The 34th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe (ERC), hosted by the Republic of Moldova, was held from 14 to 17 May 2024 at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy, in hybrid modality.

The Regional Conference was attended by 214 participants, including eight Ministers, ten Deputy Ministers and State Secretaries, and representatives from 53 Members. Three Member Nations, four United Nations (UN) organizations, four intergovernmental organizations, and eight representatives of civil society organizations were in attendance, along with four private-sector companies and representatives from two institutions in the research and academia sector.

The Regional Conference's global policy discussions focused on: i) The role of innovation and digitalization in the sustainable use of natural resources to accelerate the implementation of climate-resilient and low-emission pathways in agrifood systems; ii) Building resilience through agrifood systems transformation; iii) FAO’s response to the multiple crises in Europe and Central Asia; iv) Implications on world food security and agriculture, including global food prices, arising from the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine; v) Financing to end hunger for today and tomorrow (SDG 2); vi) How to fight against food loss and waste; and vii) Global and Regional Food Security Outlook.

With regards to the role of innovation and digitalization in the sustainable use of natural resources, the Regional Conference requested FAO to facilitate intersectoral engagement for the improved governance of natural resources while fostering knowledge exchange, collaboration, and the development of harmonized policies, as well as to accelerate the implementation of flagship initiatives, such as the 1000 Digital Villages Initiative, to address the rural digital divide and invest in democratizing technologies. The Organization is expected to expand climate change support for resilience, adaptation and emission reduction in alignment with its key global strategies and actions plans and provide updates on how different parts of the Organization are working together on climate, nature and biodiversity, soil health, livestock, land use, and sustainable production. FAO is expected to align its innovation and digitalization efforts with existing global initiatives and work together with academic and research partners and others. FAO is requested to provide updates on how its digitalization and innovation work is contributing towards the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) United Arab Emirates Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems, and Climate Action and FAO’s intersectoral plans. FAO should facilitate access to data, knowledge and digital services and cultivate a culture of innovation and digitalization through an inclusive, human rights-based and gender-sensitive approach.

On the topic of resilience-building through agrifood systems transformation, the Regional Conference called upon FAO to support Members, through the Regional Priority Programmes, in determining, developing, refining, and implementing policies and tools to build resilient agrifood systems, including through agroecological and other innovative approaches. It should continue using the humanitarian–development–peace nexus approach, combining immediate relief requirements with long-term development objectives, and continue developing partnerships in this regard. FAO is expected to work with coordinating mechanisms and bodies to analyse the impacts of multifaceted challenges in combating malnutrition and food insecurity, particularly on women, youth and people in vulnerable situations, and revitalize agrifood systems. The Organization should support Members in capacity-building in resilience and sharing best practices, and support efforts in creating opportunities for regional cooperation.

Related to FAO's response to the multiple crises in Europe and Central Asia, the Regional Conference called upon FAO to continue its support for global sustainability and climate goals within its mandate. FAO is expected to work in a collaborative manner with other ongoing global initiatives to address the effects of climate change on agrifood systems and continue efforts to address the crises through immediate measures and through medium- and long-term interventions. FAO is required to cooperate with organizations active in responding to emergencies, in particular the other Rome-based Agencies, plan and implement priority interventions, taking into account issues of gender equality and youth dimensions, and continue support for
resilience-building interventions on climate change, desertification and biodiversity loss to transform food systems.

On the implications on world food security and agriculture, including global food prices, arising from the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, the Regional Conference welcomed FAO’s response to mitigate and monitor the impact of the war on food security globally and in Ukraine, and requested FAO to continue to assess the damage to Ukrainian agriculture and food sector, as well as the reconstruction and rehabilitation costs of Ukrainian agriculture due to loss and damage. FAO is requested to report regularly to Members, including through FAO Governing Bodies, on actions taken with respect to the above.

Regarding the fight against food loss and waste, the Regional Conference called upon FAO to provide demand-driven policy and technical support to countries and integrated solutions for food loss and waste (FLW) reduction that are tailored to the national context and other innovative solutions, as well as cooperation and coordination among all food value chain actors. FAO should also support resource mobilization for sustainable investments in technological, social and institutional innovations, and support partnership-building strategies to foster the development of regional, national and subnational FLW reduction initiatives.

