

Steering Committee Meeting

18-19 November 2020

This steering committee has met in a partially new constellation

Rainer Baritz: new ESP-chair (**RB**)

Elena Havlicek: former ESP-chair, now co-chair of Pillar 1 (**EH**)

Borut Vrščaj: sub-regional Alpine subregional partnership; in addition co-chair Pillar 4 (**BV**)

Yusuf Yigini: GSP Secretariat (FAO) (**YY**)

Rosa Poch, Maria Konyushkova, Costanza Calzolari, *Peter Ruiter*¹⁾ (ITPS) (**RP, MK, CC**)

Violette Geissen (chair Pillar 1) (**VG**)

Arwyn Jones (chair Pillar 2) (**AJ**)

Gergely Tóth, *Coen Ritsema*¹⁾ (chair Pillar 3) (**GT**)

Maria Fantappiè (chair Pillar 4) (**MF**)

Hakki Erdogan (chair Pillar 5) (**HE**)

Marc Van Liedekerke (ESP Secretariat) (**MvL**)

¹⁾ *excused*

Background materials:

Update and comments to the ESP Terms of Reference (ToR)

Meeting report 7th ESP Meeting (10 Sept 2020)

Draft concept for a revised global Pillar 4 Implementation Plan

ESP implementation Plan 2017-2020

TOP 1: Welcome

RB opened the meeting, presented the agenda, and referred to the background materials.

Objective of this meeting is to

- a) follow up on tasks set by the ESP Plenary (reg. composition of the SC, ESP planning including activities in the Pillars and development of the new post-2020 ESP Implementation Plan (IP))
- b) discuss the Pillars in detail

RB noted and appreciated the interest and attendance by the European ITPS members.

He added:

- that the 2020 stocktaking exercise of the GSP will likely affect the regional soil partnerships, thus eventually requiring an update of the ESP's ToR
- that the overall mandate of the ESP is to advocate for the limited soil resources of the European region

TOP 2: Reflections about the 7th ESP meeting

RB summarized the last ESP Plenary meeting, and the implications for this SC meeting. He noted:

- Subregional partnerships: great progress in the Eurasian and Alpine partnerships, and initiative for a Pyrenean subregional partnership is well noted and supported.
- GSP products: protocol on sustainable soil management, SoILEX platform, ReSOIL online database of soil science, maps on soil salinity and soil organic carbon sequestration potential, and the building of the global soil information system as infrastructure for data exchange.
- ITPS products: the report on the status of knowledge on soil biodiversity.

- EU: political strategies and target setting programmes in support of soil protection, the creation of the European Soil Observatory at JRC, and – for the whole ESP region - the EEA work in indicators and thresholds.
- ESP pillars: the tremendous potential of synergy effects with other networks and projects as a challenge to the pillar chairs, who operate without funding.
- Country perspective: the seeming lack of coordination inside Europe, the needs for harmonization and agreed and operational time frames, and the lack of progress implementing INSPIRE for the exchange of interoperable soil data.

During the discussion, the following opinions were shared, and suggestions made:

- To widen the scope for the ESP beyond the GSP by formulating and expressing own topics of preference.
- To better summarize activities and to better inform ESP partners, to attract and facilitate increased participation and sharing – based on common tasks (an own portal is important).
- To establish a coordination of data and information products within the ESP : it was noted that currently, national data products such as the soil carbon maps are directly shared with the GSP (secretariat). A coordination within the ESP could promote border harmonization, Europe-level views, and share experiences.
- To ensure that region-specific conditions in Europe are elaborated and considered; there is no one-size-fits-all, provided the great diversity in Europe (biogeographic and soil conditions, cultures and land use history, surveys and methodologies).
- To improve the timeline of cooperation and product development: participation in indicator (data) specifications and development of feasible roadmaps need to be enabled.
- To consolidate the composition and participation in the ESP Pillar WGs.

TOP 3: ITPS - Europe

RP presented the concept for the next Status of the World's Soil Resources Report 2025 (SWSR2025). There is likely to be a chapter for each region, and these regional chapters require the sharing of recent findings, at country-, EU- and continent-level. The recently launched European Soil Condition Assessment (EEA, DG ENV, JRC, Eionet NRC Soil and other experts) may serve as a good basis for this chapter. ITPS will provide scientific guidance in due time. The Europe-chapter is a good opportunity to develop cooperation between the European ITPS members and the ESP members.

