ERC/92/REP

REPORT

Prague,
Czechoslovakia,
24-28 August
1992

Eighteenth FAO Regional Conference for Europe

Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

FAO members in the European Region (as of 24 August 1992)

Albania	Germany	Netherlands
Austria	Greece	Norway
Belgium	Hungary	Poland
Bulgaria	Iceland	Portugal
Cyprus	Ireland	Romania
Czechoslovakia	Israel	Spain
Denmark	Italy	Sweden
Estonia	Latvia	Switzerland
EEC (member organization)	Lithuania	Turkey
Finland	Luxembourg	United Kingdom
France	Malta	Yugoslavia

Date and place of FAO Regional Conferences for Europe

First	— Rome, Italy, 10-15 October 1949
Second	— Rome, Italy, 10-15 October 1960
Third	— Rome, Italy, 8-13 October 1962
Fourth	— Salzburg, Austria, 26-31 October 1964
Fifth	— Seville, Spain, 5-11 October 1966
Sixth	— St. Julian's, Malta, 28-31 October 1968
Seventh	— Budapest, Hungary, 21-25 September 1970
Eighth	— Munich, Germany, Fed. Rep. of, 18-23 September 1972
Ninth	— Lausanne, Switzerland, 7-12 October 1974
Tenth	— Bucharest, Romania, 20-25 September 1976
Eleventh	— Lisbon, Portugal, 2-7 October 1978
Twelfth	— Athens, Greece, 22-27 September 1980
Thirteenth	— Sofia, Bulgaria, 4-8 October 1982
Fourteenth	— Reykjavik, Iceland, 17-21 September 1984
Fifteenth	— Istanbul, Turkey, 28 April-2 May 1986
Sixteenth	— Cracow, Poland, 23-26 August 1988
Seventeenth	— Venice, Italy, 3-7 April 1990
Eighteenth	– Prague, Czechoslovakia, 24-28 August 1992

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REPORT OF THE EIGHTEENTH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR EUROPE

Prague, Czechoslovakia, 24-28 August 1992

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Rome, 1992

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY OF MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

General Debate on the Food and Agriculture Situation in Europe

For the Attention of Governments

The Conference:

1. emphasized the increasing importance of food and agriculture with respect to international relations. Regional cooperation, based on interdependence, would prove crucial to overcoming inter-country differences in this domain (para. 28).

2. agreed that the ultimate objective of the ongoing reforms and of agricultural development strategies should be to promote a competitive, efficient, and well-structured agricultural system that was attuned to demand and that avoided surpluses (para. 37).

3. forcefully emphasized that agriculture was a multi-layered activity and source of increasingly-appreciated public services including food security, a balanced geographical apportionment of the population, the conservation of the environment and of the landscape, the development of tourism, and the preservation of a rural heritage (para. 38).

4. stressed that close relation between agriculture and environment should be respected in agricultural policy reform implementation and sectorial restructuring in the transition countries (para. 40).

For the Attention of FAO

The Conference:

5. Unanimously acknowledged that assistance to Eastern and Central European countries should be given high priority in FAO's regional action programmes with a view to developing the agricultural potential of these countries (para. 32).

6. considered that FAO, in addition to the above, ought to play a prominent role in defining new strategies for the future of European agriculture within the new global European context. Special attention had to be given to water resource management and forest protection (para. 33).

7. called upon FAO to play a leading role in promoting cooperation endeavours in the use of particularly environmentally-friendly technology (para. 40).

FAO Activities in the Region 1990-91

For the Attention of Governments

The Conference:

8. expressed satisfaction with the new, high priority given to assistance for countries with economies in transition, particularly in formulating agricultural policy (para. 48).

9. recommended that these countries participate increasingly in FAO and ECE meetings which should also be addressed to policy-makers (para. 48)

For the Attention of FAO

The Conference:

10. expressed its appreciation for the careful review of the past activities in the fields of agriculture, forestry and fisheries (para. 46).

11. considered that future reports should include activities implemented in the current biennium (para. 46).

12. stressed that FAO's regional activities should be concentrated to allow for a more effective utilization of the limited resources allocated for Europe (para. 50).

13. expressed satisfaction with the improving cooperation established between FAO, UN/ECE and other organizations and requested that the Organization reinforces its cooperation with non-governmental organizations (para. 50).

FAO's Medium-Term Plan in the European Region 1994-99

For the Attention of Governments

The Conference:

14. expressed agreement with the overall analysis of the regional context and of the main guidelines (para. 56).

15. supported generally the priorities of the Medium-Term Plan (para. 57).

16. recommended a more selective focus and a greater concentration of activities, since they were also indicative of which were the lower-priority activities (para. 57).

17. noted specific Mediterranean environmental problems such as the quantity and quality of water resources, the destruction of forests, erosion and desertification and requested them to assign due priority to the environment and sustainable development (para. 59).

18. stressed the need for updated information regarding planned and ongoing multilateral and bilateral activities of assistance to countries with transition economies (para. 61).

19. identified the main priorities for the Region as collection, analysis and dissemination of information; an international forum for the exchange of views and the formulation of policy advice; and technical assistance, especially to countries with transition economies (para. 62).

20. suggested that the research data and findings of the ESCORENA system should be made available for users such as extension agents and farmers (para. 64).

21. considered that the activities in Europe should be expanded to other parts of the word in the form of a more effectively organized and more intensive transfer of information, experience and technology to the developing countries (para. 66).

22. noted that the follow-up to UNCED would be considered at the forthcoming meetings of the FAO Programme and Finance Committees, as well as the Council (para. 68).

For the Attention of FAO

The Conference:

23. noted the conclusions on this item would be taken into account in the preparation of the FAO Medium-Term Plan 1994-99, to be submitted to the FAO Conference in 1993 (para. 55).

24. agreed that the thrust of FAO's role in Europe should be catalytic, and that its work should seek to achieve the greatest possible multiplier effect (para. 58).

25. recommended that FAO's basic priority in Europe should be the promotion of sustainable development in agriculture, forestry and fisheries (para. 59).

26. considered that the implementation and follow-up by FAO to the recommendations made by UNCED should be clearly specified and should take concrete form in specific projects; and the Joint UN/ECE-FAO Working Party on Agriculture and Environment should provide an increasingly significant contribution to this effect (para. 59).

27. considered that FAO could play a unique and specific role in expanding its activities in Europe to other parts of the world in the form of a more effectively organized and more intensive transfer of information, experience and technology to developing countries (para. 66).

28. noted and was assured that the preparatory phases of the next FAO Medium-Term Plan would give full consideration to the conclusions and recommendations of the Regional Conference and should concentrate on the specific problems and needs of several Eastern and Central European countries (para. 67).

29. noted that FAO was expected to play an important role in the implementation of Agenda 21 of UNCED, as well as in that of the international conventions dealing with climate change and biological diversity (para. 68).

Alternative Uses of Marginal Land and Set-aside Farmland in Europe

For the Attention of Governments

The Conference

30. stressed the paradox of countries in some Regions searching for solutions to overproduction of food, while others faced the spectre of famine and malnutrition (para. 72).

31. recommended that agricultural and land use policies in Europe needed to take into account and adapt to the global perspective (para. 72).

32. noted that policies in several Member Nations were shifting from a production-oriented approach to a more comprehensive one that encouraged a diversification of agricultural activities designed to provide broader-based income support for rural communities, better environmental protection, and a basis for sustainable agricultural and rural development (para. 73).

33. noted that analysis of land use changes was hampered by lack of harmonization of terminology and definitions applied to land use, coupled with the inadequacy and lack of comparability over time of land use statistics in some countries (para. 74).

34. recommended that the following areas receive increased attention at the national and international level: biomass for energy, afforestation, training, research into potential uses of marginal and set-aside farming land, a network for the exchange of information, and impact on the preservation of natural resources (para. 76).

35. underlined the importance of monitoring the changes in rural land use in Europe and recommended that land use developments be kept under review at its biennial sessions by having specific reference made to them in the national statements (para. 79).

For the Attention of FAO

The Conference:

36. agreed that FAO had an important role to play, in cooperation with UN/ECE, in the collection, analysis and dissemination of information relating to land use changes and the factors underlying such changes (para. 74).

37. recommended that the following areas receive increased attention at the national and international level: biomass for energy, afforestation, training, research into potential uses of marginal and set-aside farming land, a network for the exchange of information and impact on the preservation of natural resources (para. 76).

38. urged the organizations working on matters related to land use to actively seek ways and means of promoting closer cooperation endeavours, of avoiding duplication of efforts and of ensuring complementarity of these activities with those of FAO and UN/ECE (para. 77).

39. noted the view of several Member Nations that FAO's priorities in the European Region include environmental protection and sustainable development (para. 77).

40. suggested that the results of activities carried out by FAO and UN/ECE bodies in this field should be drawn to the attention of Member Nations in the Region (para. 79).

Representation of the Region on the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)

For the Attention of Governments

The Conference:

41. elected Mr Josef Vlk (Czechoslovakia) as representative of the Region on the CGIAR for the four-year period 1993-96 (para. 80).

Date and Place of the Nineteenth FAO Regional Conference for Europe

For the Attention of FAO

The Conference:

42. requested the Director-General to determine the date and place of the Nineteenth Regional Conference for Europe in consultation with the Governments of Cyprus, Ireland and Israel and other Governments of the Region (para. 84).

INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

Organization of the Conference

1. The FAO Eighteenth Regional Conference for Europe, organized in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE), was held in Prague, Czechoslovakia, from 24-28 August 1992, at the kind invitation of the Government of Czechoslovakia.

