

Informal Consultation for Europe and Central Asia
Budapest, 16–17 May 2019
Minutes¹ by the FAO Regional Office for Europe
and Central Asia (REU) Secretariat

Introduction

The FAO Informal Consultation (IC) for Europe and Central Asia 2019 has brought together 34 member countries from the region and 14 non-state actors, including from civil society organizations (CSOs) and the private sector, resulting in a total of 76 participants.

In line with the overall objective, the IC provided a platform for interactions of Members and non-state actors between the sessions of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) as preparation for the ERC in 2020. The IC in 2019 was organized for the seventh time thanks to the sponsorship and hosting of the Government of Hungary.

The main purposes of the Informal Consultation were:

1. to facilitate an exchange of views among all Members of the Europe and Central Asia region;
2. to inform and update the Member Countries of the region on the implementation of FAO's programme of work in the region; and
3. to review priorities in the region in preparation for the Regional Conference for Europe in 2020.

The agenda, list of participants and session background notes are available at the event's website.²

The meeting was opened by H.E. Istvan Nagy, Minister of Agriculture of Hungary, Mr Vladimir Rakhmanin, FAO Assistant Director General and Regional Representative for Europe and Central Asia, and Ms Aulikki Hulmi, Chair of the European Regional Group of FAO Member Countries and Deputy Permanent Representative of Finland to FAO.

Mr Nagy welcomed the seventh Informal Consultation organized in Hungary since 2010 and emphasized its importance in exchanging views among Member States. Mr Nagy welcomed Hungary's cooperation with FAO in supporting the countries of the region in developing their agrifood sectors, including providing scholarships to Hungarian universities and technical workshops, exchanges and training programmes. Considering the key topics of the Consultation, the Minister emphasized the role of family farming in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the sustainable management of natural resources.

Mr Vladimir Rakhmanin expressed his gratitude to the Government of Hungary for the continuous collaboration in organizing the Informal Consultations since their inception in 2010 and overall support for the work of the Regional Office. Mr Rakhmanin noted that these Consultations provide great opportunity for deeper and further interaction with FAO's partners on a two-year basis. He stressed that the informal character of the event was one of FAO's

¹ Disclaimer: These minutes and notes have been prepared by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) Secretariat and reflect the main points of Informal Consultation debates as presented and discussed during the sessions. They serve as aide-memoire and are not intended to be considered as conclusions or decisions, taking the informal character of the meeting into consideration. They are not in any way formal statements or programme recommendations and are intended only as a pro memoria record of the Consultation.

² <http://www.fao.org/europe/events/detail-events/en/c/1181914/>

particular efforts in adjusting its working modalities for an integrated, horizontal approach, with a strong focus on discussions of working groups. Mr Rakhmanin highlighted key topics of the agenda, including reviewing the implementation of the SDGs and the implications of the United Nations reform on FAO's work in the region.

Ms Aulikki Hulmi welcomed the Regional Consultation as an excellent platform for member countries' interaction on the priorities and challenges in the region. She mentioned that the region of Europe and Central Asia faces similar challenges as FAO globally, having to deal with a high level of diversity among the countries related to economic and natural conditions. Ms Hulmi highlighted FAO's efforts in the region to support work related to food systems and nutrition as well as to ensure consistent linkage to the Sustainable Development Goals. She stressed the importance of the Informal Consultation as a platform to allow Member States to discuss the work plan and budget for the next biennium as preparation for the next Regional Conference.

Session 2: Implementation of FAO's work in the region in 2018–2019, with a focus on the Regional Initiatives' contribution to SDGs – key challenges and opportunities³

Mr Raimund Jehle, Regional Programme Leader for Europe and Central Asia, introduced Session 2 regarding the implementation of the work in the region in 2018–2019. He presented examples of results achieved within the three ongoing Regional Initiatives (IC/19/4), such as increased knowledge on the needs and constraints of smallholders and family farms through conducted country studies (Regional Initiative 1); enhanced national capacities for accession to the World Trade Organization, including meeting international sanitary and phytosanitary standards (Regional Initiative 2); and improved access of countries to climate financing instruments, such as the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility (Regional Initiative 3).

