

**Report of the**

**Thirty-second Session of the**  
**European Commission on Agriculture (ECA)**

**Rome, Italy, 7-8 March 2002**

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
Rome, 2002

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1. The Thirty-second Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA) was held in FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy from 7 to 8 March 2002 under the Chairmanship of Mr Harald Hildebrand (Germany).
2. The List of Participants is given in Appendix A to this Report.

## **OPENING OF THE SESSION**

3. The Chairperson opened the Session and informed the participants that the Session was taking place within the context of a revised mandate. The Chairperson outlined that the revised mandate was now geared towards reviewing technical aspects of importance to European agriculture and rural development, and to submit the outcome of discussions and recommendations to the FAO European Regional Conference.
4. On behalf of FAO, Ms Claude Forthomme, Regional Representative for Europe, welcomed the participants and underlined the revised mandate for the ECA and its new role in the framework of the European Regional Conference.

## **ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND TIMETABLE**

5. The Commission adopted its Agenda, as given in the Appendix B to this report, and the revised Timetable for the session.

## **APPOINTMENT OF RAPPORTEUR**

6. Mr F. Montanaro Mifsud (Malta) was appointed Rapporteur of the Session.

## **SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF LAND AND WATER RESOURCES: COMBATING DESERTIFICATION AND PREVENTION OF LAND**

7. The Item was introduced by Mr El Hadji Sène, Director of the Forest Resources Division and Chair of the IDWG on Desertification, who provided an overview on the convention to combat desertification and drought (UNCCD) and its application in Europe. He explained the major causes and effects of desertification in Europe, giving particular attention to the situation in Annex IV and Annex V countries. He highlighted policies, strategies and approaches to combat land degradation and desertification. He referred to possible FAO support to priority activities to combat desertification and elements for possible recommendations by the Commission.

8. During the discussion, Member Nations:
  - (a) recognised that land desertification and degradation should be understood as complex issues and that socio-economic factors should also be considered. Land and soil constitute the most obvious natural resource for human societies, serving as a substrate for agriculture, housing, water, biological diversity and raw materials among others;
  - (b) emphasised that more integrated and coherent action to combat land degradation and desertification was necessary on the part of governments;
  - (c) stressed that to prevent soil and land cover damage, the three UN Conventions on climate change, biological diversity and desertification (UNFCCC, UNCBD and UNCCD) should be implemented under an integrated approach as the most effective way of mainstreaming environmental considerations into development agendas, including the consideration of the results and proposals of the international policy dialogue of the UN Forestry Forum;
  - (d) highlighted that land degradation was not only limited to Mediterranean countries, but also affected northern and Central European Countries and that action and effective dialogue on land degradation issues are taking place in these countries in the context of framing agriculture policy; it was noted that many countries of Central Europe were affected and should be considered in any regional programme;
  - (e) underlined that many significant linkages existed between the objectives of the UNCCD, those of EC development cooperation and the FAO overall activities to combat desertification, not solely in the European region, but also in other areas of the world severely affected by land degradation such as ACP countries, Latin America, Asia and the Southern Mediterranean Basin;
  - (f) called for National Action Plans essential to the implementation of UNCCD to be developed and implemented in countries affected by desertification and land degradation both Annex IV and Annex V countries;
  - (g) called for provision of training and capacity building in member countries for the implementation of the Convention and respective National Action Plan;
  - (h) noted experience gained by some countries in conservation agriculture and minimum tillage which had some interesting potential for land degradation control, and emphasised that further research and new developments on the engineering side were necessary. The EC research programmes related to land degradation/desertification in the 5<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme or future activities under the 6<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme could represent a way of collaboration between the EC and FAO, in particular in the Mediterranean basin in support to the UNCCD.
  - (i) indicated that forest fires were among the main causes of land degradation and soil losses, and that legislation to prevent them and discourage any profit accruing from illegal speculation involving fire was necessary; urged that cooperation between countries, organizations and NGOs be strengthened in order to achieve synergies, as well as to improve monitoring;
  - (j) encouraged the existing collaboration of FAO and the UNCCD, particularly in the context of Annex IV of the Convention for the European Region, and observed that thematic networks being implemented in the Annex IV countries could also

be complemented and extended by FAO to other Mediterranean and Annex V countries, especially for conservation projects;

