EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURE

FORTY-THIRD SESSION

Budapest, Hungary, 27–28 September 2023

PROVISIONAL ANNOTATED AGENDA

I. Introductory items

1. Adoption of the Agenda and the Timetable

2. Election of the Rapporteurs

II. Main technical theme:

Sustainable use of land and water resources in Europe and Central Asia

3. Sustainable use of land and water resources in Europe and Central Asia

The topic aims to explore in an integrated way challenges linked to the sustainable use of land and water resources in Europe and Central Asia. Land degradation, soil salinity, lack of proper land tenure mechanisms, water stress and climate change are among the main issues at the regional level. Extreme events, such as droughts and flash floods, have become a reality in many countries, showing that proper water management and governance are necessary and must be done in an integrated and transborder way, together with sustainable land and soil management and the proper governance of land tenure. The innovative perspective is to connect these topics at a higher level and have a multidisciplinary and multisectoral approach.

A regional approach to policy guidance and governance structures for land and water is necessary to ensure the sustainable use of these natural resources. It would also contribute to a more resilient food system and promote ecosystem services and the conservation of biodiversity in the region. This would allow countries to strengthen their production of goods and services in a sustainable way, improve nutrition and livelihoods and share good practices, experiences and lessons learned, thus contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG Target 6.4 and SDG Target 15.3.

Integrated land and water resource management and governance are essential to the sustainable use of land and water resources. The Commission will be invited to explore these issues in depth as subtopics of the main technical theme. Each subtopic will also consider cross-cutting aspects of the land and water nexus, in particular climate change, biodiversity, gender and food security.

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

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4. **Enhancing the resilience and sustainability of national agri-food systems through integrated land and water resources management in Europe and Central Asia**

Land and water are essential to sustainable agricultural development. Hence, a number of countries in Europe and Central Asia are characterized as water stressed and increasingly impacted by land degradation and soil salinity. Accordingly, growing pressure on limited water resources leads to fierce competition for water among all sectors, reducing the availability of water for sustainable agrifood systems and affecting water, energy, food security and land use and tenure systems. Forest degradation further exacerbates the problem, as forests play a key role in water security and water regulation, including for agricultural needs.

On the other hand, progress in the implementation of reformed policies in the agrifood sector has varied among countries, as they still struggle with challenges in identifying properly functioning legal and practical settings for intersectoral coordination. Analysing the performance of these policies and facilitating the development of improved, integrated land and water policies in the agrifood sector will lead to the enhancement of the sustainable management of both land and water resources in the region.

Integrated land and water resource management will also impact and be impacted by several cross-cutting dimensions. Appropriate governance can only be in place if gender dimensions are properly considered and addressed. In addition, land and water resource management will consider climate change, biodiversity conservation, the sustainable use of natural resources, ecosystem restoration and food security.

Members are invited to share their experience in addressing integrated land and water resource management and possible policy recommendations to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

5. **Land governance and land degradation neutrality in Europe and Central Asia**

Non-transparent land governance systems, land fragmentation and ineffective land use are common problems in several countries of the region. Under this subtopic, the Commission is invited to explore how land governance and land tenure can be enhanced as part of integrated approach to the sustainable management of natural resources, in particular through large-scale interventions on the management of natural resources, climate change adaptation and mitigation, ecosystem restoration and biodiversity conservation. The potential of multipurpose land consolidation and land banking based on good practices in countries in Western Europe will also be discussed.

Given that sustainable land governance is closely intertwined with achieving and enabling land degradation neutrality, the second part of this subtopic will focus on land degradation neutrality. Driven by biophysical and socioeconomic factors and exacerbated by the impacts of climate change, the degradation of land and natural resources is one of the greatest challenges faced by several countries in the region. Although all countries in the region are members of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, not all have set land degradation neutrality targets, and for all of them the implementation of the convention still presents challenges.

Restoring degraded land is vital for countries to achieve multiple national and international priorities on mitigating climate change, improving livelihoods, reducing desertification, restoring ecosystems and conserving biodiversity. A strong system needs to be put in place for monitoring land degradation neutrality in the region, jointly with the strengthening of institutional capacities and designing an adequate policy framework.

