



Report of the Tenth Plenary Meeting of the European Soil Partnership

Online meeting, 4-5 May 2023

Session I: 14:00 – 17:00

Opening (Welcome, agenda, tour de table)

1. Introduction

The 10th meeting of the European Soil Partnership (ESP) took place as an online meeting, 4-5 May 2023 (two half days) (Annex I: Agenda). 70 participants from 26 countries attended the plenary meeting, including 15 country focal points, representatives of the European Commission, and representatives from the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) Secretariat (Annex II: participants).

The meeting was chaired by Mr Rainer Baritz (European Environment Agency), with the support of the ESP Secretariat, Ms Nicole Wellbrock (Federal Research Institute for Rural Areas, Forestry and Fisheries).

The ESP Plenary Meeting was prepared by the Steering Committee during its online meeting 28 March 2023.

The agenda was adopted.

2. Reports

2.1 Overall status: Rainer Baritz (Chair)

The ESP is a multi-lateral initiative by FAO member countries and many other governmental and non-governmental institutions. The ESP facilitates and contributes to the exchange of knowledge and technologies about soils, between this region and FAO.

Currently, four main streams of activities characterize the ESP region:

- Response to projects initiated by the GSP (national experts and national implementation, e.g. data products) – ESP members with in-kind support
- Bilateral cooperation between ESP members and FAO on soils (using the GSP objectives and infrastructure) – ESP-members as donors
- Results from projects catalysed and implemented in EU context – EU research projects supporting research partners
- European soil governance: European networks relevant to soil, national and EU level soil policy making

There are currently no independent activities at ESP level two elements:

- The ESP Secretariate (hosted by Germany)
- Four subregional partnerships and five national soil partnerships (which are in itself largely independent)

The ESP is currently developing towards:

- Becoming a hub to enable exchange of reflections and activities among partners – largely driven by the GSP agenda, thus strengthening positioning and
- Building an information platform about soil-related actions in Europe

There is no financial contribution to the ESP. Bilateral support (in-kind, funding) by ESP members flows 100% towards FAO.

2.2 Information from the Sub-Regional Soil Partnerships:

Chair introduced a map of the current four subregional soil partnerships. There is potential for these subregions to be supported, as well as new subregions to be created in the future:

- EU macroregional strategies
- Green Agenda for the Western Balkan
- International conventions and subregional treaties (Carpathian C, Danube River Protection C., Alpine C., C. for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution)
- EU Agenda for the Mediterranean
- EU cohesion policy
- EU research (incl. Soil Mission)

There is much potential in the ESP to significantly deepen this intra- and cross-regional cooperation on soil.

Discussion: any initiative in the Mediterranean would likely include parts of the NENA region (as already included in the EU Agenda for the Mediterranean).

Alpine Subregional Soil Partnership (AlpSP) (Mr Borut Vrscaj, SI)

The AlpSP is slowly growing, currently counting 126 members. Regional public authorities are underrepresented (only 7%), as well as national authorities (4%) and municipalities (4%). This restricts the implementation process.

Activities in 2023 mainly focussed on meetings and lectures with the aim to promote soil knowledge exchange. A policy brief on the sustainable use of mountain soils was published. The AlpSP Steering committee has met in December 2022. A proposal for an INTERRG project will be modified and resubmitted.

The subregional secretariat currently depends on in-kind support; funding is currently not available.

Pyrenean Subregional Soil Partnership (PyrSP) (Ms Rosa Poch, ES)

The PyrSP currently counts 48 partners from 7 regions, and consists of 3 working groups. A proposal for a regional research project has been submitted (SOLPYR 2024-2026 with 9 partners POCTEFA (FEDER Fund)). Local soil awareness is a strong component, such as the dissemination of knowledge about soils of the public along the hiking trail of St James. The 4th PyrSP Assembly took place in December 2022 in Toulouse.

Eurasian Subregional Soil Partnership (EASP) (Ms Natalia Rodriguez, on behalf of the regional chair and EASP secretariat)

The 6th EASP plenary meeting was announced 23-24 May 2023, in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. [*Update: The new EASP chair is Murat Temirzhanov (Kazakhstan), and the Vice-chair is Ali-aksandr Chervan (Belarus). The Secretariat remains in the Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia*]

The activity report was provided following the new 6 GSP action areas (only recent activities are mentioned here):

- Action area 3: Global soil doctors programme is being implemented in Kazakhstan in collaboration with the CACILM2 project; Uzbekistan is also preparing for its implementation
- Action area 4: World Soil Day with 31 celebrations in 2022

- Action area 6: GLOSOLAN/EUROSOLAN: several partners contributed to ring tests and global map products.