- (k) encouraged a reinforcement of the *Silva Mediterranea* network using FAO as a bridge between the three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa.
9. Two Member Nations emphasised that olive farming in Southern Spain and Portugal was a well appropriated agriculture practice and did not lead to desertification and soil erosion. It was a traditional and adapted way of farming to prevent desertification even in intense modern plantations where minimum conservation measures are taken. Both delegations requested appropriate amendment of paragraph 19 in the document (ECA/02/2).
10. The Commission furthermore considered that FAO had a very important role to play in combating desertification, taking advantage of its technical experience in agricultural and forestry matters.
11. The Commission endorsed the recommendations of the document (ECA 32/02/2). In addition, it considered that besides the Mediterranean, the Balkans and the Caucasus countries, FAO should also formulate for Central European Countries a broadly-based regional umbrella project to strengthen national efforts to combat land degradation and the effects of drought in cooperation with interested agencies.
12. The Commission forwarded the following recommendations to the 23<sup>rd</sup> FAO Regional Conference for Europe:
- (i) FAO should be ready to assist those countries needing advice in the formulation and implementation of their NAPs, and should also provide assistance to countries in the Region which need guidance in order to start pilot activities and demonstration projects in affected areas, taking into account approaches, successful techniques and best practices, and building on the experience obtained in the Region;
  - (ii) FAO should actively follow-up the recommendations of the Fire Action Plan, and in particular foster the establishment of fire agreements, establishing partnerships between countries in the prevention and combat of wild forest fires;
  - (iii) As reflected in some of the reports from European countries to COP-4, there is need for external assistance in establishing and implementing state-of-art monitoring and information systems on desertification. The project on Land Degradation Assessment (LADA), being implemented by FAO in cooperation with the UNCCD Secretariat and other partners, could provide a standard approach and a common frame of reference for the assessment of desertification, as a step forward in determining the real extent and the magnitude of biophysical impacts of desertification processes;
  - (iv) Information systems and clearing houses are most helpful for the definition of common strategies and for technical and scientific co-operation. Among the various potential areas, Annex IV countries have proposed the creation of a network to gather, evaluate and disseminate information about traditional knowledge and practices for safeguarding the quality of the regional landscape. FAO, in cooperation with other partners, should assist in the development of this network to gather, evaluate and disseminate information about traditional knowledge and practices for safeguarding the quality of the regional landscape. FAO, in cooperation with other partners, should assist in the development of this

network, and in classifying and evaluating traditional knowledge, as well as innovative, environmentally- sound and cost- effective practices. The same approach should be considered for the newly agreed upon Annex V and other affected European countries.

- (v) FAO should intensify efforts to foster new approaches and strategies of Sustainable Agriculture in Europe as a major strategy to prevent, and even reverse, much of the damage to land productivity that resulted from the industrialisation of agriculture in Europe. Among other areas, conservation agriculture, and water and livestock sustainable management need to be very much strengthened in cooperation with all concerned stakeholders from the public and private sectors, as well as the civil society, in the framework of revitalised environmentally-friendly policies of the European Commission.

**REPORT OF THE ECA WORKING PARTY ON WOMEN  
AND THE FAMILY IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT (WPW)  
AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER ACTIVITIES**

13. The Commission reviewed the activities of the Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development (WPW) and took note of the ripple effect of these activities.
14. Statements by a number of delegations provided an overview of activities in support of rural women. It was observed that in spite of the fact that rural women in the region represented a very heterogenous group, they had similar priorities and needs. The experiences of Cyprus, the EU member states, Ireland, Poland, Slovakia and Spain in enhancing the professional and socio-economic status of rural women, as well as the establishment of the National Observatory on Female Entrepreneurship and Work in Agriculture (ONILFA) by the Italian Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, were noted as innovative approaches to sensitising agricultural and rural development policy formulation and implementation on gender issues, and monitoring progress made. Sweden's initiative to support the organization of an International Seminar on Rural Women during WFS:fyI was welcomed.
15. The Commission agreed that promotion of equality between men and women was indispensable for sustainable development of rural areas, and stressed the need for increasing awareness on the importance of mainstreaming gender into policies, programmes and institutions.
16. The Commission emphasised the need for gender-disaggregated data collection, analysis and exchange of experiences and knowledge. It further recommended that the networking approach was a cost-effective work methodology. An appeal was made to provide more resources to develop the WPW's work programme and design a regional strategy for the implementation of the Gender and Development Plan of Action recently endorsed by the 31<sup>st</sup> Session of the FAO Conference.
17. The Commission supported the conclusions and recommendations contained in document ECA 32/02/3 (paras 25-27). It also approved the report of the Tenth Session of the WPW (4 - 7 October 2000, Innsbruck, Austria) and its Work Plan for the 2002-2003 biennium.

## **REVIEW OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE EUROPEAN SYSTEM OF COOPERATIVE RESEARCH NETWORKS IN AGRICULTURE (SCORENA)**

18. The Commission generally expressed support for the SCORENA network system, appreciating progress made and welcomed the interactive website. It noted improvements along previous recommendations made by some of the networks. It noted with regret the lack of activity of other networks and that FAO was no longer in a position to provide secretariat support to SCORENA. It also took note of the options included in the document (ECA: 32/02/4) for the continuation of SCORENA's activities.
19. The Commission was informed by the Secretariat in its presentation of the item of a third option of fully funding the previous secretariat arrangement and support to activities based on external resources.
20. The Commission also noted the position of one ERNAC member calling for a solution to the problem and the statement of the representative of CIHEAM, a partner organization in co-supporting three of the SCORENA networks, who highlighted key results of their collaboration with FAO in this area.
21. Several delegations expressed preference for the second option of future SCORENA support and indicated that the document presented required complementary information to permit a more thorough debate and consideration of all possible solutions. Therefore, the Commission requested that a revised document be prepared and that the question of support for SCORENA be submitted for decision to the 23<sup>rd</sup> FAO Regional Conference for Europe.

## **ELECTION OF MEMBERS OF THE ECA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

22. In accordance with the ECA's rules of procedure adopted at its 28<sup>th</sup> Session in 1993 and on the basis of nominations received, the Commission unanimously elected France (M Michel Thibier) to the ECA Executive Committee for a two-year term. The Commission unanimously reelected Austria (Ms Hedwig Wogerbauer), Estonia (Mr Ilmar Mandmets), Slovenia (Ms Bojana Hocevar), and Turkey (Ms S. Serap Ozcoskun) to the ECA Executive Committee for another two-year term.

