

## **PREPARATION OF THE FORTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURE (2023)**

*(prepared by the ECA Secretariat)*

### **I. Introduction**

This document presents the second update on the preparation of the Forty-third Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA), to be held on 26-28 September 2023. The first update was presented at the 39/6 meeting of the Executive Committee of the ECA (the ExCom).<sup>1</sup>

This update presents information on the following elements:

- preparation of the draft annotated agenda for the Session
- preparation of background papers for the Session
- preparation of the call for nominations for ECA elections.

### **II. Preparation of the draft agenda of the Forty-third Session of the ECA**

The draft annotated agenda for the Session, which was presented at the 39/6 meeting of the ExCom, has been revised by REU's technical officers to include:

- the new item "FAO's response to the multiple crisis in Europe and Central Asia", suggested by the ExCom, and
- the forestry matters,<sup>2</sup> as proposed by the ExCom.

This revised version of the draft annotated agenda was shared on 4 April 2023 with the FAO Land and Water Division (NSL), for their review.

REU is also going to present the draft agenda to the Members of the region at the Informal Consultation which will be held in Budapest, Hungary on 4-5 May 2023.

The current draft annotated agenda of the Forty-third Session of the ECA is presented in Annex 1.

### **III. Preparation of the background papers**

REU has designated its relevant officers as leads for the preparation of each background paper being developed for the ECA Session. Additionally, REU has requested the NSL to lead the preparation of the introductory paper for the main technical theme. The ECA Secretariat is the lead for documents on the amendment of the Rules of Procedure of the ECA and on the ECA elections.

Moreover, the ECA Secretariat has initiated periodical monitoring of the progress in the development of the Session papers.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fao.org/3/cc5291en/cc5291en.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> 1) Agroforestry in Europe and Central Asia; 2) The role of sustainable forest management regarding multiple forest functions for ecosystems, society, food security and nutrition; 3) Forestry-agricultural linkages and best practices for the transformation to resilient and sustainable food systems in Europe and Central Asia

#### **IV. Amendment of the Rules of Procedure of the ECA**

The FAO Legal Counsel has replied to REU's request for legal opinion and advice on the proposed amendments to the Rules of Procedure. They reviewed the amendments and had no particular objections from a legal perspective. They only noted – from an editorial point of view – that the use of the term “their” is usually preferred over “his/her” for inclusion within the Organization. They further clarified that while it may be the practice to submit proposed amendments to the Director-General prior to approval by the Commission, in accordance with the procedure outlined in Rule XII.1, amendments should be first approved by a two-thirds majority of the members of the Commission and then submitted for approval of the Director-General, as indeed, the amendments enter into force upon the Director-General's approval.

#### **V. ECA elections**

The ECA Secretariat is ready to open on 28 April 2023 the call for nominations for the ECA elections. The invitation to the call will be shared with all Members of the ECA and will be accompanied by a submission form approved by the ExCom. The deadline for submissions will be set for 30 June 2023.

All FAO representations in the region will be copied in the invitation.

The ExCom is invited to:

- review, discuss and provide comments, as needed, to the draft annotated agenda for the Forty-third Session of the ECA, as presented in Annex 1
- note the other preparations of the Forty-third Session of the ECA, and provide comments as needed.

## Annex 1. Draft annotated agenda for the Forty-third Session of the ECA

<b>EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURE</b>
<b>FORTY-THIRD SESSION</b>
<b>Budapest, Hungary, 26–28 September 2023</b>
<b>PROVISIONAL ANNOTATED AGENDA</b>

**I. Introductory items****1. Adoption of the agenda and the timetable****2. Election of the rapporteur(s)****II. Main technical theme:****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 and 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 is a must, and it has to be done in an integrated and trans-border way, together with sustainable land and soil management and proper governance of land tenure. The innovative perspective is to connect these topics at a higher level and have a multidisciplinary/multisectoral approach.

A regional approach for 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, promote ecosystem services, and the conservation of biodiversity in the region, allowing 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, contributing to achieve the SDGs and particularly SDG 6 and SDG 15 targets, specifically 15.3 and 6.4.

Integrated land and water resources management, as well as their governance are essential elements for the sustainable use of land and water resources, which the Commission will be invited to explore in-depth as sub-topics of the main technical theme. Each sub-topic will also consider cross-cutting aspects of the land and water nexus, in particular climate change, biodiversity, gender and food security.

**3. Integrated land and water resources management**

Land and water are essential factors for 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, reduced the availability of water for sustainable agri-food systems, affecting water, energy, food security, as well as 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, the progress in the implementation of reformed policies in the agri-food sector has been varying among the countries, as they still struggle with challenges in identifying properly functioning legal and practical settings for inter-sectoral coordination. Analysing the performance of these policies and facilitating the development of improved, integrated land and water policies in the agri-food sector will lead to the enhancement of the sustainable management of both land and water resources in the region.

Integrated land and water resources 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 resources management will consider the climate change impacts, biodiversity conservation in an integrated manner, promoting the sustainable use of natural resources, restoring ecosystems, and enhancing food security.

