



Report of the Fourth Plenary Meeting of the European Soil Partnership (ESP)

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FAO HQ, Rome, Italy**

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Table of contents

1. Welcome and opening of the meeting	3
2. Progress reports	3
2.1 GSP including Regional Soil Partnerships.....	3
2.2 ESP Steering Committee	4
2.3 Eurasian Soil Partnership (EASP).....	5
2.4 Information from national Focal Points.....	6
3. The ESP: overarching goals and global activities	8
4. The Pillars of the ESP Draft Implementation	9
4.1 Pillar 1	9
4.2 Pillar 2	9
4.3 Pillar 3	9
4.4 Pillars 4 and 5	10
5 Global activities: GSOCmap.....	10
6 Final discussion and Conclusions	11

1. Welcome and opening of the meeting

Mr. Ronald Vargas of the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) Secretariat welcomed the participants. Ms. Elena Havlicek, Chair of the ESP, opened the meeting with a presentation outlining the general roles of the European Soil Partnership (ESP) and ESP its Plenary Meetings. The ESP serves to

- 1) Facilitate cooperation and knowledge sharing within the European region;
- 2) Improve the governance of the soil resources within the framework of the GSP; and
- 3) Support ESP aspects related to the work of the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS).

ESP actions focus to implement the GSP Plans of Action for the five Pillars in the European context. Among various administrative issues, the ESP Plenary meetings serve to take decisions related to implementation and to guide on emerging issues and discuss on the mobilization of resources.

The main objectives of this 4th ESP Plenary Meeting are to report on recent actions and to discuss and approve the Implementation Plan 2017-2020 (see Agenda in [Annex 1](#)).

Tour de table

The 4th ESP Plenary Meeting was attended by 45 participants, from 21 countries, with 17 focal points as governmental representatives (see [Annex 10](#)).

Prior to the ESP meeting, written comments and suggestions on the Draft ESP-IP were received from Macedonia, France, Bulgaria and Ukraine. Most of them were taken into account in the finalization of the IP, however the agreed IP offers room for the other proposed activities.

2. Progress reports

2.1 GSP including Regional Soil Partnerships

Ronald Vargas presented an overview of the developments since the 4th Plenary Assembly 2016. The Plenary requested action to develop a report on the impact of agriculture on soils, to intensify collaboration with other UN panels, such as UNCCD and UNFCCC, to prepare the necessary steps towards the 2020 Status of the World's Soil Resources Report, and to finalize the development of implementation plans. Primary actions focussed on the following topics:

- Global Soil Carbon Conference (GSOC17), in cooperation with WMO, UNCCD and UNFCCC
- Capacity development and projects on the ground (Technical cooperation projects by FAO, workshops).

- Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil management (VGSSM): facilitate discussion about implementation pathways
- Pillar 4 and 5: strengthen the INSII network and the building of the Global Soil Information System as a system of (national) systems; this includes the effort to implement national soil carbon maps (GSOCmap)
- Glinka world soil prize: the next call will be issued by the end of May 2017, and all partners are asked to nominated candidates.

Mr. Vargas welcomes the progress of the ESP to develop its regional implementation plan, and notes the strong engagement of ESP partners. Questions focussed on soil carbon mapping, guidance and the need for proper learning tools.

2.2 ESP Steering Committee

Ms. Elena Havlicek highlighted the result of the previous ESP Plenary Meeting 2016, which concluded the Terms of Reference for the ESP. During that meeting, the composition of the Steering Committee (SC) was decided. Since then, the SC engaged in action:

- Orientation meeting between ESP Chair, ESP and GSP Secretariats and ITPS, followed by a full SC meeting in Rome on 25 May 2016; besides the SC members, the meeting was also attended by Claudia Olazabal (DG ENV), Ahmed Mermut (ECSSS president), and Liesl Weise (FAO). The path towards the ESP Implementation Plan (ESP-IP) was outlined during that meeting.
- A first draft ESP-IP was sent around by the Secretariat to SC members by the end of October 2016.
- Second SC meeting, Bern, 2-3 February 2017, in the additional presence of Borut Vrscaj (representing the Links4Soils project), Pascal Boivin (ESCCC president) and Klara Janouskova (JRC trainee). The revised ESP-IP was further updated towards a full Draft version, and then shared with all ESP members.
- Members of the ESP SC represented ESP during a number of conferences (Alpine Convention in Germany, EUROSIL 2016 in Istanbul, Soil Stakeholder Conference in Brussel, Global Soil Security Conference in Paris, etc.).