## **DATE AND PLACE OF THE THIRTY-THIRD SESSION**

23. Considering the revised mandate of the Commission, one delegation proposed that the Commission should not take a decision on the date and place of its Thirty-third session; rather that this should be taken by the 23<sup>rd</sup> FAO Regional Conference for Europe. The Commission unanimously endorsed this proposal.

### **ADOPTION OF THE REPORT**

24. With some amendments, the text of the draft report was approved by the Commission.

### **CLOSURE OF THE SESSION**

25. In closing the Session, the Chairperson of the ECA warmly thanked all the participants for their contribution. In particular, he expressed appreciation to the Member Nations for their increased attendance, which augured well for the Commission's future meetings within its new role in the framework of the European Regional Conference. He welcomed the new member of the ECA Executive Committee and wished him, as well as the other members of the Committee success in their work in guiding the Commission's activities.



**APPENDIX A  
ANNEXE A  
APENDICE A**

**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS  
LISTE DES PARTICIPANTS  
ISTA DE PARTICIPANTES**

**Chairperson  
Président  
Presidente**

**Harald Hildebrand (Germany)**

**Vice-Chairperson  
Vice-Présidente  
Vicepresidente**

**Ms Mária Kadleciková (Slovakia)**

**Rapporteur**

**Francis Montanaro Mifsud (Malta)**

**Chairperson of the Working Party  
on Women and the Family  
in Rural Development**

**Ms Guri Drottning Aarnes (Norway)**

**MEMBER NATIONS IN THE REGION  
ETATS MEMBRES DE LA REGION  
ESTADOS MIEMBROS DE LA REGION**

**AUSTRIA – AUTRICHE**

Hedwig Wögerbauer  
Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry,  
Environment  
and Water Management  
Stubenring 12  
1010 Vienna  
tel: +43 1 711002812  
fax: + 43 1 711002892  
email: [hedwig.woegerbauer@bmlfuw.gv.at](mailto:hedwig.woegerbauer@bmlfuw.gv.at)

Ms. Natalie Feistritzer  
Permanent Representative of the Republic of  
Austria to FAO  
Permanent Representation of the Republic of  
Austria to FAO  
Via Giovanni Battista Pergolesi 3  
00198 Rome  
tel: 06 8440141 - 06 844014227 (direct)  
fax: 06 8543286  
e-mail: [stvrom@tr.bmlf.gv.at](mailto:stvrom@tr.bmlf.gv.at)

**AZERBAIJAN – AZERBAIDJAN – AZERBAIYÁN**

Surkhay Safarov Hasan  
Chief  
Head of Department of Scientific Research  
and Training of Staff  
Ministry of Agriculture  
U. Hajibayov st. 40  
Government House  
Baku  
tel: +994 12 935874  
fax: +994 12 930884  
e-mail: [safarov@azdata.net](mailto:safarov@azdata.net)

**BELGIUM – BELGIQUE – BÉLGICA**

Christian Monnoyer  
Ambassadeur du Royaume de Belgique  
auprès de la FAO  
Représentation permanente du Royaume de  
Belgique auprès de la FAO  
Via Omero 8  
00197 Rome  
email: [RomeFAO@diplobel.org](mailto:RomeFAO@diplobel.org)

Paul Depauw  
Conseiller agricole  
Représentant permanent suppléant du Royaume  
de Belgique auprès de la FAO  
Représentation permanente du Royaume de  
Belgique auprès de la FAO  
Via Omero 8  
00197 Rome  
email: [RomeFAO@diplobel.org](mailto:RomeFAO@diplobel.org)

Madame Astrid Castelein  
Représentation permanente du Royaume de  
Belgique  
auprès de la FAO  
Via Omero 8  
00197 Rome  
email: [RomeFAO@diplobel.org](mailto:RomeFAO@diplobel.org)

**CROATIA – CROATI – CROACIA**

Vlado Matijasic  
Counsellor  
Deputy Permanent Representative of  
the Republic of Croatia to FAO  
Embassy of the Republic of Croatia  
Via Luigi Bodio 74-76  
00191 Rome  
tel: +39 06 36307650 / 06 36307300  
fax: +39 06 36303405  
e-mail: [ambasada-rh@melink.it](mailto:ambasada-rh@melink.it)

**CYPRUS – CHYPRE – CHIPRE**

Artemis Antoniadis  
Agricultural Attaché  
Alternate Permanent Representative  
of the Republic of Cyprus to FAO  
Permanent Representation of the Republic of  
Cyprus to FAO  
Piazza Farnese 44  
Rome  
tel: +39 06 6865758  
fax: +39 06 68803756  
email: [faoprcyp@tin.it](mailto:faoprcyp@tin.it)

Ioannis Papadopoulos  
Director  
Agricultural Research Institute  
P.O. Box 22016  
1516 Nicosia

**CZECH REPUBLIC – REPUBLIQUE TCHEQUE – REPÚBLICA CHECA**

Pavel Škoda  
Counsellor  
Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic  
Embassy of the Czech Republic  
Via dei Gracchi 322  
00192 Rome  
tel: +39 06 36095758  
fax: + 39 06 3244466  
email: [rome@embassy.mzv.cz](mailto:rome@embassy.mzv.cz)

