


February 2014

	منظمة الأغذية والزراعة للأمم المتحدة	联合国 粮食及 农业组织	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'alimentation et l'agriculture	Продовольственная и сельскохозяйственная организация Объединенных Наций	Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Alimentación y la Agricultura
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Regional Conference for Europe

TWENTY-NINTH SESSION

Bucharest, Romania, 2 - 4 April 2014

Agenda Item 13

Overview of FAO Governance in the Region: Proposals for the organization of the Regional Conference for Europe and the European Commission on Agriculture

Executive Summary

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of arrangements regarding the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) and the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA), following the recommendation of the Evaluation Report of FAO's Regional and Sub-regional Offices for Europe and Central Asia undertaken in 2012. The document also outlines the roles and responsibilities of the ERC and the ECA and provides background information on the current organizational arrangements for both meetings. The document further outlines the linkages between the ERC and the ECA, as the two main bodies on agricultural matters in the European Region.

In view of waning attendance at the ECA sessions over time, the 34th Session of the ECA in May 2001 recommended that the meetings be held back-to-back with ERC sessions. In line with the Evaluation Report and the recommendations of the 146th Session of the Council (Rome, April 2013), which had evidenced that the ECA preparatory activities and technical support in preparation for the ERC had become ineffective, it is now proposed to hold the ECA and the ERC sessions separately in alternate years. The proposed arrangement would allow for the ECA to be an effective preparatory technical committee for the Regional Conference and would have a threefold advantage:

- Technical issues could be discussed in greater depth and results and recommendations from the ECA discussions could better feed into the formulation of priorities in the Region;
- The Executive Committee of the ECA could maintain its double role by focusing its attention on the preparation of the ECA and the ERC in alternate years;
- Considering the foreseeable funding limitations, holding the ECA in alternate years would provide an opportunity to hold back-to-back regional informal consultations and thereby ensure cost savings and improved attendance.

This document also provides an overview of possible cost implications for the different scenarios which would foresee the ERC and the ECA being held in alternating years, with each session being held in a different country (Scenario 1) or holding the ECA at the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) on a permanent basis, while the ERC would continue to be held at different venues at each session (Scenario 2).

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Guidance Sought

The ERC is requested to:

1. Review the two proposals and to provide guidance regarding arrangements for convening the ECA in alternating years to the ERC; and
2. Endorse the proposal to hold ECA sessions in alternate years at the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia.

1 Introduction

1. Following the evaluation of the European Region in 2012 and the subsequent Evaluation Report (Annex 1), and following the recommendation of the 113th Session of the Programme Committee in March 2013, the 146th Session of the FAO Council (Rome, April 2013)¹ requested that the European Region discuss governance issues at the 29th Session of the ERC (Bucharest, Romania, 3-4 April 2014).

2. In line with this recommendation, this document provides an overview of the previous arrangements pertaining to the organization of the ECA and the ERC, as well as proposals regarding possible future arrangements. The two proposals presented to the ERC for discussion are:

Scenario 1: The ERC and the ECA would be held in alternating years with each session being held in a different country.

Scenario 2: The ERC and the ECA would be held in alternating years, but the ECA would be held on a permanent basis at the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) in Budapest, Hungary, while the ERC would continue to be held at different venues at each session.

3. The proposals are based on discussions of the findings from the Evaluation Report held during the meeting of the Executive Committee of the ECA in February 2013, during which the two proposals were reviewed, as well as the regional informal consultation meeting in December 2013.

2. Regional Conferences and Regional Conference for Europe (ERC)

2.1 Regional Conferences

4. The FAO Regional Conferences (RCs) are convened under Article VI.5 of the FAO Constitution. As a result of the Immediate Plan of Action (IPA) and subsequent amendments to the Basic Texts², the RCs have been entrusted with an enhanced role and have become an integral part of the governance structure of the Organization.

