

Brussels, 25 June 2025
(OR. en)

10834/25

AGRI 308
FAO 32

OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
No. prev. doc.:	10097/25
Subject:	EU position paper on FAO institutional issues that will be addressed at the 44 th session of Conference of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (Rome, 28 June - 4 July 2025)

Delegations will find in the Annex the EU position paper with a view to the 44th Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (Rome, 28 June – 4 July 2025), approved by the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council at its meeting on 23 June 2025.

**EU position paper with a view to the 44th Conference of the Food and Agriculture
Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (Rome, 28 June – 4 July 2025)**

Introduction

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), as an impartial and member-led UN agency, has a vital role in leading multilateral efforts to eradicate hunger and all forms of malnutrition and to achieve food security and nutrition for all, as well as in tackling poverty, including through its responsibilities in supporting its members in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in particular as regards sustainable development goal (SDG) 2 and the other SDGs which are linked to its mandate. As the primary global knowledge-based organisation for sustainable agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, FAO also has a key contribution to make in driving the transformation towards sustainable food systems and addressing in this regard the intrinsically linked challenges related to the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and natural resource degradation.

Continued efforts are needed to ensure that FAO remains an efficient, effective and transparent knowledge-based organisation, driven by results-based management and accountability at all levels, and effective dialogue and communication with its members, and capable of delivering effectively on its mandate, in line with the guidance provided by the FAO governing bodies and in accordance with the needs and expectations of its members. There is also a continued need for enhanced cooperation and increased synergies between FAO and other relevant UN agencies that deal with global issues relating to agriculture, forestry, fisheries, food security and nutrition, and food safety, in particular the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The EU and its Member States are committed to consolidating their longstanding and fruitful cooperation with FAO and to continuing working with the members of FAO to ensure effective FAO action for a sustainable future and food security for all.

Potential FAO review/reform

Background

At the 176th session of the FAO Council (2-6 December 2024), FAO's Director-General put forward a number of institutional reform proposals, for approval by the 44th FAO Conference in 2025, marking the 80th anniversary of the Organisation. In view of the opposition from the overwhelming majority of FAO Council members (34), as well as from observers (36), including all EU Member States, the Council decided to mandate the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council (ICC) to convene informal consultations to determine a process to assess whether FAO and its governance is still fit for purpose. One of the outcomes of such an exercise could be to launch a reform process.

Based on further discussions at its 177th session, the FAO Council mandated the ICC to hold further informal consultations to determine, based on members' views, the most appropriate mechanism for conducting a review in order to identify any scope for improving the functioning and governance of FAO. Such a review mechanism could then be approved by the 44th FAO Conference, with any decisions on potential reform to be presented for decision at the 45th FAO Conference in 2027.

Lines to take:

- The 80th anniversary of FAO offers a prime opportunity to reflect on FAO's functioning and how to ensure that FAO is fit for purpose in the face of current global challenges in food and agriculture, as well as fit to contribute to the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

- To that end, the FAO Conference, based on broad consensus among FAO members and consistency with the wider UN80 reform process both as regards timing and substance, could define the procedural requirements and terms of reference for a process to review the various aspects of FAO's functioning, including its institutional structure and governance, its decision-making processes, and its alignment and synergies with the United Nations system, with a view to identifying potential issues which prevent FAO from effectively fulfilling its mandate and improving FAO's effectiveness, efficiency, transparency and accountability.
- Such a review process, which should draw on well-established practices within the UN system and take due account of the previous FAO reform process, must be transparent, inclusive and member-driven at all stages, and must be a rules-based, comprehensive and evidence-based process, based on a prior independent diagnosis.
- Such a review process should also be based on a holistic and prudent approach, in order not to create unnecessary divisions within FAO that would distract from realising its mission. Such an important issue as institutional reform of an international organisation must be well thought out and prepared.

FAO Council's composition

Background

The FAO Council is FAO's executive body that holds five regular sessions in each biennium to deal with matters relating to the execution of FAO's programme of work and budget, to monitor the implementation of governance decisions and to oversee administrative matters.

The FAO Council consists of 49 member nations of FAO, elected by the FAO Conference (FAO's supreme governing body) for a three-year term, with arrangements for staggering expiry of terms of office, based on considerations of balanced geographical representation and the rotation of its membership. Each FAO Council member has one vote.

The number and regional distribution of seats in the FAO Council has been a recurring issue in FAO Council discussions over the past few decades. Seven amendments since 1945 resulted in the number of Council seats rising gradually to the current number of 49 member nations, from across the seven regional groups in FAO (at the same time, the number of FAO members increased from 54 to 194).

In February 2025 Pakistan, Indonesia and Uzbekistan introduced a proposal to increase the number of Council members to 55, with one additional seat being allocated to six FAO regions¹. In addition, Russia and Belarus proposed an increase from 49 to 51, with the objective of establishing a new 'Eurasian Group' consisting of these two FAO members and providing the group with two Council seats². Moreover, the Council noted at its 175th session the proposal from Australia, on behalf of the Southwest Pacific Regional Group, to increase by one the number of seats in the Council for members of this group. However, this proposal was not formally submitted for consideration by the 44th Conference.