**DENMARK - DANEMARK – DINAMARCA**

Soeren Skafte  
Chairman of the Danish FAO  
National Committee  
Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries  
Holbergsgade 2 DK-1057  
Copenhagen K  
tel: +45 33 923301  
fax: +45 33 145042  
email: [ssk@fvm.dk](mailto:ssk@fvm.dk)

Jørgen Mærsk Pedersen  
Minister Counsellor  
Deputy Permanent to FAO  
Royal Danish Embassy  
Via dei Monti parioli, 50  
00197 Roma  
tel: +39 06 3200441  
fax: +39 06 3610290  
email: [romamb@um.dk](mailto:romamb@um.dk)

Ms Anne Sofie Hennings  
Attaché  
Royal Danish Embassy  
Via dei Monti parioli, 50  
00197 Roma  
tel: +39 06 3200441  
fax: +39 06 3610290  
email: [romamb@um.dk](mailto:romamb@um.dk)

Poul Chr. Hoffmann  
Head of Section  
Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries  
Holbergsgade 2  
DK – 1057 Copenhagen K  
tel: +45 33 92 20 15  
fax: +45 33 14 50 42  
e-mail: [pho@fvm.dk](mailto:pho@fvm.dk)

### **ESTONIA – ESTONIE**

Ilmar Mändmets  
Counsellor  
Permanent Representative  
of the Republic of Estonia to FAO  
Embassy of the Republic of Estonia  
Viale Liegi, 28  
00198 Rome  
tel: +39 06 8440751  
fax: +39 06 844075119  
email: [ilmar.mandmets@estemb.it](mailto:ilmar.mandmets@estemb.it)

### **EUROPEAN COMMUNITY (MEMBER ORGANIZATION) - COMMUNAUTE EUROPEENNE (ORGANISATION MEMBRE) - COMUNIDAD EUROPEA (ORGANIZACION MIEMBRO)**

Madame Vilma Du Marteau  
Ambassadeur de la Commission des  
Communautés européennes auprès de la FAO  
Délégation de la Commission des  
Communautés européennes auprès de la FAO  
Via IV Novembre 149  
00187 ROME  
tel: +39 06 6782672  
fax: +39 06 6797830  
email: [CE-deleg.ROMA@mclink.it](mailto:CE-deleg.ROMA@mclink.it)

Luca Montanarella  
Responsable de European Soil Bureau  
Centre Commun de Recherche, Ispra  
c/o Délégation de la Commission des  
Communautés européennes  
auprès de la FAO  
Via IV Novembre 149  
00187 Rome  
tel: +39 06 6782672  
fax: +39 06 6797830  
email: [CE-deleg.ROMA@mclink.it](mailto:CE-deleg.ROMA@mclink.it)

**FINLAND – FINLANDE – FINLANDIA**

Juhani Rouhiainen  
Senior Adviser, Ph.D.  
Department of Agriculture/Market Organization Unit  
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry  
Mariankatu 23, Helsinki  
P.O. Box 30, FIN-00023 Government  
Finland  
tel: +358 9 160 4279  
fax: +358 9 160 4290  
e-mail: [juhani-rouhiainen@mmm.fi](mailto:juhani-rouhiainen@mmm.fi)

**FRANCE – FRANCIA**

Michel Thibier  
Consillier Scientifique  
Représentation permanente de la France auprès  
de l'OAA  
Corso del Rinascimento 52  
00186 Rome  
tel: +39 06 68405240  
fax: +39 06 6892692  
email: [rpfrancefao@interbusiness.it](mailto:rpfrancefao@interbusiness.it)

Patrick Dehaumont  
Chargé des relations européennes  
Institut national de la recherche agronomique  
(INRA)  
147, rue de l'Université  
75338 Paris Cedex 07  
France  
tel: +33 1 42759102  
fax: +33 1 42759236  
e-mail: [dehaumont@paris.inra.fr](mailto:dehaumont@paris.inra.fr)

Philippe Ferlin  
Directeur des Relations internationales  
Institut national de la recherche agronomique  
(INRA)  
147, rue de l'Université  
75338 Paris Cedex 07  
France  
tel: +33 1 42759121  
fax: +33 1 42759377  
e-mail: [Ferlin@paris.inra.fr](mailto:Ferlin@paris.inra.fr)

Tierry Prévôt  
Direction de la production et des échanges  
internationaux  
Ministère de l'agriculture et de la pêche  
3 rue Barbet de Jouy  
75007 Paris Cédex  
tel: +33 1 49554955  
fax: +33 1 49555942

**GERMANY – ALLEMAGNE – ALEMANIA**

Erhard Schwinne  
Director-General  
Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection,  
Nutrition and Agriculture  
Wilhelm Str. 54  
10117 Berlin  
tel: + +49 30 2006-3100  
fax: +49 30 2006-3110

Harald Hidelbrand  
Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection  
Food, Agriculture and Forestry  
Wilhelmstr, 54  
10117 Berlin  
Tel: 0049 30 20063234  
Fax: 0049 30 20063237  
email: [hildebrand@bmvel.bund.de](mailto:hildebrand@bmvel.bund.de)

Guntram Freiherr von Schenck  
Ambassador of the Federal Republic of  
Germany to FAO  
Permanent Representation  
of the Federal Republic of Germany to FAO  
Via San Martino della Battaglia 4  
00185 Roma  
tel: +39 06 49213280  
fax: +39 06 49213281  
email: [mail@germanrepresentationfao.org](mailto:mail@germanrepresentationfao.org)