2. Delegations from 29 Members, including for the first time, the European Economic Community, attended the Conference. Three Member Nations from other regions and four European Member Nations of the United Nations, not members of FAO, participated in an observer capacity. The Conference was also attended by representatives of United Nations agencies, and observers from nine intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

3. The list of participants is given in Appendix B of this Report.

Inaugural Ceremony

4. The Director-General of FAO, Mr Edouard Saouma, in his opening address, welcomed the Prime Minister of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, Mr Jan Strásky, to the official inauguration of the Eighteenth FAO Regional Conference for Europe, and also welcomed delegates and observers. He thanked the Czechoslovak Government for having invited the Conference to Prague, expressed his gratitude for its generous hospitality, and shared with the Conference his concern over the conflicts raging in some countries of the Region.

5. In his inaugural address, the Prime Minister of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic welcomed the delegates and observers to his country. He recalled that the four decades prior to the revolution of 1989 in his country had left agriculture in a situation where production costs were very high and structures were inadequate for the many roles demanded of the sector, particularly as concerned the environment. Today in Czechoslovakia, as in the other Central and Eastern European countries, the economy was in transition, and agriculture and nutrition faced serious problems. The Government was therefore happy that FAO was able to offer assistance, particularly in the formulation of agricultural policies, the development of institutional infrastructure, and the preparation of projects. FAO's work in Europe should not, however, lead to neglect of the problem of hunger and malnutrition elsewhere in the world, as this was a mission requiring all possible European support.

Election of the Chairman, Vice-Chairmen and Rapporteur

6. The Conference unanimously elected Mr Jaroslav Kubecka, the Federal Minister for Economy of Czechoslovakia, as Chairman.

7. The Conference also unanimously elected the following Vice-Chairmen: Mr Lawrence A. Gatt, Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, Malta; Mr Andreas Gavrielides, Minister for Agriculture and Natural Resources, Cyprus; Mr Hermann Redl, Director, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Austria, and Mr Antti Nikkola, Director, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Finland.

8. In accordance with the practice established upon the recommendation of the Fifteenth FAO Regional Conference for Europe to appoint either a Rapporteur or a Drafting Committee for the preparation of the Report, Mr H. Hildebrand (Germany) was elected Rapporteur.

Statement by the Chairman

9. In his statement, the Chairman of the Conference, Mr Jaroslav Kubecka, stated that Czechoslovakia was honoured to host the Eighteenth Regional Conference for Europe. He again welcomed delegations and observers, and expressed the hope that the Conference would herald a new trend in international cooperation in agriculture, and particularly for the Central and Eastern European countries whose centrally-planned economies were in transition to market ones.

Adoption of the Agenda

10. The Conference adopted the Agenda which is given in Appendix A to this Report.

11. Referring to the presence of a Yugoslav delegation, the Member Nation currently occupying the Presidency of the European Community made a statement reserving the position of the Community and its Member States regarding the status of the new Federation comprising Serbia and Montenegro. The statement reiterated the position expressed in previous declarations in which the European Community and its Member States had stressed that this new Federation could not be accepted as the sole successor to the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It noted that the presence of representatives of Serbia and Montenegro at meetings in the United Nations system was without prejudice to the position of the European Community and its Member States, and to further action they could possibly take to oppose the participation of Yugoslavia in the United Nations. Likewise, one Member Nation and one observer expressed their reservations regarding the presence of a Yugoslav delegation.

12. The Director-General recalled that the legal status of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was a matter to be settled in the competent fora of the United Nations. He reported that as the United Nations invited the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to be represented at United Nations meetings, FAO had followed the same course.

13. The Conference, without prejudice to the legal status in the United Nations of the new Federation comprising Serbia and Montenegro, took note of the existing arrangements.

Statement by the Director-General

14. The Director-General paid tribute to the very special cultural, economic and historical prestige of the city of Prague, which today stood as an emblem of a changing Europe. The political developments in the Region would continue to entail considerable modifications in the membership composition of FAO, as had been the case in November 1991, when the Conference had welcomed the European Economic Community, as well as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as full members. The Director-General

particularly appealed to the major European countries of the Community of Independent States (CIS) to become part of the Organization. Agriculture, one of the CIS's essential sectors, would have everything to gain from international cooperation.

15. New problems for the Region followed on the heels of these political developments. In countries in the process of transition towards a market economy, the agricultural structures were virtually destroyed, the trade networks were in disarray and food security was in grave jeopardy. In the East as in the West, both the environment and natural resources were deeply imperilled. As the GATT Multilateral Trade Negotiations showed, the Third World suffered from disequilibria and from the agricultural policies of the developed countries, particularly as regarded restricted market access.

16. A new solidarity was emerging in the face of these problems. The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), for example, was to be understood in this context. With the aid of the Group of 24, machinery had been put in place to assist the economies in transition, particularly in rebuilding the agricultural sector. A cooperation agreement was being forged between FAO and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and discussions were under way concerning various studies to be undertaken.

17. With regard to the internal European reconstruction effort and the Region's support for the Third World, the Director-General stated that FAO's role in the Region needed to be redefined, building on the basis of the four functions set out in its Constitution: information collection, a forum for Member Nations, a provider of policy advice, and a provider of technical assistance. In relation to information, he proposed to extend the Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS) to encompass all countries of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Policy advice and technical assistance from FAO would primarily concern the formulation of agricultural policies and the establishment of structures that promoted sustainable development production and modern distribution systems.

18. Placing FAO's regional action and European issues within the global context, the Director-General cited two of FAO's primary concerns. The first dealt with nutrition, and European Member Nations were called upon to make a leading contribution, based on their experience, to the first International Conference on Nutrition, to be jointly sponsored by FAO and WHO in December 1992. The second major FAO concern was that concerning the environment and sustainable development. Because the multi-layered work and activities of the Organization lay so close to the heart of this debate, the Director-General said that the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development of Rio de Janeiro, which had not resulted in common commitments to provide additional resources, was disappointing. FAO would nevertheless strive to achieve a strategy for sustainable agriculture and rural development in which Europe was destined to play a leading role, for example, in the design of integrated production systems through the joint working parties of FAO and the Economic Commission for Europe.

19. The Director-General also referred to some aspects of FAO's finances, staff matters and Headquarters accommodation. In conclusion, he declared that Europe, particularly with its agricultural and forestry

research institutes and its production models, constituted the very backbone of the Organization. In future, Europe would increasingly have need of FAO, but this worked both ways because FAO would depend unconditionally on Europe.

20. The complete text of the Director-General's statement is given in Appendix D to this Report.

Statement by the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE)

21. Mr G. Hinteregger, the Executive Secretary, stated that the transition to democracy and to a market-oriented economy in the Eastern and Central European countries, which was still far from complete, offered new challenges not only to the transition countries themselves, but also to the governments of other countries in the Region and to the international organizations which were seeking to assist them in the transition process. The situation in the new Member Nations which had emerged from the disintegration of several former socialist republics deserved particular attention and support.

22. Mr Hinteregger recalled the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Meeting on FAO-UN/ECE Cooperation in Agriculture (Berlin, September 1990) which had been endorsed and acted upon by the ECE Committee on Agriculture. He expressed his full satisfaction with the long-established collaboration between FAO and UN/ECE, which was destined to continue in future for the benefit of all Member Nations, but particularly of those whose economies were in transition.

23. He informed the Conference of UN/ECE Decision-0 (45) of December 1990 which introduced substantial changes in the Commission's priorities, structure and procedures. This Decision had identified five priority areas - environment, transport, economic analysis, statistics and trade facilitation - and two overall guiding principles: promotion of sustainable development and provision of support to economies in transition. Based on these priorities and guiding principles, the UN/ECE Committee on Agriculture and the UN/ECE Timber Committee had recently revised their programmes so as to better meet the needs of Member Nations, and ensure optimum utilization of the available resources. The UN/ECE attached great importance to making its activities regarding agriculture and forestry in Europe complementary to those of FAO. The Executive Secretary was happy to see the issue of alternative uses of marginal farmland in Europe on the Agenda of the Conference, given its economic, as well as environmental and social implications for the Region.

24. Mr Hinteregger reported on recent or planned UN/ECE workshops on economies in transition, several of which had been organized with the support of FAO technical units. He particularly mentioned the importance of activities to combat the effects of the nuclear accident in Chernobyl on agriculture and forestry. An Ad Hoc FAO-UN/ECE meeting was being held in Austria in October 1992 to draw up proposals for an integrated approach in assisting the economies in transition as regarded the forestry and the forest industries sector. The UN/ECE Timber Committee and FAO's European Forestry Commission planned to hold a new joint session in October 1993.

25. The complete text of the Executive Secretary's statement is given in Appendix E to this Report.

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Country Statements and General Debate on the Food and Agriculture Situation in the Region

26. Ms C. Bertini, Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), referred to three main subjects in her address to the Conference. After warmly thanking the governments of the countries of Europe for their contributions to WFP in food, cash, logistic services and expertise, she reported briefly on WFP's work in confronting the massive and urgent needs spawned by the current distressing situation, particularly in many parts of Africa. She followed with an urgent appeal to Member Nations of the Region to maintain and, if possible, increase their contributions to WFP, particularly for emergency operations.

27. Representatives of Member Nations attending the Eighteenth Regional Conference for Europe, and several observers, took part in the general debate. They reported on recent developments and future prospects concerning agricultural and food policies and situations in their own countries, and on some economic and social aspects of their rural sectors.

