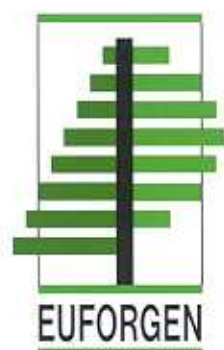




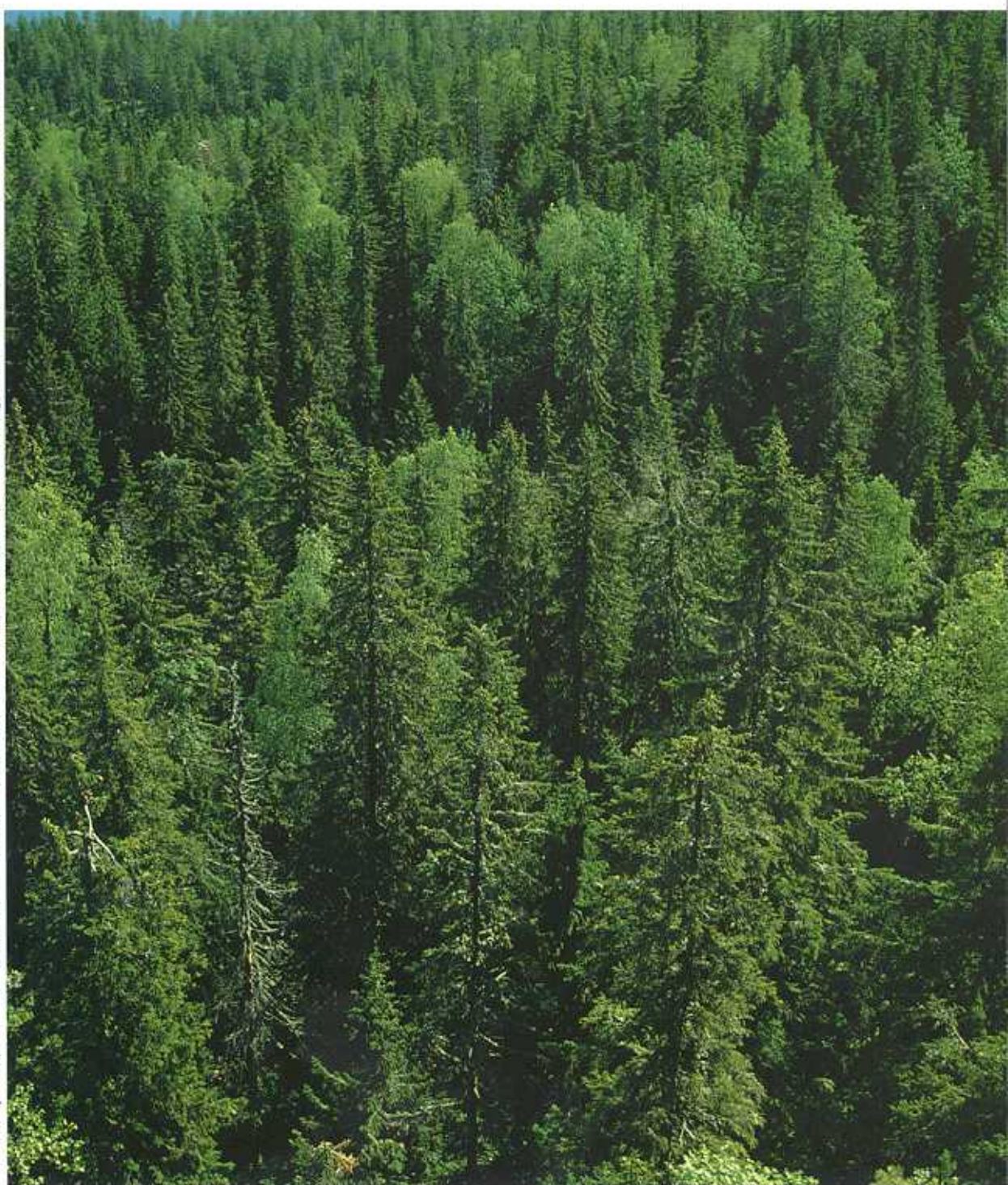
International collaboration on forest genetic resources: the role of Europe

Second EUFORGEN Steering Committee meeting
26-29 November 1998 - Vienna, Austria

J. Turok and Th. Geburek, *editors*



European Forest Genetic Resources Programme (EUFORGEN)



IPGRI is an institute
of the Consultative
Group on International
Agricultural Research
(CGIAR)

Summary of the Steering Committee meeting

Introduction

Four years after the establishment of the European Forest Genetic Resources Programme (EUFORGEN), the second Steering Committee meeting was held from 26 – 29 November 1998, in Vienna, Austria. National Coordinators from 23 participating countries (Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Moldova, Norway, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Ukraine) attended the meeting, as well as national focal persons from 11 non-participating countries and 12 resource persons and observers. The four additional countries participating in EUFORGEN (Latvia, Luxembourg, Monaco and Switzerland) were unable to attend.