**GREECE – GRECE – GRECIA**

Emmanuel Manoussakis  
Minister Plenipotentiary  
Agricultural Affairs  
Alternate Permanent Representative to FAO  
Embassy of Greece  
Via Saverio Mercadante 36  
00198 Rome  
fax: +39 06 8415927  
email: [gremroma@tin.it](mailto:gremroma@tin.it)

**HUNGARY – HONGRIE – HUNGRÍA**

Ms. Mariann Kovács  
Deputy Head of Department  
Department of International Relations  
Ministry of Agriculture and Regional  
Development  
Kossuth Lajos-tér 11 1860-Budapest V  
tel: +36 1 3020000  
fax: +36 1 3020402 / 408

János Kovács  
Counsellor  
Permanent Representative of the Republic  
of Hungary to FAO  
Permanent Representation  
of the Republic of Hungary to FAO  
Via Luigi Lilio, 59 C/10  
00142 Rome  
tel: + 39 06 5190116  
fax: +39 06 5032121  
email: [hufaorep@tin.it](mailto:hufaorep@tin.it)

**ICELAND – ISLANDE – ISLANDIA**

Jón Erlingur Jónasson  
Counsellor  
Deputy Permanent Representative  
of the Republic of Iceland to FAO  
Via Nazionale 163  
00184 Rome  
tel: +39 06 69380008  
fax: +39 06 69292908  
email: [jejonasson@tin.it](mailto:jejonasson@tin.it)

**IRELAND – IRLAND – IRLANDA**

Liam FitzGerald  
Principal Officer  
Department of Agriculture, Food  
and Rural development  
Dublin 2  
tel: +353 1 6072000  
fax: +353 1 6616263  
e-mail: [infodaff@indigo.ie](mailto:infodaff@indigo.ie)

Antony Devlin  
Alternate Permanent Representative  
of Ireland to FAO  
Embassy of Ireland  
Piazza Capitelli, 3  
00186 Roma  
tel: +39 06 6979121  
fax: +39 06 6792354  
email: [registry@irishembassy.it](mailto:registry@irishembassy.it)

**ITALY – ITALIE – ITALIA**

Paolo Ducci  
Cons. Amb.  
D.G.C.E.  
Responsabile Coordinamento  
FAO/IFAD/PAM  
Ministero Affari Esteri  
Roma

Ms. Piera Marin  
Collaboratore Agrario  
Ufficio Rapporti Internazionali  
Ministero delle Politiche Agricole e Forestali  
Roma  
fax: +39 06 4884394  
email: [urifao@politicheagricole.it](mailto:urifao@politicheagricole.it)

Mr Aldo di Biagio  
Capo Ufficio relazioni Internazionali  
Ministero delle Politiche Agricole e Forestali  
Roma  
fax: +39 06 4884394  
email: [urifao@politicheagricole.it](mailto:urifao@politicheagricole.it)

Danilo Ceccarelli  
Funzionario Agrario  
D.G. delle Politiche Strutturali e Sviluppo  
Rurale  
Ministero delle Politiche Agricole e Forestali  
Roma  
fax: +39 06 4884394

Ms. Patrizia Scandella  
Istituto Sperimentale per la Nutrizione  
delle Piante  
Roma

Giorgio Cavalleri  
Dirigente  
D.G. Risorse Forestali, Montane e Idriche  
Ministero delle Politiche Agricole e Forestali  
Roma  
fax: +39 06 4884394

Ferdinando Romano  
Presidente INRAN  
Roma

Ms. Patrizia Maria Romano  
Funzionario  
Comitato Nazionale Italiano FAO  
Ministero delle Politiche Agricole e Forestali  
Roma  
fax: +39 06 4884394

Ms Chiara Morini  
Consulente DGCE  
Coordinamento FAO/PAM/IFAD  
Ministero Affari Esteri  
Roma

Ms. Rosa Francaviglia  
Istituto Sperimentale per la Nutrizione  
delle Piante  
Roma

**LITHUANIA – LITUANIE – LITUANIA**

Ms Filomena Zukauskaitė  
First Secretary  
Chargé d'Affaires a.i.  
Alternate Permanent Representative to FAO  
Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania  
Viale di Villa Grazioli 9  
00198 Rome  
tel: +39 06 8559052 / 8540482  
fax: +39 06 8559053  
e-mail: [irenau@tin.it](mailto:irenau@tin.it)

**MALTA – MALTE**

Francis Montanaro Mifsud  
Ambassador of the Republic of Malta to FAO  
Permanent Representation of the Republic of Malta to FAO  
Lungotevere Marzio 12  
00186 Rome  
tel: +39 06 6879990  
fax: +39 06 6892687  
e-mail: [francis.montanaro-mifsud@magnet.mt](mailto:francis.montanaro-mifsud@magnet.mt)

**MOLDOVA**

Ms Emilian Brenici  
Second Secretary  
Alternate Permanent Representative to FAO  
Embassy of the Republic of Moldova  
Via Montebello 8 00185 Rome  
tel: +39 06 47824400, 47881092 - 4740210  
fax: +39 06 47881092  
e-mail: [ada.mol@flashnet.it](mailto:ada.mol@flashnet.it)