In addition, he highlighted, as per related background notes, the Regional Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan (IC/19/5) as well as the regional strategies for climate finance flow in Europe and Central Asia (GCF and GEF-7) (IC/19/6). He mentioned the lessons learned from implementing the regional work programme, including the high demand for FAO's work and support related to climate change and implementation of SDGs and, accordingly, FAO's increased efforts in these fields. The participants appreciated the report and expressed the following points:

- Welcomed FAO's Regional Gender Equality Strategy and related work and noted the importance of integrating comprehensive gender policy into FAO's work, including the use of a gender-transformative approach at national level that is able to change rural women's future;
- Welcomed FAO's work under the Regional Initiatives, highlighting the important role of Regional Initiative 1 on empowering smallholders and family farms in the region;
- Encouraged expanded cooperation between FAO and Member States at all levels and proposed to have the next Regional Conference for Europe in 2020 in Uzbekistan;
- Emphasized the relevance of FAO's cross-cutting fields on gender, nutrition and climate change, including the promotion of accession to climate finance measures as well as the

³ Background documents: [IC/19/4](#) - Update on the Implementation of the PWB 2018-19; [IC/19/5](#) - Regional Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan (2019–2022) Summary Note; and [IC/19/6](#) - FAO regional strategies for climate finance flow in Europe and Central Asia: GCF and GEF-7.

role of the Regional Initiatives in promoting these fields in the context of achieving the SDGs;

- Appreciated the improved relations among civil society organizations (CSOs), governments and FAO, and expressed the will to achieve the objectives of CSOs linked to FAO's mandate;
- Emphasized the importance of assessing the impact of FAO's work and the provision of evidence of results stemming from FAO activities; and
- Noted the results in the field of resource mobilization.

Session 3: Working groups review of the work programme in the region for 2020–2021, in light of the regional priorities⁴

The main purpose of the session was to allow a close interaction and discussion of the participants regarding the future direction of work in the region based on the background information provided by the secretariat. For this purpose, member countries, civil society organizations, private sector participants and others were divided into four breakout groups, were facilitated by Regional Office staff, along four thematic areas:

1. How to enhance support to smallholders and family farms?
2. How to transition to more inclusive and efficient agrifood systems and increase market access?
3. How to build resilience of sustainable food systems to climate change and disasters caused by natural hazards?
4. How to address food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 2?

The discussion and feedbacks are summarized below and will be considered when reviewing the work programme of the region in preparation for the Regional Conference for Europe in 2020.

How to enhance support to smallholders and family farms?

The main objective of the group work was to promote exchanges in respect to the main technical areas of Regional Initiative 1 on Empowering smallholders and family farms for improved rural livelihoods and poverty reduction, to guide its programme of work for 2020–2021, and to identify ways to strengthen partnerships at both national and regional levels. The participants welcomed FAO's work under Regional Initiative 1, highlighting its important role in the region. The main discussion points included the following:

- There is a growing need to support smallholders and family farms in the region. It is in the political agenda of many countries.
- The United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019–2028 provides an excellent opportunity to further enhance support for the development of small farms and for mobilizing additional resources.

⁴ Background document: [IC/19/7](#) - Review of the FAO programmatic framework for 2020–2021 for Europe and Central Asia.

- The relevance of the two components of the Regional Initiative on i) policy development and innovative practices for increased sustainable agricultural production and ii) improvement of rural livelihoods and poverty reduction was reconfirmed.
- Land fragmentation was mentioned by several participants as a key constraint for the development of small farms. Some countries noted that up to half of the arable agricultural land is unutilized as a result of a high level of land fragmentation, low profitability of agriculture, the effects of climate change, and more. The development of local land markets needs to be supported, including through land consolidation instruments fully in line with the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT).
- In the field of statistics, further support should be provided to agricultural censuses and surveys, as these are the main sources of data on smallholders. This also was an important conclusion from the country studies conducted as support to implement the Regional Initiative.⁵ Reliable data is needed for informed policy decisions.
- Cooperation with producers' organizations and associations should be enhanced. The cooperation of farmers may improve access to markets and strengthen the bargaining power of farmers; associations should be created to link with small farmers to produce high-value crops.
- Farmers often lack knowledge and technical capacity, which needs to be addressed with strengthened extension services.
- Besides integrated pest management, additional emphasis should be given on fertilizer and soil management.
- Further support for the promotion of sustainable agriculture, including climate-smart agriculture and agroecology, is important in the countries, both at policy and field level, for smallholders.
- Digitalization is key tool in sharing knowledge and developing the agriculture sector. However, it is important to ensure equal access to digital tools and to not leave anybody behind.
- Designing public policies should take place together with local communities, peasants, fisher folks, pastoralists and indigenous peoples. This is important, as their voices are often missing in the decision-making process.
- The diversification of economic activities, including short value chains but also including the diversification of income-generation activities with off-farm employment, are important to strengthen rural livelihoods.
- Government attention needs to be increased on supporting youth and empowering women and other vulnerable groups. These groups are important in maintaining the vitality of rural areas. With regards to nutrition, attention should be given to women and children as groups in risk of being food-insecure.
- Local producers should be given the possibility of participating in local public procurement opportunities, such as school food and nutrition programmes.
- As regards partnerships, the key technical fields emphasized were i) social protection, where joint programmes among UN agencies should be supported; and ii) short value chains, where partnerships among farmers and consumers should be strengthened.

