annex II. List of participants

First name	Last name	Institution
Anna Maria	Agustsdottir	Soil Conservation Service of Iceland
Dominique	Arrouays	INRAE
Mirco	Barbero	European Commission, DG Environment
Rainer	Baritz	ESP-Chair
Stanislaw	Bialousz	Warsaw University of Technology
Antonio	BISPO	INRAE
Hans	Brand	Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, The Netherlands
Danilo	Calcaterra	Paneco Ambiente Srl
Carolina	Cardoso	GSP
Edoardo	Costantini	CREA
Yuriy	Dmytruk	Chernivtsi-National-University
Marija	Dragovic	Ministry of Environmental Protection Republic of Serbia
Hakki Emrah	Erdogan	FP Turey
Maria	Fantappie	CREA
Dace	Guste	Ministry of Agriculture
Christian	Hartmann	IRD
Elena	Havlicek	Federal Office for the Environment, Switzerland
Lina	Heuer	BMEL
Arwyn	Jones	European Commission DG JRC
Petra	Karo Bešter	Slovenian Environment Agency
Melanie	Kastner	Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft (BMEL)
Saskia	Keesstra	WUR
Maria	Konyushkova	FAO GSP sec.
Pavel	Krasilnikov	Lomonosov Moscow State University
Patricia	Laville	French Ministry of Agriculture and Food
Aleksi	Lehtonen	Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke)
Kirstin	MARX	German Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt - UBA)
PALOMA	MELGAREJO	INITIATIVE 4 PER 1000
Luca	Montanarella	European Commission
Antony John	Mouzas	AIM
Dushkow	Mukaetov	University of Skopje
Dr. Kakha	NADIRADZE	Association for Farmers Rights Defense, AFRD
Katrien	Oorts	Flemish government. Department of Environment
Antonio	Perdigao	SPCS
Rosa M.	Poch	ITPS
Cairo	Robb	Centre for International Sustainable Development Law (CISDL)
José Luis	Rubio	World Association of Soil and Water Conservation-WASWAC
Cláudia	Sá	Direção Geral de Agricultura e Desenvolvimento Rural - Portugal
Annette	Schneegans	European Commission
Jaroslava	Sobocká	National Agricultural and Food Centre
Andrea	Spanischberger	BMLRT
Franziska	Tanneberger	Greifswald Moor Centrum (GMC)
Fabio	Terribile	università di Napoli Federico II
Gergely	Tóth	University of Pannonia
Fenny	van Egmond	Wageningen Environmental Research

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Marc	Van Liedekerke	European Commission - Joint Research Centre
Isabelle	Verbeke	FAO GSP sec
Dragana	Vidojevic	Serbian Environmental Protection Agency
Borut	Vrščaj	Agricultural Institute of Slovenia
Nicole	Wellbrock	ESP Secretariat, Thünen Institut
Ute	Wollschläger	Helmholtz-Zentrum für Umweltforschung, UFZ, BonaRes-Zentrum
Yusuf	Yigini	FAO GSP sec.