**NETHERLANDS – PAYS-BAS – PAÍSES BAJOS**

Jacco Bos  
Second Secretary  
Alternate Permanent Representative  
Permanent Representation of the Kingdom of  
the Netherlands to FAO  
Via delle Terme Deciane 6  
00153 Rome  
tel: +39 06 5740306  
tel: +39 06 5744927  
email: [rof@minbuza.nl](mailto:rof@minbuza.nl)



**POLAND – POLOGNE – POLONIA**

Ms Malgorzata Piotrowska  
Secretary of the Polish  
FAO National Committee  
Deputy Director  
Foreign Relations Department  
Ministry of Agriculture and  
Rural Development  
00-930 Warsaw  
tel: +48 22 6231303  
fax: +48 22 6232750 / 1  
email: [m.piotrowska@minrol.gov.pl](mailto:m.piotrowska@minrol.gov.pl)

Romuald Szuniewicz  
Minister Plenipotentiary  
Permanent Representative of Poland to FAO  
Embassy of the Republic of Poland  
Via Pietro Paolo Rubens 20  
00197 Rome  
tel: +39 06 3224455 / 597  
fax: +39 06 3217895

**PORTUGAL**

João de Freitas  
Counsellor  
Deputy Permanent Representative to FAO  
Embassy of the Portuguese Republic  
Viale Liegi, 21  
00198 Roma  
tel: +39 06 844801  
fax: +39 06 8417404  
email: [embptrom@tin.it](mailto:embptrom@tin.it)

**ROMANIA – ROUMANIE – RUMANIA**

Ioan Pavel  
Conseiller  
Représentant permanent adjoint auprès de la FAO  
Représentation permanente de la Roumanie auprès de la FAO  
Via Nicolò Tartaglia 36  
00197 Rome  
tel: +39 06 06 8084529/423 06 8078807  
fax: +39 06 8084995  
e-mail: [amdiroma@libero.it](mailto:amdiroma@libero.it)

**SAN MARINO – SAINT-MARIN**

Ms Daniela Rotondaro  
Counsellor  
Permanent Representative of the Republic of San Marino to FAO  
Embassy of the Republic of San Marino  
Via Eleonora Duse 35  
00197 Rome  
tel: 39 06 8072511 / 5131 8074582  
email: [ambsmarino@tin.it](mailto:ambsmarino@tin.it)

**SLOVAKIA – SLOVAQUIE – ESLOVAQUIA**

Ms Mária Kadleciková  
Deputy Prime Minister  
Bratislava  
Tel: +421 87 533532 or 36743  
Fax: +421 87 32973 or 35709  
E-mail: [stefanik@astra.agroinst.sk](mailto:stefanik@astra.agroinst.sk)

Milan Pakši  
Counsellor  
Permanent Representative of the Slovak  
Republic to FAO  
Via dei Colli della Farnesina 144  
00194 Rome  
tel: +39 06 36 71 52 06  
fax: +39 06 36 71 52 66  
e-mail: [paksim@pobox.sk](mailto:paksim@pobox.sk)

Ms Zuzana Chudá  
Director  
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister  
Bratislava  
Tel: +421 87 533532 or 36743  
Fax: +421 87 32973 or 35709  
E-mail: [stefanik@astra.agroinst.sk](mailto:stefanik@astra.agroinst.sk)

Ms A. Stromčekova  
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister  
Bratislava  
Tel: +421 87 533532 or 36743  
Fax: +421 87 32973 or 35709  
E-mail: [stefanik@astra.agroinst.sk](mailto:stefanik@astra.agroinst.sk)

**SLOVENIA – SLOVENIE – ESLOVENIA**

Ms Bojana Hocevar  
Minister Plenipotentiary to FAO  
Permanent Representation of the  
Republic of Slovenia to FAO  
Via Francesco Pacelli 14/b  
00165 Rome  
tel/fax: +39 06 39366972  
email: [a.hocevar@email.telpress.it](mailto:a.hocevar@email.telpress.it)

**SPAIN – ESPAGNE – ESPAÑA**

Ernesto Ríos López  
Consejero  
Representación Permanente de España  
ante la FAO y el PMA  
Largo dei Lombardi, 21 - 00186 Roma  
tel: +39 06 6878762  
fax: +39 06 6873076  
email: [repfaoes.agri@iol.it](mailto:repfaoes.agri@iol.it)

Sra. Eva Blanco  
Unidad de Apoyo para las relaciones  
Internacionales Sectoriales  
Ministerio de Agricultura y Alimentación  
Madrid  
tel: +34 91 3475079  
fax: +34 91 3475295  
e-mail: [eva.blanco@mapya.es](mailto:eva.blanco@mapya.es)

Javier Piernavieja  
Representante Permanente adjunto de España  
ante la FAO y el PMA  
Embajada de España  
Largo dei Lombardi, 21  
00186 Roma  
tel: +39 06 6878762  
fax: +39 06 6873076  
email: [repfaoes.agri@iol.it](mailto:repfaoes.agri@iol.it)

**SWEDEN – SUEDE – SUECIA**

Ms. Cecilia Nordin Van Gansberghe  
Head of Delegation  
Deputy Director  
Ministry of Agriculture  
tel: +46 8 4051000  
fax: +46 8 206496  
e-mail: [jo.registrator@agriculture.ministry.se](mailto:jo.registrator@agriculture.ministry.se)

