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**EFC matters****Establishment of the Forest Invasive Species Network for  
Europe and Central Asia (REUFIS)****Food and Agriculture Organization****European Forestry Commission****Thirty-ninth session**

Warsaw, Poland 9-13 October 2017

**Establishment of the Forest Invasive Species  
Network for Europe and Central Asia (REUFIS)****Note by the Secretariat***Summary*

Movement and establishment of forest invasive species, which is also exacerbated by climate change poses increased threats to forests in Europe and Central Asia. Combatting forest invasive species in the region is often hampered by lack of information. To this end, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) initiated the establishment of a suitable “platform” on “Forest Invasive Species in Europe and Central Asia” in 2016.

This paper provides basic information about the objectives of and background information about the platform as well as on-going and planned work.

## I. Introduction

1. A regional workshop for European and Central Asian countries was held in Hungary in June 2015 to promote the implementation of phytosanitary standards in forestry as well as discuss related forest health issues in the region. Participants confirmed increasing threats to European and Central Asian forests posed by the movement and establishment of forest invasive species, which is also exacerbated by climate change.
2. Workshop participants identified the need for a network or “platform” where scientists, managers and policy-makers can share information and experiences and coordinate programmes and activities in relation to forest invasive species within the region and beyond. Currently, FAO facilitates forest invasive species networks in Asia Pacific, Africa and Near East regions for establishing information exchange and working groups on forest invasive species. Those networks aim to raise awareness, develop databases, facilitate exchange of information and strengthen institutional capacity in the respective region.
3. To initiate the establishment of a suitable “platform”, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) organized a “Forest Invasive Species in Europe and Central Asia” meeting in Minsk, Belarus from 6-7 September 2016. Representatives from 23 countries (including invited speakers) from Europe and Central Asia came together to tackle the shared problem of forest invasive species. The main objective of this meeting was to kick-off a functional network to foster integrated and dynamic forest invasive species management in the region and provide baseline data for informed decision-making.

## II. Establishment and Mandate of REUFIS Network

4. Participants at the meeting in Minsk agreed on the establishment of the Forest<sup>1</sup> Invasive Species Network for Europe and Central Asia (REUFIS). Countries expressing interest in being members of the network were: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Croatia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. The network is voluntary and open to all countries in FAO Europe and Central Asia Region (FAO REU).
5. The mission of the Forest Invasive Species Network for Europe and Central Asia is to enhance exchange and share knowledge and information related to forest invasive species. The Network aims to enable sharing of information and experiences, coordinate activities on forest invasive species, raise awareness in eradication, control and management of forest invasive species, encourage publication and sharing of research results, early detection and monitoring strategies including taxonomic support, and provide a communication link for all levels within and between member countries. The importance of using existing tools and structures in these activities was highlighted.
6. The Network will collaborate with existing international and regional organizations, such as the FAO International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPPO); it will strengthen national capacities to manage forest pests, and provide decision-makers with baseline data for making informed decisions; and advocate compliance with phytosanitary regulations and provide policy advice on movement of forest invasive species.
7. The Network consists of national focal points of all current member countries and those that express interest in joining in the future. The focal points representing their respective countries have the responsibility to run and coordinate its activities on a national

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<sup>1</sup> In this context forest means forest land, other wooded land and trees outside forests as per FAO definitions.

level. A Secretary/Coordinator, and an executive committee selected by the national focal points will coordinate and manage the network on an international level in cooperation with FAO. The Network may also encourage professionals who show readiness to serve the network on behalf of their country and work to help the network in reaching its objectives.

8. It was agreed by the participants of the Minsk meeting that Prof. Ferenc Lakatos of the Institute of Silviculture and Forest Protection, University of Sopron will act as interim Secretary of the Network and assist in preparing the mandate and establishing the final network structure. The first regular REUFIS Secretary and the Executive Committee will be selected by the members at the next meeting of the network scheduled for autumn 2017. The focal points and Executive Committee headed by the Secretary will decide on the role and function of the committee, as well as determine the rotation of membership of the Executive Committee. It was agreed that any further issue related to the running of the network will be considered at later stages. The Executive Committee will include five to six country focal points and an FAO representative. The Executive Committee will decide on the operation of the Network. Sub-groups will be formed as needed to carry out specific functions related to objectives of the Network for specific sub-regions or forest health issues.

9. National representation will include a focal point from the government and another professional (e.g. from a national forest research institution) as an alternate. Member countries may be represented by the forestry and/or research institutions of their choice. The designated institution(s) will identify the individual who will serve as the focal point for the country on the Network. Additional experts from members of the Network may be identified by the Secretariat and Executive Committee and will be invited to join the Network and its meetings as appropriate.

10. FAO's mandate is to facilitate the establishment and organization of the network. Specific activities include the following: 1) Coordination of activities in cooperation with the Secretary, Executive Committee and focal points; 2) Provision of technical assistance within the framework of FAO's mandate and available resources; 3) Coordination and collaboration with EPPO and other organizations working on forest invasive species; 4) Co-organize Network meetings in cooperation with member institutions; 5) Support the set-up of a website that provides space for information sharing; and 6) Provision of required technical assistance to member countries.

11. The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia in collaboration with the University of Sopron currently facilitates the establishment of the Forest Invasive Species Network for Europe and Central Asia. A Letter of Agreement (LoA) has been signed with the University of Sopron Cooperative Research Centre Non-profit Ltd. to support the administrative and membership arrangements of the Network. FAO provides guidance to its LoA partner in developing a webpage for the REUFIS Network, and the technical content of the webpage, in preparing a leaflet on the Network (including background, mission, objectives, and members) and a periodical Network newsletter.

12. On the "joint EPPO meeting of the Panel on Quarantine Pests for Forestry and the Panel on Phytosanitary Measures", held in Paris on 22 March 2017, the interim Secretary of the REUFIS Network introduced the Network, giving a short summary on the background mission and objectives and its planned activities, and highlighted the need for cooperation with existing organizations.

13. The first regular Network meeting is tentatively scheduled for 17-19 October 2017 in Budapest, Hungary.

### **III. Points for consideration**

14. The Commission may wish to:

- Encourage countries to participate in the platform on the Forest Invasive Species Network for Europe and Central Asia (REUFIS), and contribute to the activities of this network to strengthen regional collaboration in relation to the work on forest invasive species in the region.
15. The Commission may wish to recommend FAO to:
- Continue supporting the establishment of the Forest Invasive Species Network for Europe and Central Asia (REUFIS) and the implementation of its activities;
  - Engage in cross-cutting and inter-departmental work, in particular through the relevant Major Areas of Work and/or REU Regional Initiatives defined under the FAO Strategic Framework;
  - Support cross sectoral plant protection measures to contribute to biodiversity conservation, and climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources;
  - Support country efforts to plan and implement activities within the scope of the Platform, in particular through training and capacity development work.