28. The Conference emphasized the increasing importance of food and agriculture with respect to international relations: whether relations between developed countries, relations between market-economy and transition-economy countries, or relations with the developing countries. Regional cooperation, based on interdependence, would prove crucial to overcoming inter-country differences in this domain.

29. The regional context had been totally modified by the transformations under way in Eastern and Central Europe. Some new Member Nations were participating in the Regional Conference for the very first time. The Conference attached great importance to their successful transition in achieving to political pluralism, market economies and economic development, as well as to their integration into the international trading system and the global economy. Within this changing picture, the agricultural sector deserved special consideration. In this connection, one Member Nation drew the attention of the Conference to its difficulties in achieving progress, given the heritage of its former political status and the continued presence of foreign troops on its territory.

30. Ongoing reforms in the transition economies would have profound implications for the structure and organization of the agricultural and forestry sectors of these countries. Changes in the agricultural sector were bound to be of longer duration and more complex than anticipated, particularly in view of the legacy of economic and environmental problems inherited from the former regimes. Land privatization would largely focus on the establishment of viable family farms and other types of farming enterprises, and of corporate and cooperative ownership, requiring adequate transformation from existing structures. This restructuring was likely to increase production, productivity and export capacity. A major challenge would be to effect the transition, while minimizing the negative impact on economic growth, employment and rural income. Some of the countries in transition, however, pointed out some of the current problems of their agricultural sectors: production slumps, shrinking markets, declining farm

prices compared to industrial prices (price shearing), reduced input consumption, lower salaries and a smaller labour force, and serious cashflow problems. In some countries, even food security was in jeopardy. Clear titles to property, price reforms and adequate financing systems were only some of the pre-conditions necessary for agricultural recovery. Indeed, one of the most pressing problems, at least in some countries, was to liberalize prices and reduce subsidies according to long-term national interests coupled with GATT and European Community commitments, while simultaneously resisting pressure from the production and trade sectors for a certain degree of protection.

31. The Conference was informed of certain bilateral cooperation structures and organizations which some Member Nations had stablished with the countries in transition, and which dealt with the agricultural sector. Interministerial bodies, support programmes, expert missions, data exchange networks and joint research programmes were all mentioned. Several multilateral cooperation agreements or programmes, such as the TEMPUS or PHARE, were in place. The Representative of the European Community reported on food aid and technical assistance already provided or in preparation, and on trade association and cooperation agreements already signed or being negotiated. Free trade agreements had also been signed between the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and several of the countries with economies in transition. Agriculture and the agrofood industries were priority areas of concern as regarded Economic Cooperation in the Black Sea.

32. The Conference unanimously acknowledged that assistance to Eastern and Central European countries should be given high priority in FAO's regional action programmes. The Organization needed to play a dynamic and decisive role in developing the agricultural potential of these countries. Foremost among the priority areas of activity mentioned were: agricultural policy formulation, professional training, agricultural research and data exchange. Two Member Nations stated that the efficiency of FAO's activities could be increased, and its programmes could be better coordinated if a sub-regional FAO office for Central and Eastern Europe was established, and both offered to host such a sub-regional office on their territory. One delegation stated that its country would have no objection if the financial resources provided by the European Community were to be effectively amalgamated with the technical expertise offered by FAO.

33. In addition to providing assistance to help rebuild agriculture in the countries with economies in transition, the Conference considered that FAO ought to play a prominent role in defining new strategies for the future of European agriculture within the new global European context. Bearing budget problems in mind, however, other bilateral and multilateral activities should also receive consideration. Activities mentioned as deserving special attention were water resource management and forest protection.

34. With regard to the new prospects for international cooperation in food and agriculture in Europe, the Conference expressed the view that FAO should continue to strengthen its collaboration endeavours with the UN Economic Commission for Europe, particularly as regarded the joint Working Parties. Enhanced coordination with other international organizations should assist in avoiding duplication of efforts in this regard.

35. After discussing the economic transformations underway in the countries in transition, the Conference took up the question of agricultural reform and the agricultural situation in the market economy countries, that were confronted by such serious problems as continued surpluses, low prices, farm income far below that of other professional categories, rural out-migration and environmental decline. Some delegations remarked that surpluses owed less to agricultural subsidies than to technological progress achieved in making farming more efficient. Fears were expressed with respect to the dismantling of agricultural subsidies because of a possible acceleration of price slumps. A solution would need to encompass a full panoply of measures adapted to a range of conditions.

36. The recently agreed reform had altered the essentially price-support-based agricultural policy of the European Community in favour of greater market orientation in the form of direct income support measures. It also included consideration of environmental and rural development demands. The new global approach would assist in stabilizing world markets and in concluding the ongoing Multilateral Trade Negotiations of the Uruguay Round. Some non-European Community delegations reported on political reforms in their respective countries, and expressed interest in recent decisions taken by the European Commission.

37. The Conference agreed that the ultimate objective of the ongoing reforms and of agricultural development strategies should be to promote a competitive, efficient, and well-structured agricultural system that was attuned to demand and that avoided surpluses. Market indicators, however, could not constitute the sole guide for the sector and their role should be interpreted within the context of the specific circumstances at hand.

38. The Conference forcefully emphasized that the role of agriculture was not simply to produce food and raw materials at lower costs. Agriculture was instead a multi-layered activity and source of increasingly-appreciated public services which could be of vital interest for some countries. These services included food security, production base maintenance, a balanced geographical population apportionment, environment and landscape conservation, tourism development, and rural cultural heritage preservation as one of Europe's primary assets.

39. The Conference also stressed diversity of agricultural conditions. Agricultural production potential varied greatly from one country to the next and there were regional differences and contrasting production structures and systems even within the same country. This was particularly true of the Mediterranean, where vast tracts of less-favoured land resulted in extensive agriculture, and where problems of ecological fragility and desertification had been made even more acute by recent drought and by forest fires. In the same light, the situation prevailing in mountainous countries was also described as a final illustration that agricultural policy reform, needed to devise a set of flexible and appropriate measures rather than rely on the imposition of a single formula.

40. The Conference stressed the close relationship between agriculture and environment throughout the general debate. Continued agricultural and forestry development, particularly as regarded agricultural policy reform implementation and sectorial restructuring in the transition countries, inherently and inevitably implied respect for the environment and for natural resources, and would culminate in environmentally-friendly agricultural practices and technology. The key to sustainable rural and

agricultural development was the full integration of agricultural and environmental policies, and explained why the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reforms included agro-environmental provisions. In light of the results achieved by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, and especially adoption of Agenda 21 and the two conventions on climate change and biological diversity, FAO would be called upon to play a leading role, in promoting environmentally-friendly technology. The Conference noted that cooperation endeavours in the use of environmental programmes were prepared in tandem with regional development programmes in some European countries.

41. The Conference briefly reviewed the many aspects of rural development. Although there were marked differences according to the country and the Region, agriculture was a major component of the economy and of rural life, both in its own right and in terms of the upstream and downstream activities induced by it. Economic diversification was essential, however, and tourism, particularly agritourism, could achieve significant inroads. Implicit in the continued survival of rural communities were better local services and better living conditions. While rural development inevitably implied people's participation and popular initiatives at the local level, its basic goal at the national level was to ensure the participation of rural people in the society at large.

42. The most important factor in food and agricultural production according to market dictates was consumer choice. The consumer decided what would be produced and how it would be produced. Consumers were increasingly concerned with food safety, food quality, and the means by which food was manufactured. One major pre-condition for adapting to the market was access to constantly updated information on consumer attitudes and preferences. Quality should be the prime objective, as it had become the crux of competitiveness in international markets. "Produce quality output efficiently" could be the slogan for agriculture in the future. The Conference stressed the interrelatedness between environmental questions and quality issues, as applied, for example, to extensive agriculture. The countries with economies in transition were in the process of abandoning the policy of producing cheap food commodities, and subsidies were gradually being eliminated. Consumer prices had consequently risen considerably as they were freed, and there had frequently been considerable drops in consumption levels. Food quality, as well as food quality, had also become issues in these countries.

43. With regard to international trade in agriculture, the Conference noted the continued existence of market imbalances. Promotion of effective trading relationships and progress in both trade and production systems inevitably and imperatively would result in a successful conclusion to the Uruguay Round of GATT Multilateral Trade Negotiations. The representative of the European Community pointed out that the reform of the CAP constituted a major contribution to these negotiations. Some countries stated their concern that GATT Member Nations be ensured the right to pursue vital non-economic objectives, particularly as regarded the agricultural sector. Others noted that agricultural production and marketing constituted a substantial share of their national economies, and that commercial barriers should not create obstacles for their agricultural development.

44. At the same time, a number of countries with economies in transition expressed their willingness to guarantee a certain level of self-supply, to gradually tailor their trade regulations in line with external market conditions, and to comply with their international commitments, especially as regarded GATT and the EEC. The future equilibrium of the international market would be contingent upon expanding agricultural production in these countries.

45. The Conference considered that Official Development Assistance to the developing countries from Member Nations of the Region should in no way suffer from the priority to be accorded to the transition economies in Europe. Some delegations announced that they would be increasing their assistance to the Third World, and that there would in some cases be a strong environmental component, so as to assist the least-developed countries in promoting the sustained management of their natural resources.

Report on FAO Activities in the Region 1990-91

46. The Conference expressed its appreciation for the careful review of the past activities in the fields of agriculture, forestry and fisheries,[1] but felt that it would have been more comprehensive with the inclusion of activities during the first six months of 1992. It considered that future reports should include activities implemented in the current biennium.