Added by RB after the meeting: other areas of cooperation could be discussion of the implications of global symposia for the ESP, support to ITPS writing tasks based on contributions by interested ESP members, and the discussion of Pillar 4 product specifications with ITPS involvement.

TOP 4: Pillars of action

This report includes some discussion points of meetings held between RB and Pillar-chairs, prior to this SC meeting.

Pillar 1

In 2019, Chair Pillar 1 had conducted a "Collection and Analysis of existing Data on Sustainable Soil Management in Europe", an action under contract with the European Commission. This was targeted to support the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management

(VGSSM). At this point, the project contains an list of 220 EU- and nationally funded projects which entail VGSSM-related practices. The projects are sorted by biogeographic region, and the locations are overlaid with European risk maps for specific soil threats. The European Commission, as owner of the results of this action, and due to a lacking ESP website, have not posted the results yet, nor has the project continued in 2020 due to a lack of further funding. VG and EH intend to follow up with the Pillar 1 WG.

Discussion during the preparatory meeting between RB and Pillar 1 Chairs: For Europe it is important to clarify our vision for the implementation of the VGSSM, the currently prepared protocol for the assessment of the impact of SSM practices(see [here](#)), as well as the GSP's code of conduct for the sustainable use and management of fertilizer (see [here](#)). Both activities can be further refined for Europe considering specific needs and challenges:

- Farm to Fork strategy: Integrated Nutrient Management Action Plan
- Climate action 2030: carbon farming
- Low level of soil protection under the previous CAP (see [here](#))
- Ecosystem restauration
- Zero pollution targets

It seems that at EU level, the need for knowledge and guidance for securing healthy soils with the proper management, is large. Much knowledge is existing. ESP action cannot only synthesize technical advice, and it can do so by involving a critical mass of experts, and share experiences with other regional soil partnerships, contributing to a global view. RB recommends that a short description of the concept may be a good approach to prepare and establish a writing process. It is important to include networks such as Copa-Cogeca, ENRD, ESSC.

Pillar 2

All SC members and partners are invited to investigate the updated GSP website. The website presents action areas in combination with actions under Pillars. This could be a model for a European website.

ESP partners have delivered the needed information SoileX - Soil related legal instruments and soil governance, via the soil WIKI of the European Commission's Expert Group on Soil Protection. Other than that, there seems no other concerted P2 activity at global level.

RB suggests to ensure that the World Soil Day is properly celebrated in Europe. SC members could set an example (e.g. Facebook live interviews, press releases).

Pillar 2 chair AJ has presented activities of the Mission Board Soil Health and Food, which also emphasizes the importance of soil awareness. He also explained that a properly financed European soil awareness programme would be needed, with a very high ambitious level. AJ maintains close relationships with ENSA and ELSA, RB proposes to include ICLEI.

A concept for a ESP Pillar 2 WG still needs more consideration.

Pillar 3

The establishment of the Mission Board for Soil Health and Food demonstrates the importance of soils in research and the attention that soils receive in environmental and food-related policies. The mission board is supported by the SMS project (Soil Mission Support), of which the ESP-Pillar 3 co-chair (GT) is a member. The objective is to improve the coordination of research and innovation on soil and land management in support of the Horizon Europe research programme. SMS will synthesize the state-of-the-art in soil research, existing knowledge gaps, and will identify priority areas in soil and land management related research.

At global level, ReSOIL (online database of soil science) will identify soil research partners, facilities and infrastructure. For that, a questionnaire has been launched. An overview of the European soil research infrastructure could be quite valuable. Once the results of the GSP secretariat's initiative become available, Pillar 3 will discuss the needs to follow up within the ESP.

Currently, the Pillar 3 WG has not been kicked off, only few members were nominated. At the same time, important coordination activities are happening in the EJP Soil, the CIRCASA soil research consortium, and the German BonaRes programme. Since there are likely to be others, the role for the ESP would be an umbrella role, offering opportunity to build (or use) a tool for the exchange of research results and ideas across projects. For example, this could be a web platform to disseminate soil research results.

Pillar 4

ESP Pillar 4 is currently largely focused to follow the product needs of the GSP, collected by the Secretariat, which also provides the product specifications and trainings. The GSP soil data facility (hosted by ISRIC) is largely focused to build the global soil information system (GLOSIS).

It was discussed that it is crucially important that for data exchange, the EU members states can use INSPIRE specifications and the respective national infrastructures for data exchange. The ESP must take initiative to provide countries a platform to compare and discuss their products, and the methods, so that a) they can learn from each other, and b) a harmonized product can result for Europe. The two chairs MF and BV agreed to organize follow up workshops with Pillar 4 WG.

