



# Report of the Special ESP Session in preparation of the 12<sup>th</sup> GSP Plenary Assembly

Online meeting, 28. - 29. May 2024

**Participants: 28 (total), 20-22 (per session), 19 countries**

**Background materials:**

- GSPPA: XII/2024/1 (Agenda) and all background documents for the 12<sup>th</sup> GSP Plenary Assembly
- Presentation by the ESP Chair (overview of GSP XII agenda items)
- Draft ISAF report<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ISAF WG (2024). SoilSTAT - Development and Integration of Key Performance Indicators for the Global Soil Partnership, the Soil Health Indicator System, and the Global Soil Health Index (GSHI). Technical Concept Note. Draft 2024

## **Summary:**

The meeting was opened by a brief summary of recent activities in the ESP region (Top2). The main topic was then focussing on the agenda and background documents of the GSP Plenary Assembly (Top4). Lastly, the GSP action areas were discussed based on the content and structure presented at the ESP website (<https://www.europeansoilpartnership.org/>) (Top3).

While the achievements in Europe in the context of GSP projects were acknowledged, various questions and uncertainties appeared regarding the GSP governance. This includes the role of NFPs, the regional partnerships, and the regional organization to implement action areas.

## **Tuesday, 28.05.2024:**

### **TOP 1**

After a tour de table, the chair opened the meeting with a short overview of soil-related activities in Europe: the richness of soil research under the EU Soil Mission, and activities around the proposed soil monitoring law, subregional activities, and GSP international technical networks and symposia. It has been difficult to place an ESP Plenary Meeting in the past year full of meetings around these activities. He announced that the ESP secretariat will soon send a place holder for a full ESP plenary meeting later in the year. This current meeting will be largely devoted to help partners prepare for the GSPPA next week.

### **TOP 2**

Following this introduction, short pitches about activities in the European subregions followed:

Rosa Poch (Representative of the Pyrenean Subregional Soil Partnership and chair of ITPS) introduced a new INTERREG project SOLPYR, which would provide unified information on mountain soils (maps), but also promote soil awareness. The Alpine Subregional Soil Partnership reported in written.

Michele Freppaz informs about the organisation of pillars and conference contributions by members of the partnership including a summer school in collaboration with the FAO-Mountain Partnership.

Dusko Mukaetov reports that the Western Balkan Partnership under the umbrella of Green Agenda for the Western Balkans is a very active soil expert group, with roughly 3 meetings per year and recent a recent report about the condition of soils in the region.

Regarding national soil partnerships, Ukrainian, Italian and Portuguese representatives were present during the meeting and contributed with interventions. Ukraine shared an overview of the extend of soil degradation through the Russian invasion. Chair ESP reminded all partners of the ESP initiative to identify national experts which could advise about clean-up and restoration operations. With the exception of Germany, no other ESP focal point has returned any information yet. Chair ESP referred to highly official political negotiations about supporting Ukraine's recovery, to which focal points could maybe contribute.

Marija Romic reported about EUROSOLAN, in particular the recent launch of a Eurasian soil proficiency test, and its contribution to recent internal soil research conferences. The Belgian-Luxembourg national soil laboratory network (BELOSOLAN) conducts an upcoming workshop on clay analysis. Meeting participants from Ukraine and Georgia have voiced additional support to EUROSOLAN. It is suggested to further elaborate ideas to establish some partnering/twinning amongst well-experienced and less experienced laboratories.

Rosa Poch then reported about the writing process for the Status of the World Soil Resources Report 2025. The Europe chapter will now be reviewed by ITPS members, JRC and EEA as min authors, which then also allows ESP members to channel their comments. The full draft will be made available once the review process is kicked off.

**TOP 4** (*the sequence of TOP 3 and TOP 4 has been changed; TOP 4 is more urgent and shall receive sufficient time for discussion*)

Chair has introduced each of the GSP agenda items using slides (attached)

**GSPPA XII/2** summarizes the progress to develop an implementation framework for the Soil Health Indicator System (SHIS) and the GSP Performance Indicator System (GPIS) – prepared by the ISAF WG. The two indicator systems are an integral element of the GSP Action Framework 2030, and were adopted earlier. Although not finished, the ISAF technical concept note was shared with permission of the GSP secretariat.

It appears that the ISAF report suggests a reporting system for indicators. While the benefits of these indicators are clearly presented, the implications of such a system, role of national monitoring and the specifications for indicator submissions and the overall implementation structure (new INSII WG?) are not clear. It is important that GSP members can review, comment and endorse the report once finalized. It seems that this indicator system relies on significant country input, with implications for work load, investment and coordination (role of focal points).

**GSPPA XII/3** provides the information requested in 2023.

During the discussion, several positions appeared:

- Appreciation of the potential benefits of the COAG subcommittee; there is a risk whether these benefits can be realized; there is not sufficient detail in this and earlier reports about the operation of the GSP secretariat and the exact tasks and interactions with the subcommittee. All GSP members must see clear what their role is to support the process in COAG; for that GSP focal points shall cooperate closely with their representations.
- Doubt whether this subcommittee is sufficiently justified for COAG to make a decision; fear that this process may take at least two more COAG and Council meetings (> 4 yrs.)

Both GSPPA XII/2 and /3 challenge roles of the GSP governance: workload and tasks for NFPs, GSP secretariat, implementation governance for the GSP Action Framework (implementation plans, RSPs, working groups, pillars/action areas). It seems that an update of the GSP ToR is necessary, despite uncertain roadmap regarding the COAG Subcommittee.

### **Wednesday, 29.05.2024**

**GSPPA XII/4** refers to the activities of the ITPS. While ITPS is without very successful, it was suggested it needs support to deliver more official statements and recommendations, more visible in the public and policy space<sup>2</sup>.