The Eurasian Soil Portal was updated <https://eurasian-soil-portal.info/>

The presentation was followed by a statement from Ukraine (**Mr Arkadiy Levin, NFP Ukraine**). The Ukraine will step out of the EASP and is currently in no subregional partnership. Chair ESP referred to a later TOP focussing on Ukraine.

Western Balkan Subregional Soil Partnership (WBSB) (Mr Darko Konjevic, SWG Secretariat, Ms Dragana Vidojevic, NFP RS, Mr Dusko Mukaetov, NFP MK)

In November 2022, the Western Balkan Subregional Soil Partnership was created via communique by the agricultural ministers. Two processes were connected:

- Green agenda for the Western Balkans, which foresees the establishment of a regional partnership for soil
- The project “Agriculture Policy Dialog Germany – Western Balkan” has been established under the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South-Eastern Europe (SWG, since 2005). Within that project, the Regional Expert Advisory Working Group (REAWG) on soil has been established; this WG has prepared the background document and communique to create the subregional partnership.
- REAWG Soil has developed a 2023/2024 work plan. The first product (report) has been developed in 2022: “State of Art of Land and Soil Management in the Western Balkans”.
- Three technical meetings will happen in 2023

Activities in support to Ukraine

Chair ESP presented the maps from the Website Ecodozor, which impressingly visualizes the impact of military operations on Ukrainian territory. He also informed about the UNECE “Inventory of assessments of the environmental damage resulting from the Russian Invasion of Ukraine” (project since 2022), and the seminar of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Environmental Assessments for the Ukraine: 16 February 2023).

Ms Katja Dells (BVVG) presented the German-Ukrainian Agricultural Policy Dialogue (APD <https://www.apd-ukraine.de/de/>) an example how an ESP member country currently supports and advises solutions for challenges related to land management in the Ukraine: this is to strengthen the Ukrainian land policy to increase the competitiveness of the agricultural sector and to sustainable development of rural areas. The process involves several working formats and tools:

- Legal soil policy advising on central state level (e.g., online seminar 4 May 2023)
- Capacity building, conferences, experts exchange (e.g., study tours by Ukrainian experts), online seminars and technical working groups; website publications

Two online events were organized in 2022 about the remediation of contaminated sites and demining will be continued this year.

Ms Natalia Rodriguez (FAO) informed about the preparations of a project to support local Ukrainian laboratories, to build capacity of experts to map and to identify hotspots of pollution.

All ESP partners were asked to share their national initiatives in support of the Ukraine with the ESP secretariat; partners are also encouraged to directly contact Arkadiy Levin, NFP Ukraine.

2.3 GSP Secretariat: global activities with participation from ESP members (Ms Natalia Rodriguez, FAO)

The GSP secretariat provided an overview of last year's ESP contributions to GSP ongoing and developed products, activities and relevant publications in all six action areas:

- European experts have contributed to various publications, and participated in **trainings** (37 experts from 15 ESP countries). A training on soil salinity parameters has been held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan 23 – 25 May 2023.
- RECSOIL pilot projects are conducted in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.
- ESP partners are important contributors to the SoiLex platform.
- During World Soil Day 2022, 184 events were implemented in the ESP region (out of a global total of 2368). 203 laboratories from Europe participate in GLOSOLAN.

2.4 ITPS: ongoing activities with needed input from ESP members (Ms. Rosa Poch, ITPS)

- Europe Chapter of the 2nd Status of the World's Soil Resources Report (SWSR 2025)

The main structure for the European Chapter has been presented. It presents the changes of the soil condition since 2015. Deadlines for writing and delivering the chapters is 31 October 2023 (1st draft); the final version is scheduled for 30 March 2024. The next ITPS session to discuss the writing progress is in November 2024. The European region is reported in two "subregions" Europe and Eurasia.

Cristina Arias-Navarro (JRC) informed that the writing process for a European Report on the Status of the European Soils is shortly in front of its launch (with EEA and Eionet), and that the content of this report provides input for the Europe chapter for the SWSR 2025. All ESP partners will be contacted before the summer.

Discussion: The structure of the regional chapter has been questioned. Each subregional soil partnership should have its own brief overall assessment, not just Eurasia. It was also mentioned that the text should involve a review by policy makers – at least the summary.