The ESP Pillar 4 WG contains the European members of the International Network of Soil Information Institutions (ESP-INSII), as well as any interested ESP member.

Pillar 5

Shortly before the SC meeting in November, the EUROSOLAN had met with 72 participants (European Soil Laboratory Network, 30 Sept – 2 Oct 2020). ESP members presented their experiences in national lab networks (BE and HU), as well from the private lab perspective (PT). Given that European laboratories have long standing experience with ISO and CEN standards, the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) under GLOSOLAN are followed with great interest.

Pillar 5 includes the development of an indicator system and the respective methodologies. The suggestion of the global Pillar 5, to develop a multi-domain indicator system for soil observation, has not yet been followed up. For Europe, a report by EEA is currently in preparation which provides an overview of indicators for soil monitoring, and how they can be evaluated with thresholds.

Besides EUROSOLAN, most Pillar 5 issues are covered and discussed by the INSII members. Therefore, both pillars are closely related. Harmonization of data can hardly be separated from the production process. This is also for issues related to the soil domain model (Pillar 5), which is needed to build the GLOSI infrastructure (Pillar 4).

TOP 5 Governance

A draft of a revised ESP ToR has been presented, and partially discussed. The SC members were asked to study the revised draft and send their comments back to the chair.

The SC welcomes new members:

- the co-chairs of the Pillars where wished and needed
- the representative of the Alpine Subregional partnership

The SC also agreed to follow up the recommendations of the last ESP Plenary, which is to ask a representative of the National Focal Points to become a SC member. A procedure for nomination and selection still has to be sought. Chair (RB) will follow up.

TOP 6 Implementation Plan

Currently, the global implementation plan for Pillar 4 is under discussion. RB suggested that the ESP revisits its implementation plan once there is clarity about the role of regional soil partnerships. This is likely to be impacted by the ongoing discussion about the GSP statutory role. The development of any new implementation plan needs to be prepared well, and conducted inclusively and transparently, so that the proper participation and support of action by ESP members can follow.

TOP 7 Other business:

The ESP Plenary in March will be canceled. This is partly because of COVID, partly because further guidance from the GSP stock taking exercise is needed. However, a web meeting shall be held to that all ESP members can prepare for the upcoming GSP Plenary Assembly. A meeting is also necessary do that a representative of the NFPs to the SC can be appointed.

Chair also indicated that he would intensify the search for a new ESP Secretariat. This is because the current host of the secretariat, JRC, has repeatedly indicated the temporary nature and limited capacity to provide this role.

Regarding membership in the ESP Pillar Working groups: all ESP members will be invited to confirm/name national contact points for each Pillar. ESP will ensure that the links among national and European level working groups will be efficiently built.

Agenda

ESP Steering Committee

Wednesday 18 November afternoon 14:00 – 18:00

DAY 1 - Status quo

1. Welcome / Current status of RSPs in the GSP (and developments...) **(ESP chair)**
2. Reflections on the 7th ESP meeting **(All)**
3. ITPS: current reports, work of sub-groups, ToC SWSR2025: Discussion: link to ESP Pillars, implications of the global Symposia for ESP **(ITPS chair)**
4. Pillars: Observations, tasks, reflections, ideas, expectations **(Pillar chairs and co-chairs)**

Thursday 19 November morning 09:00 – 13:00

Day 2 - Action

5. Governance - Revision ESP ToR (to be endorsed at the next ESP meeting/or written consultation):
 - Roles: Pillars **(chairs, co-chairs, WGs)**
 - Roles: Sub-RSPs **(Eurasia, Alpine, Pyrenean, other?)**
 - Roles: NFP, and its representative in the SC **(selection procedure)**
 - Roles: Chair, co-chair, SC composition, ESP members **(Co-Chair selection procedure; I would favour that the Co-chair is the NFP in the SC)**
 - Roles: Other related to Pillars: Pillar 1: ENRD, Fertilizers Europe, Copa-Cogeca; Pillar 2: ENSA, ELO; Pillar 3: ECSSS, Mission Board, SoilVer, EIP Agri; Pillar 4: ESDAC/EUSO, ISRIC; Pillar 5: CEN/ISO)
6. Implementation Plan - Observations, needs, relationship to global plans, European perspective, analysis of current plan
7. Other business: ESP meetings (Format), Quarterly letter of the Chair (future: Newsletter?), Website (link to RSP, template needed), World Soil Day