47. Mr Antoine Saintraint, Independent Chairman of the Council of FAO, underscored the importance of the role of the Regional Conferences, particularly for Europe, at a time of such profound change. He hoped that the growing integration of the European Economic Community (EEC) and its new status as a Member of FAO would assist in enhancing multilateralism and in strengthening the Organization. Questioning the principle of zero growth for the budget of FAO, he asked that FAO be allowed to obtain the resources it needed to carry out its mandate.

48. The Conference expressed satisfaction with the new, high priority given to assistance for countries with economies in transition during the period under consideration, particularly in formulating agricultural policy. The Conference recommended that these countries however, increasingly participate at the policy-making level in such FAO and ECE meetings as seminars, technical consultations, workshops and joint working parties.

49. The Chairwoman of the Working Party on Women and the Agricultural Family in Rural Development of the ECA, presented a summary of its activities. A secretariat document summarizing activities from 1990 to 1992 and describing the major themes of future work was distributed to participants. The Chairwoman drew the attention of the Conference to various roles of women, particularly on the farm, in community development, in farm management and in agritourism. Countries with economies in transition were greatly in need of support in all these fields. The Sixth Session of the Working Party was to take place in Innsbruck, Austria, October 1992.

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[1] ERC/92/2.

50. The Conference stressed that FAO's regional activities should be concentrated to allow for a more effective utilization of the limited resources allocated for Europe. In this context, the Conference expressed satisfaction with the improved cooperation endeavours between FAO UN/ECE and other organizations. The proposals on agriculture currently being discussed in the UN/ECE should deserve special attention. Enquiries were made as to areas of collaboration between FAO and the EEC which could be intensified in light of the Community's new Member status. The Organization was asked to reinforce its cooperation with non-governmental organizations.

51. One Member Nation asked that there be more information and greater transparency concerning available resources and their use. Regular Programme resources and extra-budgetary funds apportioned between the Regional Office for Europe in Rome and the Joint ECE/FAO Agriculture and Timber Division (JEUR) in Geneva should be clearly indicated. This Member Nation proposed that FAO's Finance Committee consider this question, and another Member Nation seconded the motion.

52. The Secretariat offered clarifications in response to the querries by delegates, especially as regarded the Standing Group on European Agricultural Policy and its results to date, the status on the establishment of two new joint FAO/ECE Working Parties, the recent promotion of environmental issues and new technologies by ESCORENA.

53. The Deputy Director-General, Office of Programme, Budget and Evaluation recalled the mandate of the Regional Conferences and that of the Governing Bodies of FAO concerning the Organization's finances. The review of FAO activities in the Region provided an orientation for future activities, and afforded the Regional Conference the opportunity to make recommendations concerning the utilization of financial resources. The Director-General would subsequently report to the Conference of FAO on follow-up to these recommendations.

54. The Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe provided additional information on the financial resources of the Joint Division in Geneva, and their origin. He stated that the gap between the UN/ECE's geographical coverage and that of FAO was widening in the European Region, a factor which augured well for cooperation between the two organizations, and which could serve as a model.

FAO's Medium-Term Plan in the European Region 1994-1999

55. The Conference apprised that the document dealing which this subject[2] was to be viewed in the context of FAO's preparations of the next Medium-Term Plan covering the period 1994-99. The Conference of FAO had directed that the views of the Regional Conferences be sought. Since the primary objective of this Plan was to establish the main guidelines and priorities, a regional review that would illustrate the diversity of Europe and the profound changes taking place there, would assist in defining the new European needs. In response to these needs, FAO's traditional functions of providing information, policy advice and technical assistance, in addition to serving as a forum for Member Nations to voice issues would be useful in targeting regional priorities. The discussion was not intended to speculate on eventual resources since the legitimate claims of other

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[2] ERC/92/3.

regions, and opportunities for mobilizing extra-budgetary resources to meet European needs had to be considered. The Conference noted that the conclusions of the Regional Conference on this item would be taken into account in the preparation of the FAO Medium-Term Plan 1994-99, to be submitted to the Conference in 1993.

56. The Conference expressed satisfaction with the quality and balanced presentation of the document. By and large the Conference expressed agreement with the overall analysis of the regional context. There was general approval of the main guidelines, although some Member Nations considered the objectives to be realistic while others felt that they were ambitious, given available resources. Several Member Nations regretted that no indication was given as to availability of resources at a time when new needs were emerging in Europe.

57. Several Member Nations stated that the Plan should be more clearly-defined in structure, and follow a conceptual framework. It should in addition give greater consideration to the new situation which had emerged in Europe, and to the new international dimension of European agriculture as regarded contributions for food to developing countries and the technical expertise supplied by the Region. The diversity of national agricultural situations and conditions within Europe could not be overstressed. The Conference generally supported the priorities indicated. However, the Conference recommended a more selective focus and a greater concentration of activities, since they were also indicative of which were the lower-priority activities.

58. The Conference agreed that the thrust of FAO's role in Europe should be catalytic, and that its work should seek to achieve the greatest possible multiplier effect.

59. The Conference recommended that FAO's basic priority in Europe should be the promotion of sustainable development in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Conference considered that the implementation and follow-up by FAO to the recommendations made by UNCED should be clearly specified, and should especially take concrete form in projects dealing with soil, water, forest protection, pesticide residues and new technologies. In this respect, particular note was made of such specific Mediterranean environmental problems as the quantity and quality of water resources, the destruction of forests, erosion and desertification. The Conference agreed that priority assigned to the environment and to sustainable development matters would ensure that other activities, such as research and technical assistance, could be placed in their proper perspective. The Joint UN/ECE-FAO Working Party on Agriculture and Environment should provide an increasingly significant contribution to this effect.

60. The Conference noted that assistance to countries with economies in transition constituted another priority area for action. These countries should not, however, be considered as just another group of developing countries. They needed intensive support, but it would be unrealistic to expect that the Organization could significantly or suddenly alter the share of resources allocated to the European Region, and a significant change in the assistance flows or resources to the developing countries would take place. Some Member Nations expressed enthusiastic support for the results of the Workshop held in Nitra, Czechoslovakia, in May 1992, on the question of rebuilding Central and Eastern European agriculture, and offered to make a contribution to the work already underway.

61. The Conference stressed the need for updated information regarding planned and ongoing multilateral and bilateral activities of assistance to countries with transition economies. The Conference took note of the statement by the OECD observer, who offered to provide this computerized data to FAO and its Member Nations.

62. Referring to the three main roles conferred upon FAO by its Governing Bodies, the Conference identified the main priorities for the Region as being (1) the collection, analysis and dissemination of information in close coordination with such existing institutions as EUROSTAT, and the expansion of the coverage of the Global Information and Early Warning System and of remote sensing; (2) its role as an international forum for the exchange of views and the formulation of policy advice on agriculture, food, forestry, fisheries and rural development, and (3) the furnishing of technical assistance, especially to countries with transition economies. FAO was particularly well placed to act in these three areas, in comparison to other organizations.

63. The Conference also discussed food security, the different types of agricultural and farming systems that reflected the diversity of European agriculture; rural social problems especially in less-favoured areas; the role of women and the elderly in the rural sector; the various aspects of food and agricultural commodity quality, and changing consumer attitudes; extension, and training for trainers and the adherence of the countries of the Region to the various agreements, regulations and standardized systems such as Codex Alimentarius operating under the aegis of FAO and WHO, as worthy of analysis in planning future activities.

64. The Conference suggested that the research data and findings of the ESCORENA system should be easier for such users as extension agents and farmers. It was also stressed that it would be useful to transmit them directly to Southern European countries and to the countries with transition economies.

65. Various views were expressed with respect to working methods. Given the shortage of resources, one Member Nation expressed its preference for seminars, workshops and technical consultations rather than direct commitments for technical assistance. While others preferred to see projects reinforced, for example, through the Technical Cooperation Programme. The importance of expanded investment operations with the support of financial institutions such as the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) was also stressed.

66. The Conference considered that, in comparison to the other intergovernmental organizations dealing with agriculture in Europe, FAO as an international organization could play a unique and specific role in expanding its activities in Europe to other parts of the world. This expansion should take the form of a more effectively organized and more intensive transfer of information, experience and technology to the developing countries.

67. In response to the debate, the Conference noted and was assured that the preparatory phases of the next FAO Medium-Term Plan would give full consideration to the conclusions and recommendations of the Regional Conference. The Plan should be viewed as an outline, not as a draft programme of work. Gradual improvements would be made in its conceptual framework, and the proposed priorities were all the more likely to be

re-evaluated in view of the swift and profound changes taking place in Europe. One clear message received from the Regional Conference was that FAO's action in Europe should concentrate on the specific problems and needs of several Eastern and Central European countries, and on the assistance to be given to them. Cooperation with other organizations, research institutes, etc. was nevertheless essential. FAO had many comparative advantages which were valid for all concerned to reassess from time to time.

68. The Conference noted that the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), especially as regarded the implications of its action plan Agenda 21, would be considered at the forthcoming meetings of the FAO Programme and Finance Committees, as well as the Council. As it did for the preparation of UNCED, the Conference noted that FAO was expected to play an important role in the implementation of Agenda 21, as well as in that of international conventions dealing with climate change and biological diversity. UNCED follow-up would also call for closer cooperation among international institutions. At the request of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, FAO was assuming a leading role in the formulation of proposals for the establishment of the inter-agency coordinating mechanism to this effect.