The most important aspects of the ESP SC meetings were:

- The ESP should deliver concrete outcomes focusing on specific actions (in the frame of a more ambitious long-term vision).
- One approach is to develop a network of (relevant) networks. An important effort is needed to contact and establish partnerships with these networks.
- The ESP seeks to contribute to global GSP projects (GSOCmap, SWSR2020 report, ...)
- Any organization, any individual person could become a member. In the case of a project, the ESP SC considers that the project leader organization should become a

member rather than the projects which are not legal entities and which are temporary.

- The ESP gives no formal support to candidate EU (or other) projects.

As a result of the SC meetings, the ESP Secretariat (JRC) has engaged to install and maintain a web site and a Facebook page

(<http://esdac.jrc.ec.europa.eu/networkcooperations/european-soil-partnership>;
<https://www.facebook.com/europeansoilpartnership/>)

The ESP-SC also established a working relation with the ECSSS in relation to the organization of the EUROSIL 2020 Conference (contact: Pascal Boivin) and maintains close contact with the EU Horizon2020 Links4Soil project that seeks to become a regional ESP initiative for the Alpine region (kick off meeting in Ljubljana 29-30 May 2017). This status is preferred over the formal establishment of a Sub-Regional Soil Partnership due to administrative issues.

The minutes of the ESP SC meetings have been made public via the ESP webpage maintained by ESDAC.

The ESP-SC could 'support' relevant international events or organizations (such as ECSSS); this is up to the ESP-SC to decide and would not require the approval of the ESP Plenary.

2.3 Eurasian Soil Partnership (EASP)

The EASP is a Sub-Regional Soil Partnership of the ESP. Hakki Erdogan, EASP Vice Chair, summarized the recent activities following the third EASP Plenary Meeting that was held during an International Conference on Expansion of Eurasian Food Security Network and Eurasian Soil Partnership taking place in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic on February 29 - March 2, 2016. The primary focus of this meeting was to lower the barriers to the implementation of the regional IP:

- An Eurasian Soil Portal has been developed, covering an extensive catalogue of soil-related resources for the region (<http://eurasian-soil-portal.info>).
- A workshop and training on digital soil mapping and soil information management was organized in Almaty, Kazakhstan, 31 of October – 4 of November 2016.
- In the area of soil salinity, a call for small research projects was opened in April 2016 and five projects have been selected and supported through funds from the Russian Federation. Provided to the Healthy Soil Facility as the funding instrument of the GSP.
- A book “Land resources and food security of Central Asia and South Caucasus” was published jointly by FAO and Eurasian Center for Food Security.
- In 2016, the volume “Food security of Eurasia” was published where the results of different research projects (case studies) were presented. These studies were

initially support supported by the World Bank and the Eurasian Center for Food Security (ECFS) of Moscow State University.

- The World Soil Day 2016 was celebrated 1) in Moscow with wide participation of international institutions such as IUSS, ISRIC, GSP, World Bank, and Dokuchaev State Soil Museum, 2) in Dushanbe, with the participation of specialists of Soil Science Institute and other TAAS Institutes and students Tajik Agrarian University.

Forthcoming activities include:

- Training on soil salinity management, scheduled for September 2017 in Kharkiv, Ukraine.
- The EASP Plenary Meeting 2017, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, October 2017.
- The World Soil Day will be celebrated at Lomonosov Moscow State University and other places, 5th of December 2017.

2.4 Information from national Focal Points

The national Focal Points were invited to report on ESP-related activities in their countries. Also other participants were encouraged to share information about their activities.

Italy (Anna Benedetti) has created a national soil partnership with regional representatives (coordinated by the Italian Soil Science Society), with the aim to exchange and coordinate activities along the 5 pillars. For example, a cross-regional meeting will be organized to inform interested partners about the VGSSM, to encourage participating at the GSOC17 conference, and to discuss and coordinate contributions to GSOCmap.