The main objective of the Steering Committee meeting was to review the progress made since the establishment of the Programme in November 1994 and to outline future activities. EUFORGEN was developed as the implementation mechanism of Strasbourg Resolution S2 (Conservation of forest genetic resources) adopted at the first Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe.

The meeting was opened by Mr Rudolf Themessl, Ministerialrat, Forestry Department, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. He welcomed the participants and expressed the continuous support of Austria to international collaboration on the conservation of forest genetic resources in Europe. He wished the participants a successful meeting.

In his introductory remarks, Dr Geoffrey Hawtin, Director General of the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI) said that the conservation and sustainable use of forest genetic resources was a subject of global concern. The networking initiative of European countries gave substance to the implementation of Strasbourg Resolution S2, was essential for increasing the scientific knowledge in this area, and stimulated cooperation between national programmes in Europe and other regions. Ms Christel Palmberg-Lerche, Chief, Forest Resources Development Service, Forestry Department, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) also addressed the meeting. She underlined the importance of developing a coherent, country-driven global framework for the conservation, management, sustainable use and enhancement of forest genetic resources.

The first day of the meeting consisted of two technical sessions. Ten papers were presented and discussed. The first two papers focused on the history and role of genetic resources issues as they have been addressed in the process of Ministerial Conferences on the Protection of Forests in Europe. The following four papers reviewed the trends and developments in conserving, monitoring and enhancing genetic diversity of forests in Europe. The last four papers complemented these contributions by referring to the examples of collaborative activities undertaken in the Trans-Caucasus, Central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and North America and examined their links with the networking in Europe.

The papers offered a broad overview of the current developments in the area of forest genetic resources and provided a basis for the further discussions specifically related to the role, orientation and management of the EUFORGEN Programme in the future. The workshop papers are published in this volume.

Report of the EUFORGEN Coordinator and presentations by the Chairs of the Networks

Chair of the session: Michel Arbez

Rapporteurs: Bjerne Ditlevsen and Riccardo Alía

Dr Jozef Turok presented a comprehensive report covering the first four years of the EUFORGEN activities (Annex I and II). A total of 27 countries joined the Programme during the period from November 1994 to November 1998. Five Networks have been established, and a total of 18 Network meetings were organized. There has been a generally increasing number of participants (attending members) in the Networks.

The Steering Committee acknowledged the substantial output from the Networks as well as the role of the Secretariat in achieving these results. The EUFORGEN activities are financed through contributions from participating countries. Concern was raised with regard to delayed payments from some of the countries. The EUFORGEN Coordinator informed that the budget and accounts are regularly audited as part of IPGRI's external auditing procedures.

Collaborative linkages developed between EUFORGEN and other regions, with particular reference to the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union, as well as other international organizations, were noted.

It was stressed that EUFORGEN should follow closely and participate in the current discussions concerning the development of Criteria and Indicators for sustainable forest management, particularly with regard to the genetic components of biological diversity.

Brief statements were then presented describing the five EUFORGEN Networks:

- *Populus nigra* Network (François Lefèvre, Chair)
- Noble Hardwoods Network (Gösta Eriksson, Chair)
- *Picea abies* Network (Veikko Koski, Chair)
- *Quercus suber* Network (Maria Carolina Varela, Chair)
- Social Broadleaves Network (Ladislav Paule, Vice-Chair).

These contributions (Annex III) circulated to members of the Steering Committee before the meeting, provided a synthesis of the Networks' activities, including their evolution, potential and perspectives for the future as well as linkages between the individual Networks. Mechanisms to encourage further interaction and information flow between the Networks need to be explored. Collaboration with IUFRO Working Groups was emphasized.

Themes of common interest to all the Networks were mentioned, e.g. population genetic concepts, role of tree breeding in genetic conservation, global climate change, conservation of associated species in ecosystems, species hybridization. The need for exchanging information and coordinating approach to address these issues in general was expressed. One item of particular interest to some present was the development of a glossary of terms and definitions relating to forest genetic resources (FGR).