With regard to the regional results, priorities, the four betters and the Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs), the Regional Conference called upon FAO to focus more on mainstreaming gender equality and empowerment for women, girls and youth in all activities across the region, reflecting with the related Committee on World Food Security’s Voluntary Guidelines and policy recommendations. FAO is requested to further strengthen actions for promoting the One Health approach and emphasizing food safety as part of a healthy diet, and facilitating equal access to the benefits of innovations, especially in rural areas. The Organization is also required to mainstream biodiversity and strengthen the systemic approach in line with the SDGs, with an emphasis on sustainable and nature-based solutions and innovative practices. FAO should continue follow up actions regarding the war in Ukraine, in line with the decisions adopted by its regional and global governing bodies. FAO is requested to support the transition towards diversified, decarbonized, efficient and more low-input systems, as well as share further information on results-based management implementation in the region as stated in the document Priorities for FAO in the Europe and Central Asia region under the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31 and further details on funding mobilization in the region, with a breakdown of human and financial resources by programme country.

On the agenda item on learning from evaluations of FAO’s work in Europe and Central Asia (2020–2023), the Regional Conference called upon FAO to draw on the key lessons learned and pursue actions in response to the Office of Evaluation report and continue its efforts to create a comprehensive and consistent monitoring and evaluation system at all levels to enhance the sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency of FAO’s work. FAO is requested to further improve the implementation of accepted recommendations and continue its work on sustainable agriculture development, biodiversity conservation and food systems transformation, in line with the three Regional Priority Programmes. FAO should actively foster and expand its strategic and inclusive collaboration, with particular emphasis on engaging with the private sector. The Organization is required to strengthen gender equality and women’s empowerment in all activities in the region and continue strengthening its prioritization of data collection and analysis.

With regards to the Country Office Network – Current status and way forward: A policy paper, the Regional Conference requested more information on how the proposals address adequate oversight, risk management, internal controls, and other guidance and recommendations from audits and other reviews. The Regional Conference also supported the adjustments to the FAO Country Office Network and called for a clear policy on it, and for clear criteria of establishing and structuring Country Offices while recognizing the need for flexibility and context-driven decisions. The Regional Conference encouraged Management to continue collaborating with relevant UN agencies present in countries, and to support FAO’s active participation in the repositioning of the UN Development System at country level. The Regional Conference asked for an overview of the progress made since the last ERC. Members requested an overview of all Decentralized Offices with detailed country by country information as well as more information on the Knowledge Hubs, stressing that their establishment and their terms of reference should be considered by the relevant FAO Governing Bodies. Members supported FAO efforts to propose a decentralization model, to achieve a more
efficient and modern FAO Country Office Network through open, transparent and inclusive dialogue with Members, and requested regular updates on these matters in the relevant Governing Bodies of FAO.

Regarding governance matters, the Regional Conference highlighted the need for continued efforts to ensure FAO’s capacity to deliver effectively on its mandate, in line with the guidance provided by the FAO Governing Bodies and in accordance with the needs and expectations of its Members. Members expected further improvements regarding governance, effectiveness, transparency, impartiality, accountability, and risk management, and welcomed the Report of the Joint Inspection Unit of the UN (JIU) on the Review of Management and Administration in FAO, and looked forward to its thorough consideration by the competent FAO Governing Bodies. Members called upon FAO to continue efforts in accountability and transparency, including the publication of Memorandums of Understanding concluded by FAO with third parties, and of an open data information portal on FAO's activities, projects and funding. The Regional Conference recalled the need for results-based management and performance reports, with a particular focus on Decentralized Offices and on programmes and projects. Members also requested changing the name of the “Regional Conference for Europe” to the “Regional Conference for Europe and Central Asia”.

Mr Vladimir Bolea
Chairperson of the 34th Session of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC)
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Agriculture and Food Industry of the Republic of Moldova

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1 The Russian Federation did not support this paragraph since the JIU report and its recommendations were not of the Regional Conference sessions documents, and its consideration is planned for the upcoming sessions of the appropriate competent Governing Bodies.