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

#### **4. 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.<sup>3</sup> Under this sub-topic, the Commission is invited to explore how land governance and land tenure can be enhanced as part of integrated approach to 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 multi-purpose 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 (LDN), the second part of this sub-topic will focus on LDN. Driven by biophysical and socio-economic factors and exacerbated by 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 the LDN targets, and for all of them the implementation of the convention still presents challenges.<sup>4</sup>

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 for monitoring the Land Degradation Neutrality in the region needs to be put in place, jointly with the strengthening of institutional capacities and designing an adequate policy framework.

Members are invited to share their experience how land governance and land tenure can contribute to the transformation of the agri-food systems in the region considering also restoration of degraded land and

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<sup>3</sup> Mukhtarova, A. (2021) 'Central Asia performance review in land governance indices and assessment frameworks', *Central Asian Journal of Water Research*, 7(2), pp. 74–96. doi: 10.29258/CAJWR/2021-R1.v7-2/74-96.eng.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unccd.int/resources/publications/land-degradation-neutrality-interventions-foster-gender-equality#:~:text=Women%20constitute%20the%20bulk%20of,agriculture%20as%20their%20primary%20livelihood.>

ensuring land degradation neutrality. Emphasis should be also given to policy recommendations supporting the sustainable land management.

## **5. Water management in Europe and Central Asia**

Water scarcity and droughts in some countries and floods and flash floods in others become a reality in the Europe and Central Asia region. In addition, uneven distribution at different scales (among regions and societal groups) provides multiple sources of tension, affecting their agri-food systems.

Improving water management requires rethinking water issues through multiple perspectives, and strategic uses of cooperative partnerships and deliberative processes, using landscape and “water-centred” management approaches. A multi-level approach may cover several levels of water management hierarchy. The aim is to manage the interdependencies between various stakeholders with the overall goal of contributing to more secure livelihoods, increased environmental sustainability, and greater social harmony, including climate change, gender and biodiversity nexus. 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,<sup>5</sup> however they still have the challenge to identify properly functioning legal and practical settings for inter-sectoral coordination and allocation of water resources at the national level.

Further enhancement of regional capacity for dialogue and exchange of experience 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 different dimensions (social/ecological/political/environmental setting) and different levels of water management (macro, meso and micro level), as well as the drivers and management practices, such as the importance of transboundary cooperation and water financing under macro level of governance, paradiplomacy under meso-level of governance, and improving water use efficiency under micro level of governance. In addition, members are also invited to share experience.

### **III. Other matters**

## **6. FAO’s response to the multiple crises in Europe and Central Asia**

The region of Europe and Central Asia has been affected by multiple crises stemming from the war in Ukraine, the effects of climate change, and most recently, the devastating earthquakes in Turkiye in early February 2023 resulting in a triple crisis in food, energy, and finance. 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, such as Central Asia, South Caucasus, Eastern Europe, Turkiye, and Western Balkans, are most affected by the multiple crises, particularly the poorest segments of the population.

In response to the multiple crises, the FAO provided support to the affected countries in the Region both in terms of short term as well as medium term measures. The Commission will be invited to assess the FAO's responses to the multiple crises in the region over the past two years and provide recommendations

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<sup>5</sup> Murat Yakubov (2022) Small Basin Governance scheme: linking water sector reforms and governance in the Aral Sea Basin, *International Journal of Water Resources Development*, 38:5, 783-814, DOI: [10.1080/07900627.2021.1926936](https://doi.org/10.1080/07900627.2021.1926936)

for improving our interventions to better serve the needs of the affected countries and strengthen their resilience.

## **7. Advancing gender equality in the region: update on the progress made**

The agenda item is a standing item for all sessions of the ECA. 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 be presented to the Members that summarizes key gender and agriculture issues and findings of the review of the country gender assessments conducted in the countries of the region over the past two years, reflecting regional trends and the situation of rural women due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Members will be invited to review the efforts of FAO addressing gender equality in the region and present their views and share country practices and cases regarding the mainstreaming of gender concerns in agriculture, food security and addressing malnutrition in their respective countries.

## **8. 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 ECA (19–21 January 2022), REU will present an update on recent activities carried out by FAO in Europe and Central Asia, relating to the implementation of the recommendations. The Commission will be invited to note the report and provide comments as deemed appropriate.

## **9. Amendment of the Rules of Procedure of the ECA**

In line with Rule XII of the Rules of Procedure of the ECA (RoP), the Commission will be invited to consider the amendments to the RoP, as presented in the respective Session document. The amendments are aiming at making sure that the provisions of the RoP fully respect the FAO gender equality policies, at strengthening the provisions on replacement of outgoing members of the Committee, and at establishing a clear provision on quorum for taking decisions by the Executive Committee.

## **10. 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 ECA, 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.

## **11. Any other business**

## **12. Date and place of the Forty-fourth Session of the ECA**

## **13. Review and adoption of the report of the Session**

## **14. Closing of the Session**