⁵ <http://www.fao.org/europe/events/detail-events/en/c/1103164/>

How to transition to more inclusive and efficient agrifood systems and increase market access?

The main objective of the group work was to promote discussion and exchanges of views with respect to the main technical areas of Regional Initiative 2 on Improving agrifood trade and market integration in Europe and Central Asia, to guide its programme of work for 2020–2021, and to identify ways for strengthening partnerships at both national and regional levels. Overall, the relevance of Regional Initiative 2's scope of work across its three main components (trade agreements, global food safety and quality standards, and access to domestic and export markets and value chain development) and an increased focus on enabling more inclusive and efficient agriculture and food systems were noted. Delegates raised the following main points:

- Support should be continued to countries in increasing their knowledge of World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements and WTO accession.
- The sharing of knowledge should be continued to better understand the different trade and sanitary and phytosanitary standards requirements for food and agriculture products in established and emerging markets.
- Facilitating export opportunities is important, as is ensuring transparent approaches to assess compliance with trade agreements.
- Recognizing that countries may be pursuing different trading agreements concurrently, countries should be supported in understanding the international commitments under different trade agreements and how bilateral discussions may affect or can be aligned with one another.
- The importance and need for global standards and for countries to align national standards with the standards of the Codex Alimentarius, the International Plant Protection Convention, and World Organisation for Animal Health was underlined, and FAO's role and support in this area was noted.
- Specific challenges of countries regarding export and access to markets due to non-compliance with sanitary and phytosanitary standards and controls were noted. Demonstrating compliance and access to certification was highlighted as a challenge to smallholders.
- Due attention to transboundary, endemic and emerging diseases is required to safeguard animal and plant health and protection of the food and agriculture system.
- Ensuring food safety requirements for smallholders and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is appropriate and should enable, not hinder, compliance and, as a result, enhance access to markets.
- Appreciation was highlighted for FAO's work on antimicrobial resistance and the importance of building capacity and awareness of farmers, veterinarians and doctors on the prudent use of antimicrobials and addressing antimicrobial resistance.
- More emphasis should be given to sustainable value chains, geographical indications and organic products.
- Promote domestic markets, short value chains and the diversification of markets to avoid over-reliance on a few products or commodities.
- Provide more data and evidence for smallholders to identify potential markets, plan their production and sales, meet consumers' needs and increase farmers' incomes and livelihoods.

- Support the work on market information systems (price monitoring systems in particular) to help smallholders and consumers be informed on the market situation and be better protected against both price shocks and volatility.
- Support the prevention of food loss and waste, including addressing the root causes of food loss and waste and through the raising of awareness and the development of capacity among small-scale food producers.
- Promote sustainable food systems to ensure safe and healthy food, environmental protection, diverse markets, and producer and consumer awareness.
- Support for producer organizations should be emphasized as an important issue to help smallholders get organized, have a collective voice, increase access to knowledge and capacities, and comply with standards. Support should be given to local and territorial markets to ensure that smallholders have local markets to sell their products. Additionally, data and evidence should be gathered on the relevance of local and territorial markets, consumers and producers should be connected, and urban and rural linkages should be strengthened.
- In the context of partnerships, the range of knowledge brokers needs to be recognized, including government, academia, civil society organizations and producers' associations at the country level, along with the need to facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement.
- Ensure work with local authorities and involve local and community level stakeholders.
- The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia has an important role to play at the regional level, in addition to country-level work, in sharing knowledge and raising awareness on key agriculture and sustainable development issues. In this context, the promotion – at both regional and country levels – of the Committee on Food Security (CFS) guidelines was suggested, such as the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems and Connecting Smallholders to Markets.

How to build the resilience of sustainable food systems to climate change and disasters caused by natural hazards?