5. The RCs are a key forum for discussing policy and priority actions at regional, sub-regional and country levels. As FAO Governing Bodies, RCs are taking on increased importance as FAO enhances its institutional decision-making process through closer involvement with Member Countries.

6. Taking into account that the RCs are generally composed of a "technical" and a "political" segment, arranged in accordance with the prerogatives of each region, and have intrinsically developed their own region-specific operating practices, the 91st Session of the Committee on Constitutional and

¹ CL 146/Rep para. 18 " In particular, the Council called on the 2014 European Regional Conference to discuss Governance issues raised in the Evaluation. " <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/028/mg569e.pdf>

² IPA approved by the Conference at its 35th (Special) Session and the amendments to the Basic Texts as adopted by the Conference at its 36th Session. See Basic Texts, Vol. I, GRO XXXV – Regional Conferences

Legal Matters (CCLM) proposed that the RCs adopt their own Rules of Procedure, in accordance with the specific needs of the regions.³

2.2 Regional Conference for Europe (ERC)

7. The ERC meets every two years in alternate with the year in which the FAO Conference is held. The ERC provides regional perspectives on FAO's strategies and priorities, formulates concrete recommendations for regional activities and contributes to enhanced efficiency and effectiveness within the region. It conducts regional-level assessments which feed into improved sustainability of agriculture and food security and exercises oversight of the functions and activities of FAO in the Region, in accordance with the Basic Texts of the Organization.

8. The ERC recommendations and guidance on priorities, programmes, organizational structure and budgets of regional interest, as well as on the regional situation and issues pertaining to food security, agriculture and rural development, contribute towards the decision-making process by the FAO Council and the FAO Conference.

3. European Commission on Agriculture (ECA)

9. Following the recommendation of the twelve European countries convening at an ad hoc meeting in Paris in June 1949, the Director-General established a European Committee on Agricultural Technology, pursuant to Article VI.1 of the Constitution⁴. The title was changed to European Committee on Agriculture by decision of the Council at its 15th Session in 1952. In 1956 it was changed again to its present title⁵.

10. The ECA has a formal mandate for reviewing technical issues relating to European agriculture and rural development, and the recommendations stemming from ECA discussions are submitted to the ERC for decision. The ECA also monitors the activities of the Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development (WPW). Membership of the ECA is open to all ERC Members.

3.1 The Executive Committee of the ECA (ExCom)

11. The ECA Executive Committee (ExCom) is composed of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson and six other members from countries in the European Region and contributes to the preparation and format of the ERC. The main functions of the Executive Committee are to: identify areas of technical concern and monitor the preparation of technical reports and papers for ECA discussion; provide advice, in consultation with the European Regional Group (ERG) and the Chairperson and Vice Chairpersons of the ERC, on the provisional agenda of the Regional Conference; assist the Chairperson in reporting to the FAO Council on programme and budgetary matters and to the FAO Conference on policy and regulatory matters; and convene informal consultations with Member Countries in the inter-session period, including consultation on the Programme of Work and Budget (PWB).

3.2 The Linkage between the ECA and the ERC

12. The ERC and the ECA are the two main FAO bodies on agricultural matters in the European Region. While the ERC serves as a forum for policy debate, also at the Ministerial level, the ECA's mandate is to review technical aspects and issues of importance to European agriculture and rural development. The ECA is a consultative body and the recommendations emanating from its discussions are submitted to the ERC for decision⁶.

³ CL140/6 – 91st Session of the CCLM <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/019/k8928e.pdf>

⁴ Defined by the Conference at its 6th Session (1951, Resolution 87)

⁵ The Commission's terms of reference were broadened by the Conference at its 9th Session, 1957, Resolution 26/57

⁶ The ECA, according to its Rules of Procedure, reports to the Director-General. Pursuant to the observations in paragraph 88 to 91 of the document CCLM 88/3 turns out that in practice statutory bodies have been reluctant to activate a systematic line of reporting to the Conference or Council even when this reporting line was defined in their statutes. Given the current role of the Regional Conferences in the definition of priorities for the work of the Organization in their region informal proposals have been made that the Regional Conferences should be able to rely on technical inputs provided by statutory bodies. Thus, the new role of the Regional Conferences in priority setting and their contribution to

13. Participation at ECA sessions has decreased over time due to a number of factors which include: financial constraints of Members; limited availability of technical experts and an agenda which is not in line with an information exchange forum.