Ms. Pernilla Ivarsson  
Alternate, Agricultural Counsellor  
Deputy Permanent Representative of Sweden  
to FAO  
Royal Swedish Embassy  
00161 Rome  
tel: 06 441941 44194252/4 (direct)  
fax: 06 44194762  
e-mail: [pernilla.ivarsson@foreign.ministry.se](mailto:pernilla.ivarsson@foreign.ministry.se)

**SWITZERLAND – SUISSE – SUIZA**

Hubert Poffet  
Conseiller  
Représentant permanent Suppléant de la Suisse  
auprès de la FAO  
Représentation permanente de Suisse auprès de la FAO  
Viale Aventino 89  
Rome  
tel: +39 06 5756293  
fax: +39 06 5756321  
email: [hubert.poffet@roa.rep.admin.ch](mailto:hubert.poffet@roa.rep.admin.ch)

**TURKEY – TURQUIE – TURQUÍA**

Ms S. Serap Özcoskun  
Counsellor  
Alternate Permanent Representative  
of the Republic of Turkey to FAO  
Embassy of the Republic of Turkey  
Via Palestro 28  
00183 Rome  
tel: +39 06 4541547  
fax: +39 06 4941526  
email: [faodt@libero.it](mailto:faodt@libero.it)

**YUGOSLAVIA FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF – REPUBLIQUE FÉDÉRALE DE  
YUGOSLAVIE – REPÚBLICA FEDERAL DE YUGOSLAVIA**

Nenad Glišić  
Counsellor  
Alternate Permanent Representative to FAO  
Embassy of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia  
Via dei Monti Parioli 20  
00197 Rome  
tel: +39 06 3200805  
fax: +39 06 3200868  
e-mail: [amb.jug@flashnet.it](mailto:amb.jug@flashnet.it)

**OBSERVERS FROM UNITED NATIONS MEMBER STATES  
OBSERVATEURS DES ETATS MEMBRES DES NATIONS UNIES  
OBSERVADORES DE LOS ESTADOS MIEMBROS DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS**

**RUSSIAN FEDERATION  
FEDERATION DE RUSSIE  
FEDERACIÓN DE RUSIA**

Igor Shapovalov  
Minister Plenipotentiary  
Embassy of the Russian Federation  
Via Gaeta, 5  
00185 Roma  
tel: +39 06 494.1680/1/ 494.1649  
fax: + 39 06 491031  
email: [Ambrus@flashnet.it](mailto:Ambrus@flashnet.it)

Alexander Yakimushkin  
Alternate Observer of the Russian Federation to  
FAO  
Representative of the State Committee for  
Fisheries  
of the Russian Federation  
Via Luigi Magrini, 10/B33  
00146 Roma  
tel/fax: +39 06 55 92 972  
e-mail: [A.YAKIMUSHKIN@LIBERO.IT](mailto:A.YAKIMUSHKIN@LIBERO.IT)

**SOVEREIGN ORDER OF MALTA  
SOUVERAIN ORDRE DE MALTE  
ORDEN SOBERANA DE MALTA**

Giuseppe Bonanno di Linguaglossa  
Prince di Linguaglossa  
Observateur du Souverain Ordre de Malte  
auprès de la FAO  
Via Ludovico di Savoia 10, int.C  
00185 – Rome  
tel: +39 06 70491825  
fax: +39 06 7003433  
email: [dilinguaglossa@tim.it](mailto:dilinguaglossa@tim.it)

**REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND SPECIALIZED AGENCIES  
REPRESENTANTS DES NATIONS UNIES ET DES INSTITUTIONS SPÉCIALISÉES  
REPRESENTANTES DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS Y ORGANISMOS  
ESPECIALIZADOS**

**WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)  
ORGANISATION MONDIALE DE LA SANTÉ (OMS)  
ORGANIZACIÓN MUNDIAL DE LA SALUD (OMS)**

Roger Aertgeerts  
Acting Assistant Director  
Rome Operational Division  
WHO European Centre for Environment and Health  
Via Francesco Crispi 10  
00187 Rome  
tel: +39 06 487751  
fax: +39 06 4877599

**WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION(WMO)  
ORGANISATION MÉTÉOROLOGIQUE MONDIALE (OMM)  
ORGANIZACIÓN METEOROLÓGICA MUNDIAL (OMM)**

M. Ondras  
Project Manager  
Office of the Director Coordinator  
Support to Scientific Programme  
7 bis, avenue de la Paix  
CH-1211 Geneva  
Switzerland  
tel: +41 0 227308111  
fax: +41 0 227308181

**OBSERVERS FROM INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS  
OBSERVATEURS DES ORGANISATIONS INTERGOUVERNEMENTALES  
OBSERVADORES DE LAS ORGANIZACIONES INTERGUBERNAMENTALES**

**COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE  
CONSEJO DE EUROPA**

Borislav Velikov  
Member of the Parliament  
Member of the Committee  
on the Environment and  
Agriculture  
Parliamentary Assembly  
Council of Europe  
tel: +359 2 9816931  
fax: +359 2 9804048  
email: [env422@nt52.parliament.bg](mailto:env422@nt52.parliament.bg)

Antonella Cagnolati  
Head of the Secretariat of the Committee  
on the Environment and Agriculture  
Parliamentary Assembly  
Council of Europe  
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex  
tel: +33 3 88412107  
fax: +33 3 88412717  
email: [antonella.cagnolati@coe.int](mailto:antonella.cagnolati@coe.int)

**INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR ADVANCED MEDITERRANEAN AGRONOMIC  
STUDIES (ICAMAS)  
CENTRE INTERNATIONAL DE HAUTES ETUDES AGRONOMIQUES  
MEDITERRANEENNES (CIHEAM)  
CENTRO INTERNACIONAL DE ESTUDIOS SUPERIORES SOBRE AGRONOMÍA  
MEDITERRÁNEA**

Placido Plaza  
Administrateur Principal  
11, rue Newton  
75116 Paris  
tel: +33 1 53239100  
fax: +33 1 53239102  
email: [plaza@ciheam.org](mailto:plaza@ciheam.org)

**INTERNATIONAL PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES INSTITUTE (IPGRI)  
INSTITUT INTERNATIONAL DES RESSOURCES PHYTOGENETIQUES (IPGRI)  
INSTITUTO INTERNACIONAL DE RECURSOS FITOGENÉTICOS (IPGRI)**

Jozef Turok  
Regional Director and EUFORGEN Coordinator  
International Plant Genetic Resources Institute –  
IPGRI  
Via dei Tre Denari 472/a  
Rome  
Tel: (++39) 06 6118 250  
Fax: (++39) 06 6197 9661  
Email: [J.Turok@cgiar.org](mailto:J.Turok@cgiar.org)

Lorenzo Maggioni  
ECP/GR Coordinator  
International Plant Genetic Resources Institute –  
IPGRI  
Via dei Tre Denari 472/a  
Rome  
Tel: (++39) 06 6118 231  
Fax: (++39) 06 6197 9661  
Email: [l.maggioni@cgiar.org](mailto:l.maggioni@cgiar.org)

**INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE DANUBE RIVER  
(ICPDR)**

Joachim Bendow  
c/o. Ms. Silvia Kersch  
ICPDR Secretariat  
Permanent secretariat  
Vienna International Center  
P.O. Box 500  
1400 Vienna  
tel: +431 260605738  
fax: +431 260605895  
e-mail: [icpdr@unvienna.org](mailto:icpdr@unvienna.org)

**UNION DES SYLVICULTEURS DU SUD DE  
L'EUROPE**

Oscar Barreiro Mouriz  
Director  
Avda. Madariaga, No. 1  
48014 Bilbao  
Spain  
tel: +34 94 420 69 90  
fax: +34 94 476 37 15  
e-mail: [usse@usse.es](mailto:usse@usse.es)

Miguel Pérez Turrado  
Presidente Ejecutivo  
Avda. Madariaga, 1  
48014 – Bilbao  
tel: +34 94 4206990  
fax: +34 94 4763715  
email: [usse@usse.es](mailto:usse@usse.es)

**OBSERVERS FROM NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS  
OBSERVATEURS DES ORGANISATIONS NON GOUVERNEMENTALES  
OBSERVADORES DE ORGANIZACIONES NO GUBERNAMENTALES**

**COMITE DE LIAISON DES ONG DE DEVELOPPEMENT AUPRES DE L'UNION  
EUROPEENNE**

Daniel Louis Van Der Steen  
Coordinateur du Collectif Stratégies (Belgique)  
et Membre du Group Conjoint CLONG-Euronaid  
sur la Sécurité alimentaire  
184 D. Bld Léopold II  
B 1080 Bruxelles  
tel: +32 2 4120662  
email: [daniel.vandersteen@csa-be.org](mailto:daniel.vandersteen@csa-be.org)

**EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR ANIMAL PRODUCTION (EAAP)  
FEDERATION EUROPEENNE DE ZOOTECHNIE (FEZ)**

Giancarlo Rossi  
Viale San Francesco 30  
07100 Sassari  
tel: +39 079 290293  
fax: +39 079 290293  
e-mail: [gianross@tiscalinet.it](mailto:gianross@tiscalinet.it)

**PRONATURA INTERNATIONAL**

Michel Grolleaud  
15 avenue de Ségur F  
75007 Paris  
tel: +33 1 53599798  
fax: +33 1 53599446  
email: [michel.grolleaud@wanadoo.fr](mailto:michel.grolleaud@wanadoo.fr)  
[pro-natura@wanadoo.fr](mailto:pro-natura@wanadoo.fr)



**FAO STAFF**  
**FONCTIONNAIRES DE LA FAO**  
**FUNCIONARIOS DE LA FAO**

Ms Claude Forthomme  
Regional Representative for Europe

Mr El Hadji Sene  
Director – Forest Resources Division/Chairperson, Interdepartmental Working  
Group on Desertification

Mr Dietrich Leihner  
Director – Research, Extension and Training Division

Ms Marie Randriamamonjy  
Chief – Gender and Development Service

Ms Daniela Moro  
ECA Secretary – Regional Office for Europe

Rainer Krell  
Environment and Sustainable Development Officer  
SCORENA - Regional Office for Europe

Raimund Jehle  
Reports Officer - Regional Office for Europe

**APPENDIX B**

**AGENDA**

1. Opening of the Session
2. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable
3. Appointment of Rapporteur
4. Sustainable management of land and water resources: combating desertification and prevention of land degradation
5. Report on Activities of the ECA Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development
6. Review of the Activities of the European System of Cooperative Research Networks in Agriculture (ESCORENA) : Progress report on recommendations made at its 31<sup>st</sup> Session
7. Election of Members of the ECA Executive Committee
8. Other Business
9. Date and Place of the Thirty-third Session
10. Adoption of the Report
11. Closing of the Session