Portugal (Antonio Perdigao) is a) very interested in the implementation of the VGSSM, b) technically (but not yet organizationally) ready to contribute to GSOCmap, c) currently elaborate a 1:500,000 scale soil map of Portugal, D) continuously active during the World Soil Day.

Czech Republic (Jozef Kozak) has organized an international conference on soil, in collaboration with Slovakian colleagues. The database of soil properties is currently updated, including work on a new and improved SOC map. It is planned to revise the Czech national soil atlas.

Austria (Andrea Spanischberger) Austria (Andrea Spanischberger) has undertaken many soil-related activities especially concerning awareness-raising, for example the development of several soil education tools. Concerning guidance already over 25 years ago a soil advisory forum was established, where all relevant authorities and experts are work together to develop e.g. recommendations for fertilization or also guidance concerning soil functions or soil recultivation. A national research project is on its way to support national soil carbon mapping.

Belgium (Martine Swerts) has developed, in collaboration with colleagues from Luxembourg, an update and translation of the country soil (type) maps into WRB.

The COMMON FORUM (CF) on Contaminated Land (Dominique Darmendrail) informed about the upcoming meeting together with the International Committee on Contaminated Land <http://www.iccl.ch/meetings.html>. The next CF meeting in October 2017 will have 3 main topics: 1. Contaminated Site Remediation / Legal, Technical, Finance and social issues (so called countries sessions); 2. Water resources pollution Management; 3. Emerging contaminants. For more information see the CF website www.commonforum.eu. CF welcomes and supports the GSP Soil Contamination Symposium which is in planning (April 2018).

Slovakia (Jaroslava Slobocka) reported about the launch of a national initiative that aims to coordinate activities along the five GSP pillars; one of the objectives is to seek involvement in the Global Water Partnership. Currently, a proposal is prepared to enter soil protection into the national constitution.

European Commission (Josiane Masson) reported on some activities at EU/EC level, referring to VGSSM, and contacts with DG DEVCO, DG AGRI and members of the AGRIENV Committee (reform of the CAP). The DG ENV soil expert group continues the discussion with EU members states about a European soil policy.

Bulgaria (written contribution from Svetla Rousseva) reported extensively on various activities at the Institute of Soil Science supporting the ESP Pillars 1, 2, 3 and 4. (see Annex-9)

During this session, Arwyn Jones (EC) ignited a discussion about the added-value of the soil partnerships and raised the question for the incentive for countries and partners to participate in ESP activities. This was regarded as an important point by the Chair, especially because the majority of implementing activities are in-kind. In this context, the Chair remarked that 1) ESP is part of the GSP, which is a multinational initiative by FAO and its members countries; this mechanism provides legitimacy to the activities that happen under the ESP umbrella; 2) ESP operates as a soil network of networks; and 3) contributions to the ESP implementation generate mutual benefit: first-hand information and coordination of soil activities, including the political dimension, capacity building, influencing road maps of various activities promoting awareness, research, monitoring and management of soils.

Ronald Vargas emphasized that the GSP, and thus ESP, as a FAO multinational initiative, focusses action at intergovernmental level which brings the issue of soil officially at the forefront of decision makers. This is very important for the regions/countries where soil is not very high on the agenda at the moment. In Europe, countries are quite active and have many national activities, agencies and cooperations in place, so that the ESP could become a

motor of action and support to other regional soil partnerships. In relation to this discussion, the Chair reported that the ESP-SC is preparing a leaflet/flyer that will promote the ESP and explain the added value that it will bring.

3. The ESP: overarching goals and global activities

Elena Havlicek gave a presentation of the introductory part of Chapter 4 of the draft IP. There, overarching activities are mentioned, which require implementation mostly by the SC. Participants were invited to comment on these which led to various decisions/actions to be taken:

- It would be useful to develop some standard material (such as an ESP presentation, ESP flyer, etc.) that anyone interested to promote ESP could use. The ESP-SC will develop this.
- It would be useful to know who (among participants) would attend relevant soil conferences and ask to promote the ESP when attending. A round table exercise resulted in a list ([Annex 2](#)).
- Not all countries in Europe are represented by a national Focal Point (FP). As the FP is recognized to be the main interface / communication channel between GSP/ESP and relevant organizations in the countries concerning various issues, it would be beneficial to encourage the nomination of FPs for all European countries. It was suggested to add the list of missing FPs to these minutes ([Annex 3](#)).

