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منظمة  
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# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR EUROPE

## Thirty-first Session

Voronezh, Russian Federation, 16-18 May 2018

### Statement by the Chairperson of the 30th Session of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC)

**Chairperson,  
Ministers,  
Director-General,  
Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council,  
Chair of the Committee on World Food Security,  
Excellencies,  
Monsignore,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

1. I would like to start by thanking the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government and the people of Voronezh for their generous hospitality. It is my privilege to report about the outcomes of the 30th Session of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) held in Antalya, Turkey, from 4 to 6 May 2016.
2. In doing so I want to enhance continuity between subsequent European Regional Conferences with a view to sharpening the focus of FAO's work in our region.
3. The ERC at the 30th Session made important recommendations under Programme and Budget matters, which were reported to the 154th Session of the FAO Council, held in June 2016. Council endorsed all our recommendations.
4. In the debate on the **priorities for FAO work in the region**, ERC noted the trends in the region concerning rural poverty and migration, farm structure, sustainability of food production and food systems, nutrition, and agricultural trade policy. With regard to agricultural trade policy, the Conference supported the alignment of trade and sanitary and phytosanitary policies to meet World Trade Organization commitments.
5. The Regional Conference further underlined the need for continuity in the strategic direction of the Organization and the importance of taking into consideration the trends and roles of fisheries and

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ERC31

forestry sectors, particularly their contribution to sustainable management of natural resources and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

6. It also agreed that recent important global developments will frame national and regional action and FAO work in food and agriculture in the future, including the SDGs, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Rome Declaration on Nutrition and the Second International Conference on Nutrition Framework for Action, as well as the outcome of the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

7. With regard to the **Decentralized Offices Network**, the ERC recommended maintaining the location of the Regional and Subregional Offices and suggested that the office in Uzbekistan be upgraded on a budget-neutral basis.

8. Additionally, the Conference welcomed the announcement that the Liaison Office in Brussels is to play a more active role in the relationship with the European Union. It also noted the clarification on the liaison function of the Moscow Office with regard to regional institutions located nearby, as well as clarification on the funding of FAO representatives in partnership and liaison offices, which will not come from assessed contributions of Members.

9. Regarding the **Results from the implementation of the Programme of Work and Budget 2014–15 and update on the implementation of the PWB 2016–17**, the Conference welcomed the (envisaged at the time and since completed) independent assessment of the technical capacity of the Organization. At the same time, it urged the Secretariat to consider the maintenance of technical capacity of the FAO headquarters as a guiding principle for planning staff allocation.

10. The Regional Conference supported the adjustments to the Regional Initiatives for the 2016–17 biennium to bring greater focus to FAO work on:

- a) empowering smallholders and family farms in Europe and Central Asia; and
- b) agrifood trade and market integration in Europe and Central Asia, as well as focusing attention on strengthening food security and nutrition, natural resource management including fisheries and forestry, and control of animal and plant pests and diseases and food safety hazards.

11. The Regional Conference also endorsed its **Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW) 2016–19** and accepted that the reports from the two regional commissions, the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission and the European Forestry Commission, become an integral part of the ERC.

12. The Regional Conference also noted that the initiative on the establishment of a Eurasian Soil Commission should be reconsidered in view of the objective of restricting the number of Article VI and Article XIV bodies, and avoiding duplication of work.

13. The ERC noted under the item on **The Sustainable Development Goals and their implications for agriculture and rural development** in the Europe and Central Asia region the importance of collaboration among Members in the implementation of 2030 Agenda and the role of the Regional Conference in this context. The ERC also underlined that agriculture, fisheries and forestry play a crucial role in contributing to the achievement of the SDGs, as well as to climate-change adaptation and mitigation, and stressed the responsibility of all actors along the food chain, including farmers, retailers and policy-makers.

14. Regarding the **agenda item on Pulses** for improving balanced nutrition and healthy food systems in Europe and Central Asia, the Regional Conference underscored the multiple benefits of pulses and their contributions to sustainable agriculture, nutrition and human health and underlined the environmental benefits of growing pulses and their role in maintaining healthy soils as well as their contribution in lowering the carbon footprint.

15. Finally, the Regional Conference expressed strong support for Slovenia's initiative to declare 20 May as "World Bee Day," which meanwhile has been implemented.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

16. I am pleased to report that the 40th Session of the FAO Conference held in July 2017, at which the ERC recommendations related to Global Policy and Regulatory Matters were presented, endorsed the report of the 30th ERC Session and took note of the recommendations as presented.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

17. With this view back to the previous regional conference, let us focus on the work lying ahead of us.

18. The **Regional Conference for Europe has a crucial role to play**. Its main membership base, the Europe Regional Group (ERG), is an exceptionally strong group. It comprises 48 member states plus the European Union, which puts it on par with the African Group and its 49 member states.

19. At the same time, members of the Europe Regional Group provide more than 37 percent of FAO's assessed contributions and close to half of all voluntary contributions to FAO.

20. We are all aware that the Europe Regional Group is a rather **heterogeneous regional group** in many aspects: gross domestic product per capita, size, importance of agriculture sector, etc. Finding a common identity is a big challenge.

21. Therefore, we should all be pleased that the Europe Regional Group has equipped itself with a **well-functioning rotation scheme** for Council membership that balances well the interests of all members of the region and accommodates well the new members who joined FAO and the region after 1990. This rotation scheme has proven to function smoothly and excels in terms of fairness, predictability and transparency. What I really appreciate most is the fact that it allows even the smallest members of the region to sit on the Council, exercise their rights as members, sense ownership with regard to FAO, and strengthen the region's identity. Other regions might find other solutions, but for ERG, this rotation scheme is working well.

22. The **Region has a lot to contribute to FAO's work**. This is not only reflected in its huge financial support but also in terms of relevant know-how, sound policies and proven solutions. Also, this conference has a crucial role to play. It falls upon us to make sure that this Conference comes up with clear and substantial decisions that find their work into the FAO Council and FAO Conference.

23. Therefore we might also want to take a moment and reflect on the way we do things here in the region. We have had discussions in Rome about the working methods of the Council. We should also reflect on **working methods of the Regional Conference** so as to live up to the challenge of Agenda 2030 that requires us to change the way we do things. Let us have lively debates, talk about substance and come to meaningful conclusions.

24. This is important for the region and for FAO. **ERG as a region does perhaps not always live up to its own potential** and its own expectations within FAO. Let us make best use of this Regional Conference and give the regional perspective a strong push. The Region is used to tackling the big global challenges. Let us not forget: We have a couple of areas and countries in our own region where a lot of activities are undertaken by FAO, such as Central Asia, the Caucasus region and also the Balkans.

25. At the same time, we should as a region continue to be engaged in a meaningful dialogue with other regions. Such an outreach can help in finding common ground on critical issues before meetings

of the governing bodies. Let us not forget: **It is us, the member states, who bear responsibility for the success but also for shortcomings of this organization.**

26. In conclusion, I would like to **thank our successive chairs of the Europe Regional Group** and, in particular, the present chair, Loreta Malcienė of Lithuania, and Gunnvör Berge of Norway, for the excellent work they are doing.

27. Thank you.