The main objective of the group work was to promote exchanges with respect to the main technical areas of Regional Initiative 3 on sustainable natural resources management under a changing climate, to guide its programme of work for 2020–2021, and to identify ways to strengthen partnerships at both national and regional levels. Group discussions confirmed that sustainable, nature-based solutions, climate and natural resources governance, and adaptation and disaster risk reduction are relevant for the next biennium as working areas of Regional Initiative 3. Technical priorities under these areas emphasized during the discussions included the following:

- There is a need to address challenges related to natural resources under a changing climate, as ecosystem services and natural resources provide the basis for agriculture and food production.
- There are still not enough data and information about the specificities of the impacts of climate change at regional level; therefore, countries highlighted the need to strengthen evidence-based decision-making processes related to new policies and strategic guidance on sustainable natural resources management and climate change mitigation and adaptation. In this regard, the importance of data collection was highlighted by all countries, as currently there is progress on the SDG nationalization process in the region,

and countries will be submitting their updated nationally determined contributions by 2020 and every five years thereafter.

- Agro-environmental policies should be designed to support the countries in addressing and harmonizing their actions on climate change adaptation and sustainable agricultural production including forestry.
- The importance of agroecology was emphasized and was identified as one of the possible ways to support adaptation in the context of a changing climate.
- There is a growing need to support the countries in safeguarding their biodiversity (plant, animal and forest) to strengthen their resilience in climate change conditions. The importance of local varieties, local production and dynamic conservation (Globally Important Agriculture Heritage Systems) was highlighted.
- For keeping local varieties and strengthening the resilience and food security of the region, the development of national/local seed systems was emphasized.
- Member States also highlighted the importance of sustainable aquaculture in efforts to adapt to and mitigate climate change.
- Issues related to forest management (afforestation, greenhouse gas emissions, and others) and water management (water scarcity, water resources, cross-country water management, and others) should be more strongly emphasized.
- It is important to raise awareness among consumers in order to help them shift to more sustainable choices and to promote the diversification of food and food production.
- The water-energy-food nexus should be enhanced together with forestry, agriculture, land and water governance.
- With regard to partnerships, it was highlighted that broad participation of various stakeholders is needed in order to tackle climate change; these would include civil society organizations, academia, governments, parliamentarians and the private sector.

How to address food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 2?

The main objective of the group work was to facilitate views from the participants related to the programmatic scope of food security and nutrition in the region as guidance for FAO's programme of work across the region for 2020–2021 and to identify ways to strengthen partnerships at both national and regional levels. The issue of food security and nutrition is one of the four regional priorities and is addressed as a cross-cutting issue within the ongoing three Regional Initiatives.

Within Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2, work on eradicating undernutrition has been progressing in recent years in the Europe and Central Asia region, but other types of malnutrition, such as micronutrient deficiency and overweight, still represent a challenge. The working group discussions focused on the challenges of our current food systems in ensuring healthy and diversified diets for all, including for the most vulnerable populations. The underlying causes of malnutrition and the roles and responsibilities of governments and FAO to effectively address these challenges were also discussed. The issues discussed by the participants were:

- There is a need to further raise awareness on the importance of eradicating all forms of malnutrition, particularly overweight and obesity, with country-specific evidence and data.

- There is a need to further strengthen the capacities of national authorities on nutrition-related evidence-building in the following areas:
 - dietary change and food system analysis, to identify the main underlying causes of malnutrition;
 - the true cost of diets⁶ (including the health, economic, social and environmental impacts of unhealthy diets);
 - the social and economic burdens of malnutrition and diet-related (preventable) non-communicable-diseases; and
 - return on investment in nutrition (comparison of the benefit of investment in nutrition and the cost of investment) to advocate the economic efficiency of nutrition interventions.
- The role of food marketing and trade also was discussed, and the participants agreed that these are major factors that influence the dietary transition and the health status of the population in many countries. There is a need for capacity development on data collection and analysis to better understand the impact of trade and marketing policies (such as tariffs and food taxes/subsidies).
- It is important to enhance support for improving the livelihoods of vulnerable populations through various nutrition-sensitive social protection schemes to tackle access to nutritious food and to food and nutrition knowledge and practices. The following examples were discussed:
 - school food and nutrition programmes, combined with food and nutrition education; and
 - social protection schemes targeting pregnant women and mothers of young children.
- Various potentials of integrated school food and nutrition programmes were discussed. These play a potential role in enhancing food- and nutrition-related knowledge and practices of children, as well as their understanding of local food culture.
- Suggestions were made to promote local procurement schemes for government-run services and institutions. Opportunities should be provided to local small-scale producers to benefit from such local procurement programmes. However, it was also noted that producers' associations and cooperatives of smallholders would need to be involved, and capacity development opportunities should be provided to adopt good agricultural hygienic practices. The development of short value chains of nutritious food commodities can improve the sustainability of food systems and provide benefits for both producers and consumers.
- Smallholder farmers and small-scale food producers can contribute to improving the availability of fresh, diversified and nutritious products, but they need to be empowered to be able to produce high-quality and safe food. The development of quality-linked certification schemes (such as organic certification or geographical indicators) are excellent tools to improve the market access of local, traditional and high-quality products.
- Multi-sectoral/disciplinary collaboration is key to tackling the current problems of food insecurity and malnutrition. There is a need to establish a framework for collaboration on a national level (for example, a specialized agency on food security and nutrition, an independent institute on nutrition, a national committee or task force).