Alternative Uses of Marginal Land and Set-aside Farmland in Europe

69. The Conference discussed the issue of alternative uses of marginal land and set-aside farmland in Europe.[3] It noted that the area of farmland in Europe had been decreasing over the past fifteen years at a rate of approximately 600 000 hectares a year, of which two-fifths was transferred to forest and other wooded land and three-fifths to other uses, chiefly built-up land and infrastructure.

70. Given the steady rise in productivity in agriculture and the over-production of food products, notably in Western Europe, the shift in land use was expected to continue in the future and would have consequent impacts on farming economics, on the long-time welfare of farming families and rural communities, in the less accessible areas, on national economies, and on the environment. In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, land reform and farm restructuring were underway as part of the difficult and long process of conversion to a market-oriented economy. It was as yet too early to assess their long-term impact on the agricultural sector, and in particular on land use, although it was likely to be significant.

71. The Conference considered that the Secretariat document provided a good overview of this issue and a sound basis for discussion of the complex problems involved. The many delegations that participated in the debate described the policies and measures they were following to ease the problem, which served to demonstrate the very different situations occurring throughout the Region and the remedies being applied. It was pointed out, for example, that the question of marginal land was quite different from that of set-aside farmland. Moreover, in some countries of the Region, over-production of food and the transfer of agricultural land for other uses were not major issues.

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[3] ERC/92/4.

72. The Conference stressed the paradox of countries in some Regions of the world searching for solutions to the question of food over-production while others faced the spectre of famine and malnutrition. The Conference recommended that agricultural and land use policies in Europe needed to take into account and adapt to the global perspective, and policy analyses at the regional and national levels should use this perspective as a starting point.

73. The Conference noted that policies in several Member Nations were shifting from a production-oriented approach to a more comprehensive one that encouraged a diversification of agricultural activities designed to provide broader-based income support for rural communities, better environmental protection, and a basis for sustainable agriculture and rural development. This involved, inter alia, a shifting from price support to income support.

74. The Conference agreed that FAO had an important role to play, in cooperation with UN/ECE, in the collection, analysis and dissemination of information relating to land use changes and the factors underlying such changes. It noted that analysis was hampered by lack of harmonization of terminology and definitions applied to land use, coupled with the inadequacy and lack of comparability over time of land use statistics in some countries. Examples included the distinction between certain categories of "forest land" and "other land" and the sub-division of "other land" between "build-up areas" and other categories.

75. One Member Nation considered that analyses of land use policies needed to be forward-looking, and in this connection drew attention to a recently-completed study in the Netherlands, in which a model had been developed to provide future scenarios of agricultural labour requirements and areas of agricultural land in the European Community based on assumptions relating to free trade, regional employment, nature conservation and environmental protection.

76. The Conference recommended that the following areas receive increased attention at the national and international level: (a) economic analysis of the production and use of biomass for energy; (b) economic studies of the afforestation of agricultural land; (c) collection of information of training activities related to rural occupations; (d) research into potential uses of marginal and set-aside farming land; (e) development of a network for the exchange of results of research on alternative farmland uses; (f) impact of alternative land use patterns on the preservation of natural resources such as water, soil, flora and fauna.

77. The Conference was informed of the activities of other organizations, notably OECD and the European Community, in matters relating to land use. In order to ensure complementarity of these activities with those of FAO and UN/ECE, and to avoid duplication of efforts, it urged these organizations to actively seek ways and means of promoting closer cooperation endeavours for the benefit of their respective Member Nations. The Conference noted the view of several Member Nations that FAO's priorities in the European Region should include environmental protection and sustainable development.

78. Many Member Nations reported on the policies which they were implementing and the policy options under consideration for alternative use of farmland to food production. Positive and negative impacts and

consequences needed to be carefully weighed in this regard. Among the alternatives described were non-food crop cultivation; industrial wood plantation creation, woody and other biomass production as energy source; fallowing and set-aside promotion; less intensive production applications, through, for example, organic farming and promotion of quality products, and the use of former agricultural land for leisure activities, tourism, hunting and nature conservation. Some Member Nations considered that in a densely populated region such as Europe, it was highly desirable to prevent the abandonment of marginalized farmland by all possible means, since it could have negative social, economic and environmental consequences.

79. The Conference underlined the importance of monitoring the changes in rural land use in Europe and the need for policies to be adapted to evolving situations. Accordingly, it recommended that land use developments be kept under review at its biennial sessions, by having specific reference made to them in the national statements. Furthermore, the Conference suggested that the results of activities carried out by FAO and UN/ECE bodies in this field should be drawn to the attention of Member Nations in the Region.

OTHER MATTERS

Representation of the Region on the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)[4]

80. Mr Josef Vlk, Representative of Czechoslovakia, was elected for the four-year period 1993-1996 to represent the Region within the CGIAR.

Progress Report on the International Conference on Nutrition[5]

81. The Conference was given a progress report on the International Conference on Nutrition (ICN), which will be held in FAO Headquarters, Rome, from 5-11 December 1992, under the joint sponsorship of FAO and the World Health Organization (WHO). Information was provided on preparations at the country, regional and global levels on the ICN Preparatory Committee Meeting (Geneva, 18-24 August 1992). The Conference noted progress to date and gave particular attention to the success of this Preparatory Committee in reaching a consensus on the major components of an ICN Declaration and Plan of Action.

Other Business

82. On behalf of Mr Edouard Saouma, Director-General of FAO, and Mr M.G. Hinteregger, Executive Secretary of UN/ECE, Mr V.J. Shah, Deputy Director-General, Programme, Budget and Evaluation, paid tribute to the accomplishments of Mr T.J. Peck in his post as Director of the Joint ECE/FAO Agriculture and Timber Division, from which he would soon be retiring. Mr H. Redl, Vice-Chairman of the Regional Conference and Chairman of the UN/ECE Committee on Agriculture, underscored Mr Peck's role in the excellent cooperation which had been established between UN/ECE and FAO.

83. The Assistant Director-General, Agriculture Department, presented and commented upon the document on the Fourth International Technical Conference for the Conservation and Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources.[6]

Date and Place of the Nineteenth FAO Regional Conference for Europe

84. The delegation of Cyprus repeated the invitation which its Government had already extended to host two previous Regional Conferences (the Sixteenth in 1988 and the Seventeenth in 1990), and expressed the hope that it may host the Nineteenth Regional Conference in 1994. The delegation of Ireland reiterated the invitation already extended during the Eighteenth Regional Conference. The delegation of Israel also reiterated the invitation extended by its country in 1990. Since each of these three Member Nations maintained its invitation to host the next Regional Conference, the Conference requested the Director-General to determine the date and place of the next Conference in consultation with their

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4 ERC/92/5.

5 ERC/92/INF/4.

6 ERC/92/INF/8.

governments and with the governments of other Member Nations of the Region. The Conference took note that the FAO Council would consider this matter, within the context of the calendar for major FAO meetings, at the session following the next FAO Conference in 1993.

Adoption of the Report

85. With some amendments, the text of the draft report was approved by the Conference.

Closure of the Conference

86. On behalf of the Director-General, Mr V.J. Shah, Deputy Director-General, PBE, thanked the Government of Czechoslovakia for the excellent organization of the Conference and for the generous hospitality extended. Mr Shah expressed FAO's gratitude for the fruitful debates as well as his appreciation for the high level of representation at the conference. He recalled that the European countries had always given their full support to the Organization. Mr Shah reassured the Conference that due consideration would be given to the recommendations made regarding FAO's role in Europe in the preparation of the FAO Medium-Term Plan for 1994-99. He also paid tribute to the Chairman, H.E. Jaroslav Kubecka (Czechoslovakia), the Vice-Chairmen and the Rapporteur, whose presence and experience had made the Conference a notable success.

87. On behalf of the participants, the delegates of Cyprus and Switzerland thanked the Government of Czechoslovakia for the excellent organization and hospitality offered during the Conference, as well as for the highly interesting study tour.

88. In his closing statement, Mr Hermann Redl (Austria), Vice-Chairman of the Conference, reiterated his warm thanks to the Director-General of FAO, to the Executive Secretary of UN/ECE and to the FAO Regional Representative for Europe for their sustained efforts in strengthening cooperation among all European countries. He noted that the Conference had been able to discuss in-depth agricultural policy issues and options, FAO's Medium-Term Plan in Europe 1994-99 and the alternative uses of marginal land and set-aside farmland in Europe, and had been able to reach constructive recommendations and conclusions.

89. The Chairman then thanked the Director-General, his staff, the interpreters, the organizers and all those who had assisted in preparing and servicing the session and declared the Conference closed.

APPENDIX A

AGENDA

I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

1. Inaugural Ceremony

2. Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairmen and Appointment of Rapporteur

3. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

II. STATEMENTS

4. Statement by the Director-General

5. Statement by the Executive Secretary of the ECE

6. Country Statements and General Debate on the Food and Agriculture Situation in the Region

7. Report on FAO Activities in the Region 1990-91

III. SELECTED ISSUES OF AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

8. FAO's Medium Term-Plan in the European Region

Great diversity of production systems, levels of technology and of productivity have been the characteristics of the agricultural sector in the European Region, which during the last few years has also been the scene of considerable structural changes. The developments in regional economic integration initiatives are also a key factor of change. The years to come will be critical in shaping European Agriculture in the Twenty-first Century and will require adequate responses from policy-makers, farmers and consumers alike. Over the medium term, FAO will need to orient its action towards addressing the problems of agriculture in Europe and will continue to support policies pursued by Member Nations, particularly those in Eastern Europe that are in transition towards market economies, those in Southeastern Europe which are seeking to improve the productivity of their agricultural sectors. Other key aspects in shaping FAO's activities of interest to the Region over the medium term include attention to environmental problems, support to regional cooperation efforts and promotion of technology transfers to other regions. The document aims at eliciting guidance from Member Nations in the Region, in order to refine the scope of future FAO action there.