14. At the 31st Session of the ECA (Rome, 1999)⁷, progress was made towards improving the focus of the ECA agenda and the criteria identified included: the need to address recurring issues of regional or sub-regional interest, issues and areas of work pertaining to FAO's Strategic Framework 2000-2015 and issues for which an information and knowledge gap had been identified in the region and for which there was not an efficient consultation mechanism.⁸

15. This criteria did not vary substantially from that underpinning the agenda for the ERC, although the focus was on the technical nature of the debate within the ECA, while the ERC agenda was more political.

16. Since 2001, the ECA has been held back-to-back with the ERC with a view to greater efficiency savings and increased participation across both sessions.⁹

4. Future Organization of Governance in the European Region

17. Both the Evaluation Report in 2012 and the recommendations of the 146th Session of the Council indicated that the ECA preparatory activities and technical support in preparation for the ERC had become ineffective. With the back-to-back scheduling of the ECA and the ERC, the objective of the ECA to act as a forum for discussion on technical issues, which in turn would provide input for policy decisions at the ERC, had become less effective. By holding the session of the ECA directly prior to the ERC, the outcome of the technical debate could not effectively influence the identification of priorities or the main emphasis of the regional Programme of Work and Budget, for example, as the pre-session papers for these items were prepared in advance and had to be distributed to Members at least 45 days before the start of the session.

18. Subsequently, with the back-to-back schedule, substantive changes could not be included. In addition, delegates attending the ERC also attended the ECA session and were not always technical experts. In responding to the evaluation questionnaire to Members some countries stated that "the ECA was considered less useful as a forum for technical discussions of agricultural issues and priority setting in the Region"¹⁰. The evaluation indicated that Members had not received sufficient information on the role of the ECA with regard to its reporting role with regard to the ERC, and through the ERC to the Council. It was, therefore, perceived that the ECA's current role and its back-to-back scheduling with the ERC no longer responded to the needs of the Members.

4.1 Scheduling the ECA in alternate years to the ERC

19. Based on the recommendations of the evaluation¹¹ which emphasized the need for an effective body that could contribute towards the preparation of the agenda for the ERC and act as a forum for liaising with REU and Members during the inter-session period, it is proposed to move the ECA session away from the ERC and to schedule it at least four to six months ahead of the ERC.

the preparation of the Strategic Framework, the Medium-Term Plan and the Programme of Work and Budget, would imply that the "reporting lines" of statutory bodies in a given region might need to be reconsidered.

⁷ See the Final report from the 31st Session of the ECA in 1999 in Rome

http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Europe/documents/ECA/ECA31_99_Report_en.pdf

⁸ Extract of the non-paper prepared by REU/ECA Secretariat at the request of the 22nd ERC to provide information to the ERG on the implications of holding ECA sessions back to back with the ERC or continue to hold them between sessions of the ERC, taking into consideration the legal and budgetary implications.

⁹ The 33rd Session of the ECA from 1-2 March 2004 in Rome, Italy, was the last session of the ECA, which was separated from the ERC session. Starting with the 34th Session the ECA was held back to back with the ERC.