Members are invited to share their experiences on how land governance and land tenure can contribute to the transformation of agrifood systems in the region while considering the restoration of degraded land and
ensuring land degradation neutrality. Emphasis also should be given to policy recommendations supporting sustainable land management.

6. Importance of water governance for enhancing water security in Europe and Central Asia

Water scarcity and droughts in some countries and floods and flash floods in others have become a reality in the Europe and Central Asia region. In addition, the uneven water distribution at different scales (among regions and societal groups) has provided multiple sources of tension and affected agrifood systems.

Improving water management requires rethinking water issues through multiple perspectives and strategically using cooperative partnerships and deliberative processes with landscape and “water-centred” management approaches. A multilevel approach may cover several levels of water management hierarchy. The aim is to manage the interdependencies among stakeholders, with the overall goal of contributing to more secure livelihoods, increased environmental sustainability and greater social harmony, considering the nexus of climate change, gender and biodiversity. Most of the countries in the region have shifted their national water governance systems to the basin level and developed laws and regulations for establishing basin management structures, but they still have the challenge of identifying properly functioning legal and practical settings for the intersectoral coordination and allocation of water resources at the national level.

Further enhancement of regional capacity for dialogue and the exchange of experiences and expertise in water policy development and implementation is recommended to achieve water security, including transboundary water management and cooperation. Therefore, the Commission is invited to discuss the dimensions (social, ecological, political and environmental) and levels (macro, meso and micro) of water management, along with associated drivers and management practices, including the importance of transboundary cooperation and water financing (under the macro level of governance), paradiplomacy (under the meso level of governance) and improving water use efficiency (under the micro level of governance). Members also are invited to share their experiences.

III. Other matters

7. FAO’s response to the multiple crises in Europe and Central Asia

The Europe and Central Asia region has been affected by multiple crises stemming from the war in Ukraine, the effects of climate change and, most recently, the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye in early February 2023, resulting in a triple crisis in food, energy and finance. The impacts have included steeply rising food and energy prices, accelerated inflation, tightening financial conditions, increased import bills, disrupted food supply chains, damaged logistics and infrastructure, and threatened food security in the region. High retail prices of food, gas and petroleum products remain a major concern. Overall inflation has generally slowed since the peak in the first half of 2022, but food inflation remains high. The most vulnerable countries in the region, including Türkiye and countries in Central Asia, the South Caucasus, Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, are the most affected by the multiple crises, particularly the poorest segments of the population.

In response to the multiple crises, FAO has provided short-term and medium-term support to the affected countries in the region. The Commission will be invited to assess FAO’s responses to the multiple crises in the region over the past two years and to provide recommendations for improving the Organization’s interventions to better serve the needs of the affected countries and strengthen their resilience.
8. Advancing gender equality in the region: update on the progress made

This is a standing agenda item for all sessions of the European Commission on Agriculture. The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia Gender Team will provide an update on the work of the Regional Office in meeting its commitments in mainstreaming gender equality concerns in its development interventions, as well as in specific activities aimed at advancing rural gender equality in the region through knowledge building, dialogue and policy advice. A background paper will summarize key gender and agriculture issues and share the findings of a review of country gender assessments conducted in the region over the past two years, reflecting regional trends and the situation of rural women in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Members will be invited to review FAO’s efforts to address gender equality in the region and to present their views and share country practices and cases regarding the mainstreaming of gender concerns in agriculture, food security and malnutrition in their respective countries.

9. Progress made by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia on the main recommendations of the Forty-second Session of the ECA

Following the recommendations on transforming food systems to address malnutrition, which were adopted by the Forty-second Session of the European Commission on Agriculture in January 2022, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia will present an update on recent activities carried out by the Organization in Europe and Central Asia related to the implementation of the recommendations. The Commission will be invited to note the report and provide comments as deemed appropriate.

10. Amendment of the Rules of Procedure of the ECA

In line with Rule XII of the Rules of Procedure of the European Commission on Agriculture, the commission will be invited to consider the amendments to the Rules of Procedure as presented. The amendments aim to ensure that the provisions of the Rules of Procedure fully respect the FAO gender equality policies, to strengthen the provisions on replacement of outgoing members of the Committee, and to establish a clear provision on quorum for decisions by the Executive Committee.