Response by Steering Committee members and statements by observers

Chair of the session: Sven de Vries

Rapporteurs: Sam Samuel and David Thompson

The afternoon of the second day of the meeting was devoted to a detailed consideration of the Coordinator's report on EUFORGEN during Phase I. Following discussion, participating countries unanimously approved the report.

All countries and organizations present took part in the discussion of the report, which focused on the aspects presented below, in which the combined responses of participating countries (23 present), non-participating countries (11 focal persons present) and international organizations, initiatives and programmes (5 observers present) are summarized.

Non-participating countries expressed their gratitude to EUFORGEN for providing the opportunity to attend not only this Steering Committee meeting but also to participate in Network meetings and activities and in particular for the partial financial support they had received for these purposes.

Fulfillment of the objectives of Strasbourg Resolution S2

It was felt that much had been achieved and that the objectives of the Resolution had been clearly followed. The specific expectations of a number of countries had been met. EUFORGEN was recognized to have developed a good reputation in the short period of time it has been in operation.

Impact on the progress in conservation of FGR at national level

The influence of EUFORGEN was felt to have already had a major effect in some countries and many anticipated positive steps in the implementation of national FGR programmes in the near future. The participation of national governments in EUFORGEN had a positive influence on the focusing of attention on the importance of the conservation of FGR. It was felt that in a number of instances much less would have been achieved without the structure of EUFORGEN to support it. The effects had included the release of increased funding for conservation of FGR, the acceptance of such conservation as an integral part of sustainable forest management and the consolidation of genetic conservation principles into recent forest law.

Funding

National Coordinators are commonly not drawn from those organizations or sectors of government, which have the responsibility of paying for EUFORGEN membership. This applies to those who have not yet joined as well as to already participating countries. Both groups saw the need to relate activities and outputs to S2 objectives as important ways of convincing the respective funding (implementing) agencies that membership involves value for money. This is particularly true for countries that have high contributions. The importance of monitoring and documenting progress in FGR conservation resulting from EUFORGEN activities to national governments needs to be stressed.

Networks

Networks were recognized as an effective mechanism for coordinating the implementation of S2 objectives. Their main activities have been exchange of data and information, dissemination of knowledge, development of strategies and technical guidelines, common minimum information standards, databases, preparation of joint project proposals, exchange of genetic material and the initiation of joint field trials. Although some participants felt that

Networks should remain restricted to their original species, there was stronger support for their extension into wider species groups. An interest in joint meetings was also expressed. Concern over increase in the size of Networks was recognized. A joint "Inter-Network Group" consisting of Chairs and Vice-Chairs of all Networks together with two Management Committee members was proposed and discussed. This group, rather than the Steering Committee, will have the responsibility of harmonizing the direction and activities of the Networks.

Publications

There was commendation of the quality of publications that were felt to be appropriate and well produced. However, it was recognized that they served a more specialist audience such as Steering Committee and Network members or their scientific colleagues. Some members considered publications appeared too slowly after meetings. Two areas in particular were felt to warrant more attention. Firstly, executive summaries of larger publications in generally more lay terms would be useful for policy-makers and non-scientific levels of government. Secondly, this material and other more specific information would also be useful to be produced in further languages. The production of technical guidelines for the management of forest genetic resources by each of the Networks was seen as a key output of the Programme.

The wider influences of EUFORGEN

In specific cases, Networks have been effective fora in developing proposals for external funding of cooperative projects among a number of countries. EUFORGEN has the potential to enhance greater collaboration between European Union countries and non-EU members mainly from eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. It was also recognized that EUFORGEN had played a major role as an example for similar genetic resources initiatives in other regions of the world and that it could continue to do so in areas where such work has not yet been developed.

Public awareness

Raising awareness about the importance of forest genetic resources in the pan-European process on forests and at other political fora was confirmed to be one of the objectives of EUFORGEN. It was felt that EUFORGEN was well equipped to take on the task of promoting better awareness, particularly among decision-makers and forest managers in European countries. It was recognized that there was a specific need to provide better understanding of the effects of using the product of tree breeding and improvement in relation to genetic conservation principles and to try to bridge the gap between forest managers and environmentalists in the same subject area.

Training

There was some discussion of training needs with a firm interest shown by a number of countries in the prospects of training courses at general, species and national levels. There were problems in budgeting for such work; a decision was made on this topic when Phase II was discussed (see below).

Challenges

One of the main challenges that will face EUFORGEN in the future will be the implementation of the technical guidelines developed by the Networks. Several participants expressed concerns about how this implementation will take place at national level.