Since the last amendment to the number of Council seats in 1977, FAO membership has grown from 144 to 194 countries (almost 35 %), mainly because of the breaking up of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, as well as the joining of the Pacific Island States as new FAO members. If there were to be an increase in the number, this would argue for increased seats primarily for the Southwest Pacific, Africa (in line with UN consensus at the Summit of the Future) and Europe in order to reach a more balanced representation.

¹ Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Near East, and Southwest Pacific – all regions except North America, which already has two seats for two countries.

² Russia and Belarus have also expressed support for the proposal put forward by Pakistan, Indonesia and Uzbekistan.

Lines to take:

- The issue of the number and the regional distribution of the FAO Council's seats should not be considered in isolation but should be addressed as part of a broader review of FAO's functioning, including its governing bodies, even more so since any change in the number of seats would require an amendment to the FAO Constitution.
- At the same time, taking into account the complexity and sensitivity of the issue, it would seem inappropriate and contrary to well-established practice to address this issue directly at the 44th session of the FAO Conference without any prior preparation, including consideration and relevant recommendations by the FAO Council.
- Simply increasing the number of FAO Council members by one seat for each of the six regions would not solve the current problems with fair and equitable geographical representation. On the contrary, it would only increase the current imbalance. In order to develop a fair proposal in this regard, in particular the increase in the number of countries in the individual regional groups since 1977 must be taken into account.
- On the proposal put forward by Russia and Belarus to create a new Eurasian regional group, overall changes in defining FAO regions would require in-depth analysis and consultations with and within the current regional groups. The creation of a new regional group would have an impact on all the governing bodies and the *bureau* of the technical committees, which are based on regional representation. It would also create additional costs.
- Based on the above, consideration of the two formal proposals to amend the FAO Constitution at the 44th Conference should be postponed.

Election of the members of the FAO Council in 2025

Background

The FAO Council has 49 members elected by the FAO Conference (normally for three years) and distributed among seven regional groups: Africa (12), Asia (9), Europe (10), Latin America and the Caribbean (9), Near East (6), North America (2), and Southwest Pacific (1).³

The Europe group currently has 48 members, who rotate as members of the FAO Council according to a rotation scheme within seven sub-groups agreed in 2014. That scheme has served, in particular, the interests of the many smaller member states within the Europe group.

In view of Russia's unjustified and illegal war against Ukraine, and in accordance with the 'Principles regarding Russia and Belarus in multilateral fora following the Russian aggression against Ukraine' approved by the Foreign Affairs Council on 21 March 2022⁴, the EU and its Member States suspended in 2023 the Europe group rotation scheme with respect to Russia. This resulted in Russia not being elected on the Council for the period 2024-2027 (according to the rotation scheme in practice for 2024-2026).

For the 44th FAO Conference, Russia and Belarus have tabled a formal request for a Conference decision to amend the FAO Basic Texts for the purpose of creating a new 'Eurasian regional group' in FAO, and to allocate two Council seats to such a new regional group.

Strategic goals:

- All efforts should be made to facilitate the election process and to keep the best possible representation of countries from the Europe regional group in the FAO Council, including the small ones. Therefore, applications would need to be submitted, and resignations made, in line with arrangements made so far, and a strong call should be made on FAO members to respect the formal nominations made by the ERG.
- Contingency planning will be necessary to support EU Member State candidacies.

³ The European Union, as a member organisation of FAO, is not a member of the FAO Council, but may participate in its discussions.

⁴ Paragraph 3, on elections, states that the EU should 'actively oppose the election of Russia and Belarus or Russian and Belarusian candidates to elected membership and office-holder positions'.

Programme of Work and Budget (PWB) 2026-2027

Background

The Council at its 177th session requested the Independent Chairperson of the Council to convene informal consultations with members in the run-up to the 44th session of the Conference to seek consensus on the budget level.

Lines to take:

- The budget for 2026-2027 should be kept at the same nominal level in US dollars as in 2024-2025, thus encouraging the efficient use of resources, without compromising the quality of FAO's key programmes and services.
 - FAO should continue playing its important role in supporting its members in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and in achieving the SDGs through policy guidance, technical advice, the implementation of programmes and projects, as well as the monitoring and review of progress. FAO also has key responsibilities in relation to SDG 2 in particular and the other SDGs which are linked to its mandate and, as the custodian for the SDG 2 indicators, FAO has a critical task in advising on interlinkages between the SDGs, including by ensuring the availability of accurate agricultural and rural data.
 - FAO's normative and standard-setting work remains critically important for shaping sustainable and resilient agriculture and food systems, including in the framework of the International Plant Protection Convention and the Codex Alimentarius Commission.
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