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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Guidance for the EU's preparation of and EU participation in future sessions of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) in 2018

Delegations will find in Annex the document on guidance for the EU's preparation of and EU participation in future sessions of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe (ERC), as endorsed by the Coordination Working Party (FAO) at its meeting on 19 September 2016.

Guidance for the EU's preparation of and EU participation in future sessions of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe (ERC)

1. Introduction

The FAO Regional Conference for Europe (ERC)¹ is the FAO's governing body for its 'Europe and Central Asia' region. The ERC meets every two years and serves as a forum in which ministers for agriculture and other high-level representatives from the ERC members, together with observers from intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organisations and specialised UN agencies, can discuss challenges related to food and agriculture in the Europe and Central Asia region. The ERC is in particular responsible for defining priorities for the region, so as to ensure that the FAO's work at regional level is effective and meets the needs and wishes of the FAO members concerned.

When assessing the proceedings and outcome of the 30th session of the ERC (Antalya, Turkey, 4–6 May 2016) at its meeting on 4 July 2016, the FAO Coordination Working Party discussed, on the basis of a Presidency non-paper, how the EU could improve its preparation for and participation in the ERC and how the ERC could encourage participation of high-level representatives from the EU and its Member States as well as from other members in the region.

The outcome of this discussion is reflected in the following principles and recommendations to guide the EU's preparation of and EU participation in future sessions of the ERC.

¹ In addition to the EU and its 28 Member States, the ERC includes the following members: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Norway, the Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

2. Agenda of the ERC

It is important that the ERC agenda fully takes into account the FAO's Programme of Work and Budget and its Medium-Term Plan. In addition, all efforts should be made to define an attractive ERC agenda, which includes one or more appropriate topics for political debate that will encourage high-level participation from representatives across the Europe and the Central Asia region. To that effect, the EU and its Member States should ensure that they are actively and at an early stage involved in the agenda-setting process, in particular through the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA), including its Executive Committee, as well as through the informal consultation process organised by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia in Budapest.

With regard to the next, 31st ERC session scheduled for 2018, internal EU discussions on the ERC agenda (including topic(s) for the political debate) should take place before the possible agenda items are discussed in the formal FAO preparatory process (i.e. the 'Informal Consultation Meeting' in Budapest (scheduled for September 2017), the 40th session of the ECA (scheduled for September 2017) and the meeting of the ECA's Executive Committee (scheduled for October 2017)). In this respect, it is important to ensure appropriate information exchange among the EU members of the ECA's Executive Committee, the FAO's Regional Office in Budapest, the Rome-based representatives of the EU and its Member States and the members of the FAO Coordination Working Party in Brussels.

3. Format of the ERC

In order to encourage broad dialogue with rich input from all countries across the Europe and Central Asia region, discussion formats that help create an interactive environment, such as round tables, moderated debates, panel discussions and breakout groups, should be promoted. Particular attention should be given to promoting enhanced dialogue between the EU Member States and the Central-Asian members of the region throughout the ERC.

4. ERC report

The EU and its Member States should ensure that they are able to propose candidates for co-rapporteur of the ERC in good time. In addition, in order to help the co-rapporteurs adequately reflect discussions in the ERC report, the EU and its Member States should make every effort to deliver clear and concise statements, with a limited number of key messages, so as to ensure that their views and positions are accurately reflected in the Chair's oral summary on every agenda item and - ultimately - in the ERC report. The EU could also create a small team to support the work of the ERC co-rapporteurs. In addition, this team could be tasked with outreach to other ERC members - both before and during the ERC session - so as to ensure that the EU's views and positions are well understood and - where necessary - clarified. The exact role of this team should be clearly defined prior to the ERC.

5. Multi-stakeholder consultation prior to the ERC

Participation of representatives of civil society and private sector organisations in the 'multi-stakeholder consultation' which takes place prior to the ERC should be promoted and encouraged. It is particularly important to ensure adequate representation of the private sector in this multi-stakeholder consultation.

To that effect, the EU could hold preparatory discussions with the 'Steering Committee of the FAO Regional CSO² Consultation', in order to define how best to promote balanced representation of stakeholders in the ERC multi-stakeholder consultation and how the outcome of the multi-stakeholder consultation can be best taken into account in the ERC proceedings and adequately reflected in the ERC report.

² Civil society organisations.