<http://www.fao.org/europe/meetings-and-events-2010/european-commission-on-agriculture/thirty-second-session-of-the-european-commission-on-agriculture/en/>

¹⁰ PC 113/3 – Evaluation of FAO's Regional and Sub-regional Offices for Europe and Central Asia para. 110

¹¹ PC 113/3 – Evaluation of FAOs Regional and Sub-regional Offices for Europe and Central Asia. Final Evaluation Report para. 111

20. Furthermore, in addition to the lack of participation in ECA sessions by technical experts and the subsequent loss of identity and function of this technical body, the scheduling of the ECA's sessions back-to-back with the ERC did not give rise, as was expected, to a significant reduction in costs. By scheduling the ECA in alternate years to the ERC, the latter could consist only of the Ministerial segment over two days. This would imply a two-day ECA meeting to ensure proper reporting and approval of the final report in all languages (See table of cost overview in Annex 1 and the detailed cost explanation in Annex 2).

21. Further to the above-mentioned cost savings, the proposal would also have the following advantage:

- technical issues could be discussed in greater depth and results and recommendations from the ECA discussions could better feed into the formulation of priorities in the Region;
- the Executive Committee of the ECA could maintain its double role by focusing its attention on the preparation of the ECA and the ERC in alternate years; and
- taking into consideration the foreseeable funding limitations, holding the ECA in alternate years would provide an opportunity to hold a back-to-back regional informal consultation which would ensure both cost savings and improved attendance as Members would be encouraged to support the participation of experts whose recommendations would be seen as contributing directly to the policy debate at the ERC.

22. The above proposal was supported by the ERC at its 22nd Session in July 2000, which further noted it would have been more fruitful to hold the technical debates prior to the Ministerial Round Tables rather than after, with the result that the technical discussions would have served to inform and enrich the policy debate. This recommendation presupposed that a sufficient period would be foreseen between the technical discussions and the ERC to enable ERC participants to receive the technical reports well in advance for timely analysis and appropriate use¹².

23. Furthermore, by delegating the review of the technical aspects of one (maximum two) major ERC agenda items to the ECA, the duration of the Regional Conference could be shortened and would ensure that the ERC retained its mandate as a forum for policy debate.

24. With the implementation of the Revised Strategic Framework¹³, the technical preparation of agenda items and future focus areas for the Region will require further attention, optimally through discussions on technical issues in close collaboration with technical experts from Member Countries. In order to ensure effective implementation of the PWB for the Region, the preparation and discussion of technical items prior to endorsement at the session of the ERC is of major importance and this function would be provided by a separate ECA.

25. There are therefore two proposals presented to the ERC for consideration regarding the future scheduling of the ECA in alternate years: the first proposal (Scenario A) would entail holding the ECA in alternate years in different countries in the region - this would require the identification of a host country in which to hold the session, which could be either the same or a different country as the ERC; the second proposal (Scenario B) would be to hold the ECA permanently at the location of the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia in Budapest, in line with the past practice followed up to the 23rd session of the ECA in 1982¹⁴.

¹² The outcome of the Committees technical debates and recommendations were of interest to all participants, and their debates were approved by the ERC in plenary. Therefore, it is safe to assume that the ERC felt the need for technical inputs into its debates. However, as noted in the Conference Report, running the Technical Committees in parallel with Plenary caused attendance problems for some delegations and certainly prolonged the agenda.

¹³ The preparation and the implementation of the Revised Strategic Framework and particularly the Regional Initiatives require a stronger technical discussion and review of the major items prior to the ERC to increase the focus and technical soundness of the prepared PWB. With the new preparation mechanism, which gives a major role to the Strategic Objective Coordinators at global level and on the other hand the Country Programming Frameworks at national level a thorough technical debate is very important.

¹⁴ From its 1st to its 23rd Session, ECA meetings were held in Rome with the exception of the 3rd Session which took place in Geneva). The 24th to the 30th Session were rotating. The 31st to the 33rd Sessions took place in Rome and as of the 34th session the ECA has been held back-to-back with the ERC.