11. Election of the ECA Chairperson, the first and second Vice-Chairpersons and the other members of the Executive Committee

According to Rule II and Rule III.1 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Commission on Agriculture, the Commission will be invited to elect from among the representatives the Chairperson of the ECA, the first Vice-Chairperson of the ECA, the second Vice-Chairperson of the ECA, and six other members of the Executive Committee, for a term of two years.

12. Any other business

13. Date and place of the Forty-fourth Session of the ECA

14. Review and adoption of the report of the Session

Closing of the Session
Information items

Advancing the digital transformation of agriculture and rural areas through national strategies, e-Government systems, and Digital Villages - update for Europe and Central Asia

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) launched the 1 000 Digital Villages Initiative to promote digital innovations to support inclusive, gender-sensitive rural development and sustainable agrifood transformation in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Furthermore, FAO harnesses the power of information and communications technology to pilot, accelerate and scale innovative ideas with a high potential for impact in food and agriculture, transforming e-agriculture solutions and services into global public goods.

The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) recognizes the pivotal role of e-agriculture in accelerating the transformation of agrifood systems, overcoming challenges arising from global crises and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. To respond to these challenges and demands, FAO in Europe and Central Asia presented its strategic priorities for e-agriculture as defined in its “Digital REU 2022–2030” approach, which prioritizes inclusive rural transformation, digitalization and innovation to empower smallholders, family farms and youth.

FAO in Europe and Central Asia plays a crucial role in expediting the attainment of these priorities by providing assistance to institutions and stakeholders in the region in developing and executing transformative digitalization initiatives.

The background document will provide information on the initiatives undertaken, the progress made and the challenges and lessons learned for Europe and Central Asia to accelerate the digital transformation of the agriculture sector in the region.

The Commission is invited to take note of the initiatives and progress made.

Integration of science and innovation into regional priorities for enhancing agri-food system transformation - Progress in implementation of the Action Plan in Europe and Central Asia

The FAO Science and Innovation Strategy was adopted by the FAO Council at its Hundred and Seventieth Session following an inclusive and transparent consultative process and embedded as crosscutting issues in the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031. It is a tool to accelerate the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

A global action plan has been developed that presents the key elements of FAO’s extensive work in science and innovation. The plan is based on the Science and Innovation Strategy’s three pillars, nine outcomes and two enablers. The high-level framework for the development of regional action plans, shared with the technical committees in 2022, contained a proposed number of outputs that were further revised based on feedback from the Regional, Subregional and Country Offices and all relevant FAO streams.

Building on the Science and Innovation Consultation in the region held in 2021, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia developed and validated the regional focus of the FAO Action Plan for the Science and Innovation Strategy through 2025 to enable the transformative potential and accelerate the

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capacity of science, technology and innovation through coordinated and collective action at regional and national levels.

The background document will outline that science and innovation are essential parts of finding solutions to address the priorities of FAO’s work across Europe and Central Asia. It will also describe the key focus of the regional action plan, provide information on the progress of its implementation and share highlights, challenges faced and lessons learned.

The Commission is invited to take note of the progress of the Regional Action Plan’s implementation.

**Food systems transformation in Europe and Central Asia - Information on FAO's work in the region**

There is growing evidence in the Europe and Central Asia region that the food and agriculture sector's performance needs to improve to overcome multiple challenges related to food insecurity, malnutrition and inequalities and to minimize environmental stress.

Members acknowledge the importance of holistic food systems transformation to overcoming these challenges and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Within the Europe and Central Asia region, food systems vary in terms of level of development, structural characteristics and natural resource availability.

The United Nations Food Systems Summit in 2021 and its follow-up process towards the 2023 United Nations Food Systems Stocktaking Moment brought increased attention to the need to transform our food systems as key to accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals through a holistic approach, involving the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability.

FAO is actively supporting countries in the region in the development and implementation of national pathways, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, through comprehensive food system assessments and actionable evidence-based policies, technical capacity development initiatives, and knowledge sharing.

The background document will provide updated information related to the work carried out by FAO to support countries in accelerating food systems transformation.

The Commission is invited to take note of the progress and initiatives.