2.5 Activities in the ESP region related to the six GSP action areas:

ESP Chair introduced the action areas, which largely overlap with the former GSP pillars. This ESP meeting initiates a series of discussions which will:

- develop content for the ESP webpage;
- map from Pillars to action areas in the ESP;
- develop input to update the ESP Implementation Plan.

Sustainable soil management and restoration (Ms Saskia Keestra, WUR, Jorge Curiel Yuste, BC3, Vitalii Lebed/Anatolii Kucher, UK)

Within the **EJP Soils project**, agricultural practices have been analysed in their capacity to address soil threats – often, practices cover several threats simultaneously. The objective is to contribute to a regional guideline for sustainable soil management.

Within the **Holisoils project**, sustainable forest management is addressed. There is a strong research foundation, which looks at the biological mechanisms and forest and their soils, with the aim to understand the mechanisms of soil vulnerability and recovery.

Vitalii Lebed and Anatolii Kucher (Ukraine) reported about soil degradation caused by warfare. Currently, more than 10 million hectares of agricultural land are affected.

Discussion: EU projects offer an important basis to develop a regional (European) program to promote the Voluntary Guideline for SSM at global level. Regarding Ukraine, much experience has been developed in the Western Balkans, through various UN and other programs. The impact of war should be well-represented on the SWSR 2025.

ESP Chair suggests to create a small group of experts within ESP that experiences from earlier projects and technical advice can be shared (e.g. remediation techniques). However, this requires responses by countries the above request about national activities related to soil and Ukraine.

Soil governance (ESP Chair)

ESP chair introduced European soil governance. The GSP governance includes two aspects:

- political developments (legal frameworks, strategies, targets)
- the cooperation structure of partners and networks around soils

In the European political governance, the proposal for a Soil Health Law will be published 5 July 2023. Already now have the discussions and backgrounds documents served as role model for target setting and a respective strategy development in the GSP.

In the cooperative governance, the ESP including its subregions and national partnerships are still in the process to establish their role and visibility. For example, the EU has recently initiated the Coalition4HealthySoils, whereas the ESP strives to include also the non-EU partners.

Soil research (Mr Gerkely Toth, HU)

During the last year of action, several products need to be highlighted:

At GSP level:

- GSP/ITPS: global assessments, Soil Letters (8 letters/yr)
- Global soil doctors programme, EduSOILS, capacity building

At ESP level:

- EJP SOIL Annual Science Days: 12 to 16 June, Riga, Latvia
- BonaRes Conference 2023 “Soil as sustainable resource”: 15 – 17 May 2023, Berlin, Germany
- Jump-start the Mission Soil (Cluster event, by invitation only: 22-23 March 2023 (hybrid))
- European Soil Observatory 2nd Stakeholder Forum, 24 - 26 October 2022 (online)

Among the large spectrum of European soil research, the project ‘Soils for Europe’ was highlighted as it establishes Think Tanks around the key topics of soil degradation.

An important tool is the [Bonares Knowledge library](#), which is a participatory platform for soil researchers to enable access to research results.

Living Labs and Lighthouses (LLL)

It was again mentioned that the [current and future calls for LLLs](#) offer great potential for the subregional partnerships. The EU project '[NATI00Ns](#)' facilitates the deployment of such LLLs through a series of country visits and information materials.

[Webinar](#) 'Core elements and specificities of the Living Lab topics': 06 July 2023.

Please contact the ESP Secretariate for more information about ongoing research opportunities.

Soil awareness (Ms Arwyn Jones, JRC)

While this topic is the largest action area for the GSP, in the ESP, outreach activities are less visible and coordinated. The [Prepsoil](#) project includes public and are engagement events. Provided more support, the ESP secretariat could capture events and best practices, and provide a website with key project outcomes.

Considering the amount of institutions in Europe dealing with soils, the amount of research and training, the amount of World Soil Day events in the region appears low.

Discussion:

Additional boost in public attention on soil can be expected from the proposal for a Soil Health Law. A mechanism would be needed which routinely flags materials and events in the ESP region to local press.

It was referred to **newsletters** (ITPS, EJP Soils, IUSS Alert) which are accessible to ESP partners, and which could be disseminated by them. For example, the IUSS Alert reaches over 3,000 soil scientists all over the world!