⁶ True Cost Accounting in food and agriculture is a currently evolving method for assessing the true costs and benefits of different food production systems with implications for everyone.

- Because consumer choice has a relevant impact on dietary patterns, building partnerships among the government, civil society organizations, businesses and consumers are key to shaping dietary habits and promoting the consumption of healthy and nutritious food (establishing national committees to develop nutrition guidelines, for example).
- The development of regional, food-based dietary guidelines was considered an excellent opportunity for technical cooperation among neighbouring countries (for example, the Nordic food-based dietary guidelines).

Session 4: Regional Technical Commissions' contribution to the regional priorities⁷

Chairs and Secretaries of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA), the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC), the Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission (CACFISH), the European Forestry Commission (EFC) and the European Commission for the Control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (EuFMD), in the form of a panel discussion, shared the main priorities of the commissions, their linkage with the overall programming in the region, and their contributions to Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Commissions shared their proposals for how to enhance collaboration among the various Commissions and the way forward to facilitate exchanges between Commissions in order to better coordinate input to the Regional Conference for Europe. The main discussion points were the following:

- Most of the Commissions have a long history, dating back even to 1954 (EuFMD) or 1949 (ECA), and they have gone through various phases of evolution with the aim of addressing the needs of the Member States.
- In addition to the Commissions' technical focus, the panel identified areas of synergies and greater collaboration, in particular for addressing cross-cutting issues such as sustainability, natural resources management, climate change adaptation and mitigation, prevention of biodiversity loss, and challenges of smallholders, among others.
- The members of the panel highlighted the importance of the sharing of knowledge and experience and of the development of capacity, based on innovative approaches being implemented by Member States.
- Building private-public partnerships was indicated as one of the crucial elements for bringing together different actors to jointly tackle the challenges of the technical areas.
- The contributions towards the Regional Initiatives can be better captured in the work of the Commissions, as most of them are actively working to support smallholders and small-scale producers, the facilitation of trade, and improved management of natural resources through cooperation among relevant actors and stakeholders at national and regional levels.

Session 5: The repositioned United Nations development system in the region: implications and opportunities for FAO within the support to the Sustainable Development Goals⁸

The Secretariat presented the short background documents outlining the implications and opportunities of the United Nations reform for FAO in the region and provided an overview of

⁷ Background document: [IC/19/8](#) - Regional Technical Commissions' Contribution to the Regional Priorities.

⁸ Background documents: [IC/19/9](#) - Review the progress on FAO's support to SDG nationalization and monitoring in the region and [IC/19/10](#) - UN reform and implications for FAO in the region.

FAO's support to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) nationalization and monitoring in Europe and Central Asia. This was followed by a panel discussion with the participation of representatives of Azerbaijan, Estonia, the Netherlands and Republic of Moldova, as well as representatives of La Via Campesina and Copa Cogeca and the UN Resident Coordinator in Turkey. During the panel discussion, participants shared their views on how the achievement of the SDGs in the region can be accelerated, benefiting from the UN reform and considering the challenges ahead in agriculture. The panel discussion was structured around the following key messages:

1. Agriculture is a key sector supporting and accelerating the achievement of the SDGs, and the integration of SDG targets into national policies is important.
2. Efforts should be made to establish adequate national capacities and institutional frameworks, allowing coordination among national stakeholders to achieve the SDGs.
3. The UN reform offers opportunities to increase the impact of support and assistance, and it facilitates partnerships and cross-sectoral collaboration for the achievement of the SDGs.
4. Partnerships among state and non-state actors (civil society organizations, private sector, academia) in support of the achievement of the SDGs is increasing impacts and ownership of the process.