A subsequent discussion took place on the priority listing of soil threats in Europe as mentioned in Section 3.1 (Soil threats in Europe) of the IP. The priority listing should be removed and it should be made clear that the importance of soil threats depends on the local situation and thus cannot be generalized similarly for all of Europe.

It was also suggested to define as precisely as possible what is a “healthy soil”, a useful concept for policy making and awareness raising. The Voluntary Guidelines on Sustainable Soil Management is a good starting point with a common agreed definition of SSM.

Another discussion took place on Section 3.4 (ESP sub-regional soil partnerships); it was concluded to shorten it and make it more neutral (less emphasis on EU-28).

The list of European soil networks in section 3.5 is open and will be expanded in the future with suggestions from partners. For instance Snowman and the German soil research network and Centre “BonaRes” have now been included, since these initiatives have international dimension. There are already a lot of soil networks established within Europe and therefore the further work of the ESP should be based, wherever possible, on already existing knowledge and networks.

The 'timeline' and 'budget' entries in the table with recommendations and outputs of Chapter 4 were better defined. It was well understood that all efforts by the partners contributing to the defined outputs are and will be in-kind.

4. The Pillars of the ESP Draft Implementation

For each of the ESP Pillars, a presentation was held by the chairs of the respective Pillars. They presented the content and actions drafted, referring to the recommendations set out by the global-level Plans of Actions. Each Pillar was then discussed separately and updated on the fly. The final version of the ESP IP will be circulated together with this plan, and can be downloaded from the GSP and ESP websites (ESP Draft Implementation Plan v9).

4.1 Pillar 1

Josiane Masson (on behalf of the Chair of Pillar 1, Violette Geissen) presented the content of Section 5 of the ESP IP (Annex 4). Participants expressed that it was a very ambitious plan, worried that the activities and outputs would have a legally binding character (good practice recommendations). Mrs. Masson explained that prioritization would be needed, and that recommendations are not legally binding, and that no output elaborated with the help of ESP partners would be made public unless there is consent.

4.2 Pillar 2

Arwyn Jones chairs Pillar 2, and presented the objectives and proposed actions following section 6 of the ESP IP (Annex 5). In relation to Task-5, Dominique Darmendrail highlighted that the EU Project 'INSPIRATION' might be important (<http://www.inspiration-h2020.eu/>).

4.3 Pillar 3

Gergely Toth (on behalf of Coen Ritsema, Chair of Pillar 3) presented Section 7 (Annex 6). Again, the INSPIRATION project was mentioned as relevant to Task 1. In addition, three Joint Programme Initiatives (FACCE - <https://www.faccejpi.com>, WATER – <https://www.waterjpi.eu>, and Urban Europe – <http://jpi-urbaneurope.eu/>) are important, and their outcomes may contribute to measuring the impact of research actions/projects (cost/benefit, also present in Task 3). In relation to Task-2, the German BONARES soil knowledge centre was mentioned as a possible solution to provide a Europe-wide platform to gather and present soil data/information/knowledge, accompanied by proper metadata. In relation to research infrastructures, Dominique Darmendrail remarked that an assessment of soil research programmes and institutions in Europe might be already done for H2020 projects, according to various assessment criteria. DG ENV has been requested to investigate this through DG RTD.

4.4 Pillars 4 and 5

Allan Lily (Pillar 4) and Hakki Erdogan (Pillar 5) presented the actions listed in Sections 8 and 9 (Annexes 7 and 8). It was stressed for Pillar 4 that activities will follow mainly the requirements set by the Global Pillar 4 IP, and that key to success in Europe would require an adequate coordination in Europe. In that sense, the activities to come up with the European part of the very concrete GSOCmap is an excellent test that will show if Europe is able to cooperate and deliver a timely outcome. Regarding Pillar 5, participants realized the importance of harmonization for information and data exchange. The GSP secretariat informed that the global Pillar 5 IP will be distributed together with the material for the upcoming 5th GSP Plenary Assembly. The plan includes links to the regional Pillar 5 activities, so that better coordination between regional and global-level activities becomes possible.