Mapping and monitoring soil health (Luca Montanarella, Chair INSII, Yusuf Yigini, FAO, Maria Fantappiè, CREA, Antonio Bispo, INRAE, Marija Romić, Chair EUROSOLAN)

INSII is a network of soil information institutions, consisting of single representatives of relevant institutions on national level. All global products are country driven. Requests for products are agreed by the GSP Plenary Assembly, and thus directed to the National Focal Points (NFPs). In some cases, NFPs are then challenged to collect relevant data from different institutions. Regarding pan-European representation and datasets, the ESP is still lacking a coordination mechanism, which would facilitate the exchange of experiences among experts and product aggregation. Technically, a great deal of support is provided through Work Package 6 of the EJP Soil.

In the European Soil Laboratory Network, the main areas of work are laboratory methods and standards (harmonization of SOPs), including quality control and equipment. Currently, many ESP countries have no registered labs!

The current GSP data products were presented. 9 ESP countries contributed to the Global Salt Affected Soils Map (mostly from the EASP), 5 countries to the Global Black Soil Distribution Map, 17 countries to the Global Soil organic Carbon Sequestration Potential Map.

The GSP action framework 2022 - 2030 comprises voluntary targets as well as technical aspects related to monitoring, SoilSTAT and the GSP indicator system; it includes Key

Performance Indicators (KPIs), SoilSTAT monitoring indicators, and a Global Soil Health Index (SHI). Results will be shared and disseminated through SoilSTAT. Specifications for this indicator system are currently being developed by an expert group – ISAF (72 members; 21 from Europe).

Recent results from soil monitoring were presented for France, describing two pilot studies: on pesticides and on biodiversity. There is clearly a need for such broad-scale monitoring of pesticide residues in soils, which can be connected to already established monitoring programs.

Discussion:

Activities by ESP members largely focus around GSP data products.

EEA is currently conducting a project which investigates the use of the EU INSPIRE Directive for the exchange of national data sets which are ideally also compatible with the Global Soil Information System (GLOSIS) of the GSP.

For EU-wide representation, JRC has developed a soil health dashboard.

Questions were raised about the ISAF writing process: it is important to ensure that SoilSTAT monitoring does not contradict results from different sources. It seems that such effects can be prevented by official data requests and national submissions to SoilSTAT.

It was also asked how an integrated system in Europe could be built, where the different sampling systems, results, thresholds etc, produce a harmonized view on Europe. The timeframe for ISAF writing process is too tight.

The action area “Technical cooperation” was not discussed.

3. Preparations for the GSP Plenary Assembly

The draft agenda for the GSP Plenary Assembly was presented. At the time of the ESP Plenary Meeting, the background documents were not available yet, so that a deeper discussion could follow in a separate ad-hoc meeting of the National Focal Points, or bilaterally.

4. ESP Organisation and Secretariat

The new website of the ESP was presented: <https://www.europeansoilpartnership.org/> ESP members are asked to study and supplement the content. The regular sharing of national projects, links to activities, workshops, conferences, requires that focal point establish themselves as information hubs, or: enable the ESP Secretariat to use the network partners to collect such information. That way, the website could even become an information source for national Focal Points. However, no progress is possible without inputs and resources.

Many requests have been made to intensify communication and action in the ESP. This requires:

- A revision of the Terms of Reference (to adapt the ESP to the new GSP action framework, and to identify the roles of ESP members more clearly)
- Funding or in-kind support: while the formalities of financial support to the ESP secretariat need to be clarified, in-kind action at country level could be a promising

solution to boost national as well as ESP level cooperation and soil awareness; this could be achieved by tasking a national expert to compile and develop relevant national soil information and materials.

5. Closing remarks

5.1 Conclusions and observations from partners

ESP members and partners are requested to share with the ESP secretariate :

- Expert for remediation, warfare and demining for Ukraine
Feedback to the website

ESP members and partners are encouraged to develop their national data sets for current GSP data requests (contact your INSII member, and/or ensure that you have a representative in the respective GSP networks).

A Call for contributions to the Status of the World Soil Resources report 2025 will follow.

Chair ESP offers the opportunity to hold an ad-hoc meeting for National Focal Points before the GSP Plenary Assembly could follow.

5.2 Next ESP Plenary assembly: date, location

To be decided after the GSP Plenary Assembly.

Provided the density of topics, two ESP meetings per year are necessary. In case more intensive communication is needed in between meetings, the ESP secretariat needs to be strengthened in order to increase proactive action and services (see above).

5.3. World Soil Day 2023

ESP members and partners are encouraged to plan respective activities

Chair ESP closed the meeting by deeply thanking all participants for their contributions, and for further reflections on the meeting outcome.