Development of national programmes on forest genetic resources in Europe

Chair of the session: Christel Palmberg-Lerche

Rapporteur: Csaba Mátyás

The EUFORGEN Coordinator presented results of the survey on the status of the conservation and management of FGR in Europe, which was conducted prior to the meeting (September-October 1998). It was divided into three parts (conservation of genetic resources in the forestry practice, coordination at national level and international coordination). Response was received from 37 countries. The European Forest Genetic Resources Workshop held in November 1995 in Sopron, Hungary had, among others, recommended that each country develop a national strategy for the conservation of FGR. One of the objectives of the survey (part II) was to assess how that recommendation was being implemented in the participating countries.

While considerable differences were evident among countries, all reported some advances ranging from the development, and in some cases, implementation, of comprehensive national forest genetic resources programmes, to initial steps taken towards this goal. Major challenges for the national strategies/programmes were to ensure that genetic considerations be integrated into national forestry policies and practices, to involve all relevant stakeholders and achieve efficient coordination among their activities.

While recognizing that the present survey was the first of its kind and that no previous baseline data with which to compare the results therefore existed, the Steering Committee requested that the Secretariat extract highlights from the survey and from other available sources and, based on quantifiable data, provides a summary of the progress made for the attention of Committee members and for decision-makers in EUFORGEN countries. The Committee further recommended that the Secretariat regularly monitor progress in important criteria (e.g. establishment of a formal national programme, commitment, coordination, links, impact) against the baseline data, paying due attention to varying initial levels of development in the national forest genetic resources strategies/programmes. Several members stressed that, in addition to its technical and scientific value, such factual analysis of progress was likely to also strengthen or motivate the necessary political commitment of signatory governments of Resolution S2 to forest genetic resources.

The third part of the survey focused on international collaboration, including a question about the effectiveness of EUFORGEN in contributing to the conservation and management of forest genetic resources in Europe. It was noted that countries, in general, had rated highest those activities that had been originally specified in its programme, i.e. the objectives of Resolution S2. Results of the survey also indicated areas in which EUFORGEN might become involved in the future. Providing a regional forum for the exchange of experience, knowledge and information; planning and implementation of joint Network tasks; and thus encouraging countries to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of their FGR received the highest rating.

Proposal for a second phase of EUFORGEN

Chair of the session: Tore Skrøppa

Rapporteurs: Hojka Kraigher and Karel Vancura

Needs for a second phase

There was unanimous support for a second Phase of EUFORGEN. The increasing number of participating countries during Phase I, the technical outputs provided and their impact as well as the need for further coordinating and promoting the gene conservation efforts made by European countries provide strong justification for the continuation of EUFORGEN. A new Letter of Agreement for the Phase II will need to be formally approved by governments. This will cover the period from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2004. Some participants mentioned that there might be difficulties with seeking formal approval for a new agreement, especially if the existing one (Phase I) was made only recently. It was recommended that the Secretariat prepares and submits the new Letter of Agreement well in advance of time during 1999 (last year of Phase I), in order to allow the necessary procedure at the national level. The accompanying correspondence should make it clear that the second Phase is an expected extension of the existing Programme, and not a new mechanism.

Objectives

It was agreed widely that EUFORGEN should concentrate all efforts on implementing the original objectives stated in Strasbourg Resolution S2, refer to them and avoid expanding work into new areas which are not directly associated. The objectives of Resolution S2 were discussed at length. It was noted that there has been a clear distinction regarding the commitment made by signing S2 between national responsibilities and the international implementation. While EUFORGEN is directly responsible for implementing the international collaboration aspects of Resolution S2 (see Annex IV), it is recognized that decisions on forest genetic resources, their management and financing are entirely under the responsibility of the national programmes. EUFORGEN assists countries to develop and implement effective national strategies/programmes.

Milestones

The Steering Committee requested the Secretariat to compile an overview of the outputs provided during the past 4 years against the operational objectives of EUFORGEN (expectations based on S2). This would help to illustrate the progress made at both national level and internationally. Such overview would also clearly present the needs for continuation and lay down the concrete operational objectives for Phase II. It is important to have a baseline because different countries are in different stages of developing their national programmes on forest genetic resources (see above section). It was recommended that a report on what was achieved in the implementation of S2 by countries (at the national level) and by the EUFORGEN Secretariat (at the international level) be prepared for each Steering Committee meeting.

Mode of operation

It is described in the "EUFORGEN Document" which forms part of the Letter of Agreement and is regularly reviewed at Steering Committee meetings (Annex IV). It was discussed on the basis of the proposal prepared by the Secretariat and sent to members of the Steering Committee in advance before the meeting. The recommendations resulting from this discussion are incorporated in the version endorsed (Annex IV). Some members raised their concern over relatively little time devoted to this item at the meeting.