The main points raised at the panel include:

- When discussing the role of agriculture in the context of achieving the SDGs, consideration should be given also to consumers likewise to producers.
- Ownership and political willingness are pivotal to ensuring policy coherence in work to achieve the SDGs.
- An evidence-based approach should be strengthened in SDG work without neglecting the importance of monitoring, reporting and evaluation.
- While the importance of improving national institutional capacity is underlined, it is also noted that local authorities have important roles and influence on the achievement of the SDGs.
- Coordination for cross-sectoral work and multi-stakeholder involvement is critical to achieving the SDGs, and efforts should be made to improve national capacities for coordination.
- The UN reform brings multiple opportunities to the UN system, such as a stronger accountability framework, more coherent coordination of UN agencies and work plans, and more equal relationships among UN agencies; however, all of these are possible only with Member States' strong ownership.
- In particular, for civil society organizations, the UN reform offers increased opportunities to open dialogues with governments and other stakeholders.
- Having common values among stakeholders and partners is important for partnerships to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.
- An emphasis was put on the private sector's role in achieving the SDGs, considering that it is the only sector able to take climate actions.
- The human rights agenda should be addressed in all work towards achieving the SDGs, with a particular focus on smallholders and small-scale farmers as well as on gender equality and youth.

Session 6: Draft annotated agenda for the Forty-first Session of the European Commission on Agriculture and draft provisional annotated agenda for the Thirty-second Regional Conference for Europe⁹

Draft annotated agenda for the Forty-first Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA)

The Secretariat briefly introduced the scope and the agenda of the forthcoming Forty-first Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA), which will be held in Budapest, Hungary on 1–2 October 2019. The session will focus on plant health issues in view of the International Year of Plant Health in 2020. The Members welcomed the chosen technical focus of the ECA session and highlighted the following points during the discussion:

- Members advised to include antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in the ECA agenda, as AMR is not only an animal-health-related issue but also is connected to plant health. It could be addressed under agenda item 4.
- Members also highlighted the importance of learning from the legacy of previous International Years when focusing on a selected specific international year such as the International Year of Plant Health.
- Apart from the introduction and spread of pests into new areas, monitoring possible changes in the behaviour of already established pests that may be caused by climate change also should be considered under agenda item 4.
- Members further proposed to reflect the biennial theme of FAO during the ECA, as well to address plant health issues within the wider farming systems and to present innovations relevant to plant health and transboundary pests.
- Civil society representatives highlighted needs for a more systemic approach towards plant health issues, as part of the agricultural system, and to consider the needs and solutions of farmers, especially smallholders.
- Civil society representatives proposed and were ready to organize a side event at the session under the topic of “Agroecological food system: an innovative approach to plant health.”

Draft provisional annotated agenda for the Thirty-second Session of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC)

The Secretariat presented the draft annotated agenda for the Thirty-second Session of the ERC, including the Secretariat proposal for three topics to be considered for ministerial agenda items. In the final draft annotated agenda, there will be space for one or two proposals. The draft annotated agenda was prepared by the Secretariat based on consultations undertaken with the Executive Committee of the European Commission on Agriculture and Members from the Europe Regional Group (ERG) and Central Asian Members. Members provided the following inputs and proposals:

- Few Members expressed their specific preference from the listed topics, leaving all three presented topics supported:

⁹ Background documents: [IC/19/11](#) - Provisional Annotated Agenda, Forty-first Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA), Budapest, Hungary, 1–2 October 2019 and [IC/19/12](#) - Agenda of the Thirty-second Session of the Regional Conference for Europe.

- sustainable consumption and healthy diets in Europe and Central Asia;
- United Nations Decade of Family Farming: solutions for youth, employment and developing rural areas; and
- investing in the development of sustainable value chains: aspects of plant and animal health and food safety in Europe and Central Asia.
- Inclusion of antimicrobial resistance in the third topic in relation to animal and plant health issues was raised, should this topic be the main theme for the ERC.
- The Chair of the Europe Regional Group informed the participants that the Programme Committee, in its recent report, requested the FAO Headquarters Office of Evaluation to make available for each of the FAO Regional Conference in 2020 a regional synthesis report related to lessons learned and trends stemming from the individual country evaluations carried out in each of the Region.
- The Secretariat informed the participants that due to the late publishing of the background document, Member Countries may submit written comments via email to ERC-ECA-Secretariat@fao.org.

Additionally, the participants were informed by a representative of Uzbekistan that the Government of Uzbekistan was offering to host the Thirty-second Session of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC), to be held 5–7 May 2020.