10th EUROPEAN SOIL PARTNERSHIP PLENARY MEETING

3 -4 May 2022 (Zoom meeting)

Chair: Rainer Baritz, EEA

Secretariat: Nicole Wellbrock (Federal Research Institute for Rural Areas, Forestry and Fisheries)

Registration: <https://thuenen.limequery.com/692251?lang=en>

Draft AGENDA

Session I: 3 May, 14:00 – 17:00 (CEST/UTC +2)

Session II: 4 May, 09:00 – 12:00 (CEST/UTC +2)

1. Opening (Welcome, agenda, tour de table)

2. Reports

2.1 Overall status: Chair

2.2 Information from the sub-regional and national soil partnerships:

- Alpine, Pyrenean, Eurasia, Western Balkan Partnership, Activities in support to Ukraine

2.3 GSP Secretariat: global activities with participation from ESP members

2.4 ITPS: ongoing activities with needed input from ESP members

- Europe Chapter of the 2nd Status of the World's Soil Resources Report

2.5 Activities in the ESP region related to the six GSP action areas:

1. Sustainable soil management and restoration
2. Soil governance
3. Soil research
4. Soil awareness
5. Mapping and monitoring soil health
6. Technical cooperation

3. Preparations for the GSP Plenary Assembly

4.1 Discussion of all decision-making points, and how this affects the ESP

4.2 Summary, and future objectives of the ESP

4. ESP Organisation and Secretariat

5.1 Activities of the ESP secretariat

7. Web site: <https://www.europeansoilpartnership.org/>

5. Closing remarks

6.1 Conclusions and observations from partners

6.2 Next ESP Plenary assembly: date, location

6.3 World Soil Day 2023

Annex 2: Participants

Last name:	First Name:	Country
Agustsdottir	Anna Maria	Iceland
Altobelli	filiberto	Italy
Aran	Miguel	Spain
Arias Navarro	Cristina	European Union
Batsalia	Maria	Greece
Baritz	Rainer	European Environment Agency
Baumgarten	Andreas	Austria
Bernardi	Daniel	Italy
Bialousz	Stanislaw	Poland
Bispo	Antonio	France
Bragason	Árni	Iceland
Brand	Hans	Netherlands
Cardoso Lisboa	Carolina	United Kingdom
Centeno	Maria	Portugal
Cherlinka	Vasyl	Slovakia
Cortés	Amparo	Spain
Costantini	Edoardo	Italy
Curiel Yuste	Jorge	Spain
Dazzi	Carmelo	Italy
Dmytruk	Yuriy	Ukraine
El Fadili	Saïd	Belgium
Fantappiè	Maria	Italy
Garry	Sarah	United Kingdom
Guste	Dace	Latvia
Havlicek	Elena	Switzerland
Heinrich	Barbara	Germany
Ivanova	Maria	Bulgaria
Kaiser	Moritz	Germany
Jones	Arwyn	European Union
Karo Bešter	Petra	Slovenia
Karyotis	Kostas	Greece
Keestra	Saskia	Netherlands
Konjevic	Darko	The Republic of North Macedonia
Kucher	Anatolii	Ukraine
Lebed	Vitalii	Ukraine
Levin	Arkadiy	Ukraine
Lolos	Nikolaos	Greece
Marx	Kirstin	Germany
Montanarella	Luca	European Union
Mukaetov	Dusko	The Republic of North Macedonia
Müller-Grabherr	Dietmar	Austria
Muntean	Alexander	Russia
Nadiradze	Kakha	Georgia
Pascale	Francesco	Austria
Perdigao	Antonio	Portugal
Poch	Rosa M.	Spain
Princen	Jean-Pierre	France
Robb	Cairo	United Kingdom
Rodríguez Eugenio	Natalia	UN Food and Agriculture Organization
Romić	Marija	Croatia

Rost	Laura	Germany
Roures Rego	Daniel	Spain
Rozloga	Iurii	Republic of Moldova
Sá	Cláudia	Portugal
Salo	Tapio	Finland
Sirbu	Rodica	Republic of Moldova
Sobocká	Jaroslava	Slovakia
Spanischberger	Andrea	Austria
Swerts	Martien	Belgium
Szilard	Szabo	Hungary
Thorsson	Johann	Iceland
Tóth	Gergely	Hungary
Triantakonstantis	Dimitris	Greece
Truszevska	Marta	Italy
van Egmond	Fenny	Netherlands
Verbeke	Isabelle	Italy
Vidojevic	Dragana	Serbia
Wellbrock	Nicole	Germany
Willenbrock	Nicholas	United Kingdom
Yigini	Yusuf	UN Food and Agriculture Organization