All issues raised by the participants were directly implemented in the text, so that consensus was established, and the ESP IP could be finalized. The chair remarked that now, all activities require committed focal points and technical experts to turn the plan into action.

Each Pillar foresees a working group with representatives by each ESP partner if possible. It was agreed that the ESP Secretariat, on behalf of the ESP Pillar chairs, would organize a poll among ESP partners to ask for nominations of working group members. Given the ambitious Pillars, with many activities defined, some prioritization needs to be applied by each working group.

5. Global activities: GSOCmap

Luca Montanerella, Chair of ITPS, asked how the ESP partners would contribute to:

- 1) the Global Soil Organic Carbon Map programme, which is already well underway and for which data submission by countries is expected before September 2017, to produce a map before the WSD2017 on 5 December;
- 2) the 2nd edition of the Soil Atlas of Europe, which is projected for 2018 and work still has to start;
- 3) the SWSR2020 (2nd Status of World's Soil Resources report) for which a plan still needs to be developed by ITPS;
- 4) the implementation of the already available VGSSM, for which countries would need to report to ITPS.

A tour the table was made for comments.

Most comments were related to the GSOCmap:

The tight timing was raised as a limiting factor to engage in Pillar 4 version 0 grids as foreseen in the global Pillar 4 IP. Several ESP partners see problems to deliver before August

2017. Even though all countries supported the global Pillar 4 IP, and agreed to the carbon mapping via 4th Plenary Assembly, resources to implement SOC country maps are limited, sometimes responsibilities unclear. However, most countries can build on experiences on project level, in some cases national SOC maps have been already produced.

Luca Montanarella noted that JRC is not involved in the collection of data or the compilation of the overall GSOCmap for Europe, but is ready to step in with its expertise to help coordinating this exercise and eventually, if explicitly asked, to fill data gaps for countries that will not deliver data in time.

Rainer Baritz (GSP Secretariat) noted that 20 out of 38 ESP countries (EASP countries not counted) are ready to produce SOC maps (18 are not yet in, of which 8 are EU). He regarded this GSOC exercise as a testing phase to build, and contribute to, the Global Soil Information System as a country-driven global data infrastructure.

Luca Montanarella proposed, if needed, to raise the timing issue during the GSP 5th PA, 20-22 June 2017 (and later at the ITPS meeting of October 2017). Mrs. Masson agreed with this and proposed that the GSP Secretariat presents a progress report on GSOCmap, including the issue of gap filling.

In relation to late delivery of data, Rainer Baritz commented that any effort to produce national SOC data would not be in vain, as data could be merged later into the future global soil data infrastructure, thus continuous updating of products can be implemented.

Dominique Darmendrail commented that there might be also serious IPR obstacles for countries to deliver data, to which Luca Montanarella replied that such difficulties are dealt with by INSII. As a matter of fact: at GSP level it is stated that any national data policy overrules the GSP data policy (reference was made to the 5th GSP PA, during which this topic will be discussed).

Josiane Masson noted that the national GSOCmaps shall be accompanied with extensive metadata, as it will help explain/understand the likely possible patchy structure of the map compiled from the various contributions. Several participants stated that a European technical meeting on various issues related to the GSOC exercise would be quite helpful.

The chair concluded the session by mentioning that needed activities related to the 4 points introduced by Montanarella were covered well by the Pillar activities of the IP and that it would be the task of each Pillar chair to coordinate contribution.

6 Final discussion and Conclusions

Mobilization of Resources

As mentioned above: it was agreed that the ESP Secretariat, on behalf of the ESP Pillar chairs, would organize a poll among partners, inviting for experts nominations for the Pillar working groups.

Next steps of the ESP

In order to launch the concrete implementation of the ESP Implementation Plan, the next steps will be:

- Re-establish active working groups for the 5 pillars
- Identify priorities and synergies for the 5 pillars actions
- Mobilize resources with the help of national focal points

The ESP Steering Committee will meet in June and start the activities.

Conclusions / Wrap-up

The Chair closed the meeting, congratulating all with the finalization and agreement on the ESP Implementation Plan 2017-2020 and thanking all participants for the constructive inputs and fruitful discussions.