The main level and tool for implementing the objectives of EUFORGEN remain to be the species Networks. The Steering Committee stressed that this was a practically oriented, well-established approach. The participants were reminded that the species chosen for the individual Networks were "pilot", i.e. representing different gene conservation problems and situations and hence not based on criteria such as the level of threats to individual species. The broadening of the scope of the Networks with regard to species should be driven from within the Networks, under the overall guidance by the Inter-Network Group. It was noted that Networks already made first steps towards broadening their species scope: *Quercus suber* Network and Mediterranean oaks, *Populus nigra* Network and *P. alba*, *Picea abies* Network and other conifers. The Steering Committee expressed satisfaction with these developments. Some participants raised concerns about the increased size of meetings associated with the broader scope of Networks involving more countries. The mechanism adopted in the EUFORGEN Document was considered adequate to ensure a good balance. A survey will be conducted before the next Steering Committee meeting in order to re-assess the priorities given by countries to species that have, or have not been covered by the EUFORGEN Networks.

While it was agreed that synergies should be created between all the EUFORGEN Networks in addressing certain themes (such as genetic resources in view of the global climate change, common methodologies), thematically-oriented Networks should not be developed. The Steering Committee recommended to further incorporating the most pertinent themes into the context of ongoing activities of the Networks. This arrangement takes into consideration the fact that the five Networks are differently advanced and may work with different intensity. The Inter-Network Group will also be responsible for harmonizing thematic priorities and action among the Networks. The Steering Committee encouraged that occasional joint Network meetings (two or more Networks) are organized, according to the needs and operational possibilities.

The Steering Committee requested that each Network provide a brief overview of its objectives, workplan with milestones and outputs. These will enable to indicate progress, separately for Phase I and expected for Phase II (especially the three Networks with changing scope).

It was agreed that Chair of a Network is to be elected for a period between 3 (minimum) to 5 (maximum) years, depending on the frequency of meetings. A new Chair and a new Vice-Chair are not to be elected at the same time so as to avoid any disruption in the Network's leadership.

It was suggested that the possibilities of electronic media (particularly Internet) be further explored to improve the communication and exchange of information by the Networks.

The motivated involvement and various inputs in kind by a large number of Network members in fulfilling the tasks of the workplans were acknowledged by the Steering Committee.

The possibility for developing "complementary modules" was proposed to the Steering Committee by the Secretariat with the intention to mobilize additional resources in support of the tasks of the workplans in individual Networks, organize training etc. First option foresaw that funding for these activities are raised independently from the annual financial contributions of participating countries and on a voluntary basis. Second option foresaw funding of the modules from increased annual contributions. While some countries confirmed that additional resources for increased contributions might be available for Phase II, it was decided not to change the present mode of operation and not to introduce complementary modules into the structure of EUFORGEN.

Budget

The annual budget and contributions for Phase II as given in EUFORGEN Document were endorsed by the Steering Committee (Annex IV).

Conclusions

The revised EUFORGEN Document was circulated. It was discussed and endorsed by members of the Steering Committee with modifications (see Annex IV).

Dr Thomas Geburek, Austria's National Coordinator, chairing the final session, thanked all participants for their work and all the inputs during the meeting. Dr Geoffrey Hawtin expressed his wish to see the collaborative work on forest genetic resources in Europe continued and further strengthened.

The Steering Committee thanked the host and the organizers for their arrangements of the meeting.

Agenda

26 November 1998

1. Opening of the meeting
 - 1.1 Introductory remarks (IPGRI, FAO)
 - 1.2 Election of Chairpersons
 - 1.3 Adoption of the Agenda
2. Welcome address by host country
3. Technical Workshop
 - 3.1 Session I: Genetic resources in the pan-European Process on Forests
 - 3.2 Session II: Contribution of Europe to the global efforts on forest genetic resources
 - 3.3 General discussion and recommendations

27 November 1998

4. Coordinator's Report on EUFORGEN
5. Presentation of the EUFORGEN Networks by Chairs
6. Response by Steering Committee members; discussion and adoption of the Report
7. Statements by observers

28 November 1998

8. National programmes on forest genetic resources in Europe (status, needs and priorities)
9. Proposal for a second Phase of EUFORGEN
10. Review of EUFORGEN Document
 - 10.1 Scope and objectives
 - 10.2 Mode of operation; Networks
 - 10.3 Communications
 - 10.4 Budget
 - 10.5 Complementary programme modules (training; collaboration with EU-funded projects)

29 November 1998

11. Conclusions
12. Closure

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