26. There are no legal implications for either scenario.

4.2 Implications for the organization of the ERC and the ECA

27. The implications of the two proposals outlined above are mainly related to Secretariat costs and to expenses that would arise from the organization of formal meetings in the respective Member Countries. Furthermore, by alternating the ERC and the ECA, the number of informal consultation meetings could be reduced as they would no longer be needed to replace the ECA as forums for technical discussions. For both Scenario A and Scenario B, the REU Secretariat would organize at least one (maximum two) informal consultations in the inter-session period between the ERC. The extra costs for the informal consultations have not been taken into consideration.

4.2.1 Scenario A: ERC and ECA rotating in the Region

28. The proposal to rotate the venue of the ECA would imply inter alia: increased ownership by the host countries and thereby increased visibility within the host countries with regard to FAO events; reduced organizing costs for the host country thereby placing also smaller countries in a position to host ECA sessions; and, the possibility of linking major technical topics with examples in the relevant host countries.

29. A possible negative implication could be the increased logistical requirements to be borne by both the host country as well as the Secretariat. These would include the identification and review of venues, arrangements for hosting the Secretariat at the venue before the session, and the increased workload and cost implications for the Secretariat in organizing the ECA in a remote location.

4.2.2 Scenario B: ERC rotating in the region and ECA organized permanently at the location of the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU)

30. The second proposal, Scenario B, would foresee the organization of ECA sessions at REU on a permanent basis, while the ERC would rotate amongst the Member Countries of the Region.

31. This proposal would imply inter alia: simplified and cost efficient servicing of the meetings by the Secretariat as the relevant staff would not need to travel to other locations, nor would there be a need to recruit additional staff on site; simplified logistic arrangements and reduced organizational costs pertaining to identifying locations and venues for meetings, as a permanent location in a government building could be identified for all ECA sessions, in close collaboration with the Government of Hungary; and, in line with the technical nature of the meetings, the presence of FAO technical staff could be increased without major travel costs being incurred, which would be conducive to in-depth discussions on technical agenda items.

32. A possible negative implication of holding the ECA meetings permanently at REU could be reduced visibility for the body and decreased ownership by individual Member Countries, as there would be less opportunity for linkage of the technical items on the agenda to relevant issues at country level.

33. The table setting out the overview of costs for the two scenarios outlined above is contained in Annex 2. The detailed list of main cost categories is contained in Annex 3.

5. Conclusion

34. The overview contained in Annex 2 shows that the proposed Scenario B would have a slight cost advantage compared to Scenario A. Furthermore, Scenario B also would facilitate the logistical organization of the ECA and the Secretariat would continue to organize only one major meeting every two years, as currently done with the ECA and the ERC being held back-to-back. Scenario A would imply that the Secretariat would organize a major meeting in one of the Member Countries every year, which would require additional staff resources.

35. In light of all the above considerations, including the political, technical and cost implications, it is recommended that the ERC and the ECA be organized in alternating years and that the ECA be held permanently at REU.

Detailed Recommendation from the Evaluation Report¹⁵ :

The evaluation summed up by indicating that the following scenario appears to be the most appropriate:

Given the interest in a dedicated technical body for the Region, the ECA's technical role should be reinvigorated. Issues discussed should be selected with attention to the pressing issues of interest to the Region as a whole. In order to best do this, the session of the ECA should be in alternate years to the ERC.

The Executive Committee of the ECA, the existing elected body within the Region, should retain its double role of preparing both the ECA and working in close collaboration with the REU Secretariat to prepare the ERC in alternate years.

The ECA should hold sessions in alternate years to the ERC as this would have a threefold advantage:

- Technical issues could be discussed in greater depth and results and recommendations from the ECA discussions could better feed into the formulation of priorities in the Region;
- The Executive Committee of the ECA could maintain its double role by focusing its attention on the preparation of the ECA and the ERC in alternate years;
- Considering the foreseeable funding limitations, holding the ECA in alternate years would provide an opportunity to hold a back-to-back regional informal consultation. This would ensure both cost savings and improved levels of attendance.