**GSPPA XII/5** concerns the financial status and funding of the GSP. The GSP report provides an excellent overview of GSP finances (see table in the PPT of the ESP chair). Questions were raised about the allocation of voluntary contributions towards specific projects. Some focal areas of national contributions can be detected in the GSP report; however, details are not revealed and are donor-internals. The substantial contribution by PhosAgros was noted, trusting the FAO guidance for public-private partnerships.

**GSPPA XII/6** concerns the normative tools and actions on sustainable soil management. Without doubt, this are some of the core GSP projects with visible impact for policy stakeholders and practitioners. The projects are largely donor-based, and are implemented through consultants in the GSP secretariat. Besides SoilLEX, there is no direct implementation of projects (such as GSDP and RecSoil) in European countries (wider application in the Eurasian subregion). The importance of these projects shall be discussed at a later meeting of the ESP.

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<sup>2</sup> Note by the Chair: It could be considered that the GSP international networks perform largely the quality control of their products and the products of the GSP secretariat. Where information products with country representation are produced, a GSP review process is needed.

**GSPPA XII/7** presents an overview and outcome of recent global symposia. The chair has encouraged partners to raise new topics of interest for upcoming symposia.

**GSPPA XII/8** contains the reports of the Regional Soil Partnerships (RSP). Chair ESP asked to contribute with any news about relevant national activities, for his presentation during the Plenary Assembly, or as contribution to keep the ESP website updated.

**GSPPA XII/9** covers the Technical Networks. There are currently 7 technical networks with wide-spread participation, especially experts from the ESP region. Currently, networks are largely driven by personal interest, and experts nominate themselves.

Regarding GSPPA XII/8 and /9, focal points expressed the difficulty to keep track of the national participation, and thus cannot help prioritizing or channelling support; often, the relevance and challenge of products on national level cannot be understood. In addition, since much rotation is happening in governments, guidance and training for focal points could probably help newcomers to implement their roles.

**GSPPA XII/10 and /11.** A short discussion covered the proposed UN Decade on Soil Health 2031-2040. The synergy for building on IUSS experience and urgency for action was highlighted.

### **TOP 3:**

A first draft overview of ESP action areas can be viewed on the ESP website:

<https://www.europeansoilpartnership.org/the-six-action-areas/> . Action area 1 “Sustainably manage and restore soils for the provision of ecosystem services” was presented and discussed as an example. The website presents relevant instruments and existing guidelines for aspects related to sustainable soil management. The aim of action area 1 in the ESP is to develop a European regional guideline on sustainable soil management. Discussion could now follow about the synergy effects with ongoing projects (such as the EJP Soils, other EU and national projects), and the design of a method to synthesize for the ESP region. Until the next ESP Plenary Meeting, partners could share further background, so that an united approach can be discussed for the ESP – for all action areas.

### **TOP 5:**

The GSP Plenary Assembly will be attended by most ESP members online. In order to enhance presence and visibility, the ESP chair suggests that focal points contact their national representations in Rome to support them, possibly with speaking points if demanded.

**A full ESP Plenary Meeting is currently planned for the end of October 2024; a note will be sent by the ESP secretariat soon after the GSP PA.**

The chair thanked the participants for the many helpful contributions and anticipation in this network.

## Annex I: Agenda



EUROPEAN SOIL  
PARTNERSHIP

### 11<sup>th</sup> EUROPEAN SOIL PARTNERSHIP PLENARY MEETING

28-May-2024 14:00—17:00 and 29-May-2024 09:00—12:00 (Zoom-meeting)

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Chair: Rainer Baritz, EEA

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

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#### Draft AGENDA

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28-May-2024: 14:00—17:00 (main session)

29-May-2024: 09:00—12:00 (to the extend needed)

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

2. Reports

2.1 Overall status of activities in the European region

2.2 ESP-related processes [short interventions by representatives]

-> Action in Sub-Regional and national soil partnerships, GSP secretariat, EUROSOLAN, ITPS

2.3 Key messages from the Europe Chapter of the Status of the World Soil Resources Report

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3. Activities in Europe regarding GSP action areas

(short pitches by the chair, participants share from their perspectives)

-> Sustainable soil management and restoration

-> Soil governance

-> Soil research

-> Soil awareness

-> Mapping and monitoring soil health

-> Technical cooperation

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4. Agenda of the GSP Plenary Assembly

(short pitches by the chair, participants share from their perspectives)

-> Short summary of each agenda item by our secretariat

-> Participants share their views

5. ESP Organisation and Secretariat

-> ESP website

-> Date for next Plenary Meeting

Joined dinner in Rome at GSP meeting on Monday

## Annex II: Participants

Andrea Spanischberger	AT
Guler Mirzayeva	AZ
Narminja Jafarova	AZ
Martien Swerts	BE
Bavo Peeters	BE/ENV
Christian Probst	BE/ENV
Elena Havlicek	CH
Laura Rost	DE
Nicole Wellbrock	DE
Rainer Baritz	DK/EEA
Lucas Amparo Cortes	ES
Rosa Poch	ES
Antonio Bispo	FR
Ekaterine Sanadze	GE
Marija Romic	HR
Niall Ryan	IE
Anna Maria Agustsdottir	IS
Francesco Pascale	IT
Maria Fantappie	IT
Natalia Rodriguez	IT/FAO
Edoardo Constantini	IT/IUSS
Uspanov Institute of Soil Science	KAZ
Dusko Mukaetov	MK
Antonio Perdigao	PT
Claudia Sa	PT
Marija Dragovic	RS
Sevinc Madenoglu	TR
Arkady Levin	UA