9. Issues Related to Alternative Land Uses of Marginal and Set-Aside Farmland in Europe

Within the last two decades, agricultural surpluses, particularly in Member Nations of the European Community, coupled with socio-economic changes throughout Europe have been driving forces behind changes in land use in the Region. An average of about 600 000 hectares of farmland in

Europe are being removed from agricultural production annually. The document examines the scope of these land use changes. It considers alternative land uses, particularly as regards marginal farmland, including forestry, biomass production as an energy source, speciality crop production (e.g. organic produce), agriculture, extensification fallow, and tourism and recreation. It reviews related policies pursued by the national governments of the Region and by the EC, and discusses social, economic and environmental issues associated with the various alternative land uses. Finally, the document raises a number of points for discussion related to issues which need to be addressed if marginal lands are to be transformed to more appropriate use, while taking into account agricultural and general economic policies, environmental and social factors, and the preservation of some traditional European rural ways of life.

10. Representation of the Region on the CGIAR

11. Update on ICN Preparations

IV. CONCLUDING ITEMS

12. Any Other Business

13. Date and Place of the Nineteenth Regional Conference for Europe

14. Adoption of the Report

15. Closure of the Conference.

APPENDIX B
ANNEXE B
APENDICE B

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LISTE DES PARTICIPANTS
LISTA DE PARTICIPANTES

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APPENDIX C

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

ERC/92/1	Provisional Annotated Agenda
ERC/92/2	Report on FAO Activities in the Region 1990-91
ERC/92/3	FAO's Medium-Term Plan in the European Region
ERC/92/4	Issues Related to Alternative Land Uses of Marginal and Set Aside Farmland in Europe
ERC/92/5	Representation of the Region on the CGIAR
INF SERIES	
ERC/92/INF/1	Information Note
ERC/92/INF/2	Provisional Timetable
ERC/92/INF/3	Provisional List of Documents
ERC/92/INF/4	Update on ICN Preparations
ERC/92/INF/5	Action Taken on the Main Recommendations of the Seventeenth Regional Conference for Europe
ERC/92/INF/6	Policy Changes Affecting European Agriculture - Agricultural Restructuring in East European Countries
ERC/92/INF/7	Director-General's Statement
ERC/92/INF/8	Fourth International Technical Conference for the Conservation and utilization of Plant Genetic Resources - Information Note
ERC/92/REP/SERIES	
ERC/92/REP/1 ERC/92/REP/2 ERC/92/REP/3	Draft Report of the Conference
ERC/92/OD/SERIES	
ERC/92/OD/1 to ERC/92/OD/5	Orders of the Day

APPENDIX D

STATEMENT BY MR EDOUARD SAOUMA, DIRECTOR-GENERAL

Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Prague, the Symbol of Europe

There are cities whose charm borders on magic. Their natural setting, glorious history, majestic buildings, art treasures, economic dynamism and cultural and intellectual prestige are all a splendid reflection of human thought and expression. And among these great cities, which are striking examples of extraordinary human accomplishment, Prague occupies a special place. Its position as a European crossroads is perhaps too obvious to mention, as are its visual splendours surrounding us. Rather, I would prefer to recall the city's long history, undoubtedly full of sacrifice and suffering, but always marked by a prodigious stream of ideas and enterprises on every plane - political, social, aesthetic, economic, religous and philosophical - all of which have been driven by the same underlying value the love of liberty.

Far from just dreaming of its past glories, the city that welcomes us here today still shows its energetic spirit. Not even in the darkest hours of these past decades has Prague ever renounced the creativity or the passion for liberty which fires its citizens. Even before the liberating tide of recent years, Prague was a committed front-line fighter in the struggle for human dignity. There could not be a more apt homage to the city's courage and will to live than that contained in "the Prague Spring", an expression that has remained impressed on our memories since 1968.

Our cordial greetings to our host are even warmer in that Prague stands as an emblem for all of Europe. No region in the world is more replete with history and glory. As witnessed in its works of art and monuments, Europe is the driving force and apogee of civilization, for centuries the centre of world thought, and the mother of modern agriculture and industrialization. Having given so much, Europe might conceivably have felt the need to take a breather, to rest on its laurels, or at least to reduce its pace appreciably. Not so: like Prague the magnificient, Europe continues to offer the world a kaleidoscope of constant change.

From this tangled skein of joy and anguish, of hope and suffering, which history weaves even as we watch, I should like to draw out a few threads directly affecting FAO and which I feel to be of particular relevance to your discussions.

Changes in the Composition of FAO

In the first place, the dynamics of this historical process have considerably modified the composition of FAO, and will continue to do so. The changing political landscape in Eastern Europe has given us a reunified Germany; also, the three Baltic States, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, are now new Member Nations. This, though, is only the beginning, as we expect other countries of the former USSR, particularly the large European members of the Commonwealth of Independent States, to follow this lead and ask to

join in the near future. This would certainly be in their interest since agriculture, a key sector in their economies, is facing problems that can only be solved through international cooperation. Their entry would also bring FAO closer to attaining its inherent goal of universality.

As you know, FAO was the first organization to reflect in its membership the strong shift towards European unification; at its last session, the FAO Conference welcomed the European Economic Community (EEC) as a full Member. Thus, the fruitful and increasingly close cooperation that the Organization has pursued with the EEC for years has been rendered more official.

Emergence of New Problems

In the second place, these swift changes on the political scene have been accompanied by socio-economic upheavals of virtually unprecedented scope and complexity. Naturally, the food and agriculture sector has been profoundly affected, with the result that FAO's role in the Region will have to redefined.

Admittedly, until recently many of us had a rather simplistic notion of Europe. So long as it was split in two and not much was known about what was happening in the eastern half, the tendency was to act as if Europe stopped at the "Iron Curtain". The word "Europe" conjured up a stable, peaceful and prosperous Region, regardless of the few less-developed, poorer pockets, particularly in the southernmost part. Its problems were typical of affluent societies: unemployment, overconsumption, squandered resources and pollution. Its agricultural problems appeared to be primarily economic: overproduction, surplus management, prices, subsidies, and so forth. There was also the problem of ensuring that rural areas would be protected and exploited on a sustainable basis. When food security was mentioned, what first came to mind was Europe's contribution to global food security and its shipments of aid to food-deficit regions.

Now, however, with the collapse of the centrally-planned empire, the dismantling of barriers and the end of bipolarization, these generally accepted ideas have been demolished and the amalgamation of Eastern and Western Europe has begun. The continent is being shaken by violent convulsions which, unfortunately, sometimes degenerate into bloody conflict. Death, destruction, pain, poverty and hunger again stalk Europe, as masses of refugees throng the gateways to the West. An economic system under which hundreds of millions managed to survive has caved in, and a way must now be found to effect the transition to a market economy as painlessly as possible. In much of Europe, the entire edifice of an agricultural production system that was barely able to feed its people has collapsed without a sure alternative to put in its place. Plummeting agricultural and industrial output and the dislocation of distribution and trade networks in the former COMECON countries have further lowered their already poor standards of living. Food security has consequently become an acutely real problem and a source of anxiety. This is especially so given that certain industrial and energy production systems represent a serious danger to the environment, not to mention to human lives and health.

These, however, are not the only dangers facing the environment in Europe. Industrial pollution, excessive fuel consumption, the massive use of chemicals in agriculture and the unprecedented buildup of animal wastes pose a fearful threat to nature in Western Europe, particularly to the

climate and atmosphere and to land, water and forest resources. European leaders now understand that their industrial and agricultural strategies must take all these factors into account.

At the same time, the conscience of Europe has woken up to the tragedy of the Third World, where food insecurity and poverty are the rule rather than the exception. The GATT-sponsored Multilateral Trade Negotiations, slow and difficult though they may be, point to the main source of the evil: the inability of developing countries to find remunerative market outlets while most of their export earnings are devoured by debt servicing. The GATT talks have clearly shown how the practices of developed countries affect life in poor countries, whether through agricultural support measures, restricted access to markets (mainly as a result of sanitary and phytosanitary regulations) or the competition confronting Third World exports. There is now a clearer perception of the inevitable impact that the North's trade and agricultural policies have on the situation in the South, and of the developed countries' responsibility where world food security is concerned.

The Emergence of a New Solidarity

Regardless of whether the problem is the situation in the East, the imperilled environment or the need to protect the interests of developing countries, their manifestations are felt most quickly and sharply in Europe. As interdependence passes from concept to reality, so does the solidarity it implies progress from thought to action. Moreover, all these developments are mirrored in the revision of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the economic implications and social repercussions of which are increasingly self-evident.

Naturally, the situation in Central and Eastern Europe is of crucial concern to the EEC. The Community is trying to do what it can to pacify conflict-torn Yugoslavia, intervening actively and organizing humanitarian aid. With the assistance of the international community and the Group of 24, machinery has been put in place to assist the countries and satellite states of the former USSR, mainly in rebuilding their agriculture. I refer in particular to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and am very pleased with the cooperation between FAO and this agency, so essential to Europe's future. The President of the EBRD, Mr Jacques Attali, was invited to deliver the McDougall Lecture before the Plenary Session of the FAO Conference, and he gave a remarkable address on our future prospects. Discussions concerning various studies to be undertaken are now under way with the EBRD, and a Cooperation Agreement between our two agencies, to which I attach great importance, is already in the offing.