To ensure that all sectors within the Organization's competence are given their due attention, a report on the recommendations and actions arising out of the technical bodies in the Region should become a standing item on the ERC agenda. This would be ensured through the relevant technical officers in the Region, some of which serve as secretaries to the regional commissions. Given that the ExCom is to work more closely with, and receive enhanced technical inputs from, the Secretariat, this should ensure that all sectors and issues are given adequate consideration.

The ERG, when it is able to foresee discussions directly relevant to governance and priorities in the Europe and Central Asia region, should make an effort to include Member Countries which are not formally party to it, but belong to the ERC.

REU should play a stronger role in identifying the priorities with Members at sub-regional and regional level as discussed later in Section 7.2. The Evaluation finds it unlikely that, given funding concerns, four informal consultations could be held between ERC sessions. However, in the period between the ECA and its corresponding ERC, REU and SEC should hold one informal consultation per sub-region. The results of these would be compiled and integrated into the considerations of the ExCom through the Secretariat.

¹⁵ <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/027/mf581e.pdf>

Annex 2

Table 1 - Overview of costs for organization of the ECA and the ERC

	ERC with ECA in rotating locations Scenario A	ERC rotating and ECA at the location of REU Scenario B
Costs of the Secretariat for the ERC	250 000	250 000
Costs of the Secretariat for the ECA	200 000	150 000
Costs of the ERC (host government)	110 000-220 000	110 000 -220 000
Costs of the ECA (host government)	50 000-80 000	30 000-50 000
Trust Fund for supporting countries	60 000-80 000 ¹⁶	60 000-80 000 ¹⁷
Total	USD 670 – 830 000	USD600 -750 000

¹⁶ Costs would be higher as with the organization of the ERC and the ECA in two locations there are additional flight costs although the number of days would be approximately the same for both events.

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Annex 3**1. The main cost categories for organizing the ERC and the ECA in a rotating manner (Scenario A)****A. ERC**

- Costs for translation and expertise, including preparation, travel and consultations for the ERC; covered by the REU Secretariat:
 - Approximately USD 250 000
- Costs for local organization of the ERC; e.g. venue logistics and catering; covered by the host country:
 - Approximately USD 110 000 - 220 000
- Additional costs are Trust Funds supporting the participation of two representatives from member countries requiring support:
 - Approximately USD 30 000 - 40 000

B. ECA

- Costs for translation and expertise, including preparation, travel and consultations for the ECA, covered by the REU Secretariat:
 - Approximately USD 200 000
- Costs for local organization of the ECA; e.g. venue logistics and catering; covered by the host country:
 - Approximately USD 90 000-180 000
- Additional costs are Trust Funds supporting the participation of two representatives from member countries requiring support:
 - Approximately USD 30 000-40 000
 -

2. The main cost categories for organizing the ERC in rotating manner and the ECA at the same location of the REU (Scenario B)

41. The main categories of costs of this scenario would be:

A. ERC

- Costs for translation and expertise, including preparation, travel and consultations for the ERC, covered by the REU Secretariat:
 - Approximately USD 250 000
- Costs for local organization of the ERC; e.g. venue logistics and catering; covered by the host country:
 - Approximately USD 110 000-220 000
- Additional costs are Trust Funds supporting the participation of two representatives from member countries requiring support:
 - Approximately USD 30 000-40 000

B. ECA

- Costs for translation and expertise, including preparation, and consultations for the ECA, covered by the REU Secretariat:
 - Approximately USD 150 000¹⁸
- Costs for local organization of the ECA; e.g. logistics and catering; an agreement could be discussed with Hungary to use a Government venue for free, like during the Informal Consultations:
 - Approximately USD 30 000-50 000
- Additional costs are Trust Funds supporting the participation of two representatives from member countries requiring support:
 - Approximately USD 30 000-40 000

¹⁸ The costs for the secretariat are lower as no travel and accommodation costs are needed for the secretariat staff. There is also no need for preparation missions to the countries and costs for setting up organization teams at local level.