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News | 16.03.2012

GMO Campaign Blog

Flawed compromise rejected by Ministers - Good news, but door still left open for new GMOs



On March 9th, 2012, a blocking minority of 9 EU environment ministers (from D, Fr, Bel, UK, Ire, Cyp, Bul, Esp and Svk) have put a halt to a Danish compromise proposal that aimed at allowing more freedom for Member States to prevent the growing on their territory of a GMO crop that is allowed at the EU level. The proposal was a compromise attempt after the initial Commission proposal had been largely overhauled and voted by the EP and then rejected soundly in the Council of Ministers. It offered two options for a country to prevent the growing of a GMO on its territory. The first one was to negotiate directly with the applicant that the EU authorisation specifically exclude that country (probably in exchange for a positive vote in favour of the EU authorisation). The second option was similar to the Commission initial proposal, giving a Member State (MS) more legitimate grounds to ban a GMO, but with no legal guarantee that this would be acceptable by the WTO. The result then was a flawed deal that would have given a disproportionate influence to the biotech companies that want to commercialise GMOs on one hand, and would not offer solid legal grounds for a MS to exercise its right to ban a GMO on the other hand. Another critique of the proposal that has been made by various countries is that it is fundamentally wrong, as it is leading to a fragmentation of the Single Market. The Greens feel relieved that the proposal has not been accepted as such, but are anxious that this gives a wrong signal to Commissioner Dalli to fasten proposals for authorising new GMOs, as he almost threatened some Member States, in particular the ones who have already a safeguard clause on one of the two GMOs that are allowed for growing in the EU (one GM maize and one GM potato). For the Greens, it would be completely irresponsible to even think of authorising new GMOs at a time when there is so much widespread public concern on GMOs generally, on the EU

legislation, on the insufficient risk assessment rules, on the lack of inclusion of socio-economic consequences of GMOs in the authorisation process, and on the credibility of EFSA and the renewal of its management board and most of its scientific panels. The discussion must continue in order to improve the level of the EU authorisation process, in line with the unanimous conclusions of the Dec. 2008 Environment Council, which are still not implemented, to improve the possibility of a MS to legally ban an EU-authorised GMO for environmental or other national or regional concern and to prevent private companies to be able to enter into deals behind closed doors with National governments. As long as these fundamental questions have not been satisfactorily answered, no GMO should be proposed for growing in the EU.

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