FAO's Role in Europe

FAO fully intends to do its share, and has a new role to play in the mammoth task of Europe's reconstruction and the region's support for the Third World. Our Constitution assigns to us four basic functions to gather, to process and to disseminate information in our areas of competence; to provide Member Nations with a forum for discussion and dialogue to advise on policy; and finally, to provide technical assistance. Until now, most of our work in Europe has clearly focused on the first two, and somewhat less on the third.

Concerning the information function, we need now to supplement and to broaden the data that we supply to our Member Nations, for Europe needs reliable and complete data to organize its internal and external action. In this regard, I propose that our Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS) for food and agriculture be extended to cover all countries of the former USSR, and that the information so collected and disseminated be used as an official reference by the entire international community.

The intra-European debate on food and agriculture, of which your Regional Conference is the summit, has been thrown into much sharper focus by the problems I have just mentioned. With regard to policy advice and technical assistance, the new European situation that I have described calls for the experience and expertise we have accumulated during almost 50 years of work in the Third World. The formulation of dynamic and realistic agricultural policies, the establishment of structures enabling the sustainable development of agricultural, forestry and fishery production, and the introduction or modernization of distribution systems responsive to the new conditions in Europe are all areas where FAO's advice and technical assistance will have an unprecedented scope and influence. We shall be - and already have been - called upon to intervene in Central and Eastern Europe in areas such as landownership, the size and role of farm holdings, production techniques, rural employment, agricultural income, training, research and extension. We shall also, I am sure, be called upon to assist with the design, negotiation and refinement of the framework texts - conventions, agreements and other international instruments - that will give definition and substance to the greater Europe of tomorrow.

The International Conference on Nutrition

There are two issues which are of primary concern to FAO and underlie all our activities. First of all, nutrition: let us not forget that the first to show interest and devote their life-long research to this subject were Europeans. Our work in this vital sector merely follows in the footsteps of such people as John Boyd Orr, André Mayer and many others.

What is at stake is not only food security, even though this has again become relevant with the recent re-emergence of food shortages in Europe. Our aim is also to encourage people, throughout the world, to follow healthy and balanced diets that will provide them with what they need to keep fit and well throughout their lives. One of the main prerequisites is to ensure that food is wholesome and that the consumer is protected. We have been working towards this objective for a long time in close collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), particularly within the framework of the Codex Alimentarius. However, the gravity of the problem has become such that we decided, together with WHO, to organize the first major International Conference on Nutrition (ICN), which will be held in December in Rome. We have included this on your agenda, as we expect a leading contribution from Europe in terms of sharing its experience and suggesting practical solutions.

The Environment and Sustainable Development: UNCED

The other major issue that I would like to draw to your attention is the environment and sustainable development, which was the subject of the important international conference held recently in Rio de Janeiro. This issue is uppermost in people's minds, and we have just seen how important it is to Europe's leaders. FAO's work is vital for this issue, for we are directly concerned with areas such as natural resources, water, land,

forests, oceans, atmosphere and climate, and the impact of fertilizers and pesticides. For years we have been increasingly active in conserving the natural environment and in promoting sustainable agriculture. We organized a similar preview to the Rio Conference when, with the support of the Government of the Netherlands, we held the Conference on Agriculture and Environment in Den Bosch in April 1991. This Conference provided the framework for our participation in the Rio Conference on which, like the European governments and people, we pinned great hopes, and gave all that we could, in terms of commitment and energy, for its preparation. Europe was also present in force at this world summit on development and environment, where it made specific proposals.

But we need to be frank. For both Europe and ourselves, the Rio Conference was a big disappointment. No consensus was reached on the European proposal for a time-scale for the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions, on the sustainable and equitable use of biodiversity on a special fund to assist developing countries in implementing Agenda 21, nor on the fossil fuel tax suggested by Europe. We had to content ourselves with declarations of principle on objectives and programmes which will undoubtedly help to mobilize world opinion and governments, but which fall far short of expectations.

If we consider the high stakes in terms of planetary survival, we should not, and cannot, afford to give way to discouragement. FAO is more anxious than ever to work towards the shaping of a strategy for sustainable agricultural and rural development and towards the adoption of a corresponding programme and timetable. Europe is destined to play a prominent role in defining production targets that are compatible in the long term with land-carrying capacities, and in designing integrated production systems that give due consideration to ecological and biological factors and employ less damaging technologies than in the past. We know that dialogue with Europe can produce decisive results, and we intend to pursue it vigorously, particularly within the joint working parties of FAO and the Economic Commission for Europe.

Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have outlined all these matters to bring home the fact that we stand ready to assume our new role in Europe along the lines that you determine. With this in mind, we have prepared "FAO's Medium-Term Plan in the European Region", which you have before you. The intention is to encourage reflection on your part, and to help you to define the orientation that you wish to give to our activities. We shall, therefore, be following your discussions very attentively.

FAO's Situation

FAO is here to serve our Member Nations, and so I should perhaps touch upon the practical resources which allow us to do so. I am happy to tell you that FAO is faring better, for our programmes were unanimously approved by the Conference, and are being implemented according to its instructions.

Finances

Moreover, we have not had to take out loans this year, despite continuing delays in the payment of certain contributions in arrears. Though the situation appears to be relatively healthly for the Regular

Budget, I am nevertheless a little worried that some Member Nations may want the United Nations agencies to reshape their programmes of work to provide more resources for sustainable development and the environment, without lifting the negative-growth constraint that has burdened our budgets since 1986. Having said that, we have learnt to husband our slender resources to sparingly that if we were to be given only what is due, we would undoubtedly be able to do much more.

In contrast, we are up against major difficulties with regard to the extra-budgetary funds that finance most of our field work - mainly those of the UNDP and the Trust Funds. The agency fees are not enough, and the UNDP's new refunding system only makes our life more complicated, but I will do my utmost to keep this from affecting the quality of our work. As for our efforts in Europe, we hope that our cooperation with the EBRD and the EEC will secure for us the funds that we need to satisfy the numerous requests for technical assistance from Eastern Europe.

Staff

Staff problems are another source of concern mentioned, and will undoubtedly affect our work if they remain unresolved. The terms of employment and salaries we offer are no longer competitive, so that we are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit the high-calibre officers that we need. At the same time, staff morale is being seriously undermined by actual or envisioned measures by the UN Joint Staff Pension Board concerning pension levels, and by the International Civil Service Commission's declared intention to change the method used to calculate General Service staff remuneration.

Accommodation

The news regarding Headquarters accommodation is more encouraging. Thanks to the generosity of the Italian Government, whom I should like to thank once again, construction work is proceeding well, and we have every reason to hope that our staff will be grouped within one complex before the end of 1993. This will enable us to make considerable savings and to work even more efficiently. It now appears that, as we approach the year 2000, FAO will finally have the up-to-date facilities and equipment it needs to do the job that our Member Nations expect.

Conclusion

The fact that FAO's Headquarters is located in Europe should not be played down, for this is where the heart of our work lies. I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that your Region is the backbone of our Organization. European successes in agricultural production can set an example for the entire world, and the Region has many world-renowned agricultural and forestry research institutes, some of which are also authorities on tropical crops. The work of these institutes and of European farmers, breeders and foresters has provided models not only for temperate zones but also, with the necessary adjustments, for production systems in other climates. It is thus only natural that Europe provides such a large proportion of our experts and senior staff.

As I said before, an analysis of the situation shows that Europe will increasingly need FAO in future years and, no doubt, in future decades. But this works both ways, for FAO needs Europe, and will do so more and more. We depend unconditionally on Europe to serve the entire

international community, from the richest to the poorest, and to ensure the survival of humanity and the protection of nature. We depend on its intellectual and moral support, on its active commitment and on its financial and technical contributions.

May Europe, old but forever young, continue to instill the values it has created and nurtured throughout the world, and may Europe's humanistic ideals enlighten, enrich and inspire our Conference discussions.

Thank you.

APPENDIX E

STATEMENT BY Mr GERALD HINTEREGGER, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE UN ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

Mr Chairman, Mr Prime Minister, Mr Director-General, Distinguished Ministers and Delegates,

This is now the third occasion on which I have had the great privilege to address the Regional Conference for Europe as the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. The ECE is very pleased to be associated with FAO in the organization of the Regional Conference, and I would like to express ECE's full satisfaction with our cooperation with FAO over the years and to recognize the dynamic role of Dr Saouma in world agriculture and forestry. I would also like to express my deep appreciation to the authorities of our host country for inviting the Conference to this beautiful city of Prague and for the warm welcome we have received.

When we met exactly four years ago in Cracow, there were already some early indications that the old continent of Europe, with whose geopolitical structure we had become familiar since the end of the Second world War, was about to undergo significant modifications. Twenty months later, when we met again in Venice in April 1990, far-reaching changes had occurred in several countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and moves from single-party regimes to multi-party democratic systems of government and from centrally-planned to market economies had taken place. But, as we can now see, that was only the beginning of a process that even today is still far from complete.

No one could have foreseen, before the transition process got under way, how far and how fast it would go. This has placed a tremendous strain on the countries themselves and their new democratic governments and their peoples, while at the same time it has created new challenges for other governments and international organizations that have been ready to give support to the process of transition.

One immediate impact on the UN/ECE has been the remarkable increase in the number of member countries, in a matter of only 12 months, from 34 to 43 today, mainly as a result of the disintegration of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and most recently the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, in this latter case, thank god, by entirely peaceful means. Thus there is a very concrete prospect of still further growth of our membership in the near future. This development has two major consequences for ECE. As 17 out of the 43 member countries are countries with economies in transition, the very nature of our Commission has changed considerably and the ECE can no longer be considered a "club of the rich". Futhermore, several of the new members, which have little experience in international cooperation, require special attention and support. At a time of serious budgetary constraints throughout the UN system, this places an additional burden on our already stretched resources and requires us to seek every possible solution to improve our productivity and to utilize our resources in an optimum fashion.

If anyone had been expecting, at the start of the transition process by the Central and Eastern European countries to market economies, that it would be a quick and painless experience, their illusions have since been shattered. While the difficulties have mainly been internal, they have been aggravated by the unexpectedly prolonged recession in many of the established market economy countries, to which the transition countries had been looking for new trade outlets, as well as for sources of financial support. Despite these constraints, the number of east-west joint ventures and direct investment deals from western sources has registered a significant increase in the last two years.

ECE's response to the new situation has been prompt in developing specific programmes of assistance to transition countries. Priority has been given to developing means for the exchange of information and experience, in a flexible and informal way, between exports from market economy countries and their counterparts in transition countries. The most effective means has been found to be a programme of workshops, mostly held in the transition countries, that deal with well-defined topics identified by the countries themselves as being of particular importance in the transition process. Over 50 such workshops have been held over the past two and a half years, and almost as many are in the pipeline at present.

In the fields of agriculture and timber, three workshops have already taken place, each of them involving substantive support from the Joint ECE/FAO Agriculture and Timber Division in Geneva, as well as from technical units at FAO Headquarters. Last year a workshop was held in Hungary on the organization and management of forestry under market economy conditions. This year, workshops have taken place in Hungary on the transformation of collective farms into viable market-oriented units, and in Germany on privatization in the forestry and forest industry sector. Workshops are in preparation for later this year in the Russian Federation and Belarus, to deal with problems associated with creating market structures in the forest complex and with agrotechnical methods to improve soils contaminated by radionuclides, respectively. Other prospective workshops may be held in Sweden, Poland, Bulgaria and the Ukraine.

Another urgent problem area, in which ECE has been mobilizing international support, is the impact of the nuclear accident at Chernobyl on agriculture and forestry. Our efforts are being made in close collaboration with the Joint FAO/IAEA Division of Nuclear Techniques in Food and Agriculture in Vienna. A meeting has taken place in Belarus to assess the forestry problems involved and to draw up recommendations for action, and another meeting will be held next month to deal with agricultural problems. One difficulty we face - and I call on delegates to this Conference to assist us - is to identify specialists outside the most heavily-affected countries, Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, who have experience in dealing with nuclear radiation effects and counter-measures in agriculture and forestry. An aspect to stress in this activity is the need to create a bank of knowledge should a similar disaster, God forbid, occur again somewhere.

I have spoken in some detail about support for the countries with economies in transition and the nuclear radiation problem beecause ECE has given special emphasis to these issues in setting its overall priorities. Sustainable development has also been singled out as a principle that should guide all areas of ECE's programme activities. This received a new impetus from the UNCED Conference in Rio de Janeiro last June, and we in ECE are assessing our present programmes in light of UNCED with a view to

even further orienting our activities to comply with this guiding principle. Apart from such important sectors as environmental protection, energy conservation and industrial development, sustainable development is also an essential ingredient in all matters relating to agriculture and forestry. Indeed, in looking at the programmes of ECE's Committee on Agriculture and Timber Committee, it is evident that they are to a large extent concerned with aspects of sustainable development.

So far as the Committee on Agriculture is concerned, delegates will recall appeals made at earlier conferences and other fora for closer cooperation between the Committee and the FAO European Commission on Agriculture. This led to an informal meeting in Berlin in September 1990, of FAO and ECE representatives, at which recommendations were drawn up for a clearer division of labour between the ECE Committee on Agriculture and the FAO European Commission on Agriculture. The recommendations were, in essence, that the ECE Committee should concentrate on environment and agriculture, economic and statistical analysis in the agri-food sector, and quality development and standardization in the agri-food sector.

The Economic Commission for Europe was at the same time carrying out its own review of its priorities, structure and methods of work. At a special session on 14 December 1990, it adopted Decision 0(45), which has provided the basis for substantial changes. Among other things, it determined that ECE's activities should conform to two overall guiding principles: they should aim towards the objective of sustainable development; and they should be directed as much as possible towards supporting the economies of Central and Eastern Europe in their transition towards a market-directed economy, and integration into the European and world economy.

Decision 0(45) also identified five priority areas in ECE's work: environment, transport, economic analysis, statistics, and trade facilitation. As to other ECE activities including energy, industrial development, science and technology, human settlements, and agriculture and timber, the Principal Subsidiary Bodies dealing with those areas were instructed to reorient their programmes, to the extent necessary, so that they concentrated on activities related to the priority areas and conformed to the guiding principles mentioned before.

The Committee on Agricultural Problems, meeting in March 1991, took up the Berlin meeting's recommendations and the directives of Decision 0(45) and initiated a radical reorganization of its programme of work and its structure. In doing so, I should stress, it sought the approval and support of FAO for those changes affecting joint FAO/ECE subsidiary bodies. In essence, the Committee's proposals were the following:

(1) abolition of two joint FAO/ECE Working Parties on mechanization in agriculture; and on agrarian structures and farm rationalization;

(2) establishment of two new Working Parties: on relations between agriculture and the environment, and on economic aspects of the agri-food sector and farm management, which it invited FAO to co-sponsor as joint FAO/ECE bodies;

(3) maintenance of the two other subsidiary bodies: the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce; and the Joint FAO/ECE/CES Working Party on Food and Agriculture Statistics. For the Standardization Working Party, the Committee recommended that its mandate and its title be extended to cover food quality developments;

(4) initiation of activities in support of the economies in transition;

(5) in response to another Decision of ECE, Decision C(46), initiation of activities to assist the agricultural sector in the countries affected by the Chernobyl radionuclear disaster.

I have gone into some detail on the reform of the ECE Committee on Agriculture because I believe that the Conference needs to know the importance that ECE attaches to remodelling its structure and programmes to the new priorities and requirements of member countries, as well as to ensuring that its activities in the field of European agriculture are complementary to those of FAO and that no overlap is occurring.

As for forestry and timber, the long-standing and close cooperation between the ECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission has continued through joint meetings of their respective bureaus, several joint activities and the work of their two subsidiary bodies, the Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee on Forest Technology, Management and Training, and the Joint FAO/ECE Working Party on Forest Economics and Statistics. Furthermore, preparations are underway for the next of the periodic joint sessions of the bodies themselves, which will be in October 1993. One purpose of that session will be to agree on an integrated approach for the forestry and forest industry sector in supporting the economies in transition. An ad hoc FAO/ECE meeting on this matter will be held at the invitation of the Government of Austria in October 1992 to coordinate proposals for appropriate directions and strategies. Another major item on the agenda of the joint session next year will be a discussion on the policy implications on the results of the 1990 Global Forest Resource Assessment. This is being carried out in two distinct parts. One deals with the forest resources of the developed, temperate zone regions, that is to say, all ECE member countries (i.e. Europe, the member countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Canada and the United States of America), as well as Australia, Japan and New Zealand. These countries' forests account for just over half the world total. This part of the assessment is being carried out by the Joint ECE/FAO Agriculture and Timber Division in Geneva. The main results have already been published in executive summary form, and the full publication will be issued at the end of this year. FAO's Forestry Department is carrying out the assessment for the rest of the world, that is, the developing countries in tropical and temperate regions, and it will also be responsible for integrating the two parts into a global assessment.

Like the Committee on Agriculture, the Timber Committee has carried out a fundamental review of its priorities and activities in the light of ECE Decision O(45). It agreed that the Committee's existing work programme already took account of the priority areas identified by the Commission, as well as of the special relevance of sustainable development to the forest sector and the build-up of activities in support of the economies in

transition. So that its programme would be even more clearly aligned with the Commission's guiding principles and priority areas, however, it restructured and streamlined it further.

Mr Chairman, the topic chosen for special treatment by the Conference this week concerns issues related to alternative land uses of marginal and set-aside farmland in Europe. The topic was certainly well chosen, since it addresses a problem of region-wide dimensions, even if the nature of the problem differs significantly from one part of the Region to another. It also addresses issues that are considerably broader than purely agricultural ones. For environmental just as much as for economic reasons, countries can no longer afford the luxury of irrational or ill-considered allocation and use of their natural resources, including land. Policies towards agriculture need, therefore, to take into account general land use, social, industrial and trade balance considerations, as well as Europe's food, agriculture and forestry relationships with the rest of the world. I look forward to the outcome of the debate on these questions with considerable interest.

I have attempted to demonstrate ECE's continuing commitment to support European activities in the field of agriculture and forestry. The programmes of the two ECE bodies concerned, the Committee on Agriculture and the Timber Committee, are almost entirely directed towards priority areas and, as a consequence, have the full support of the Commission. In all our activities in these sectors, we welcome the strong links that have been forged between ECE and FAO. I and my colleagues in ECE also look forward to continuing this relationsip in the future for the benefit of our member countries.

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