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GMO imported crops continue to enter the EU while the flawed authorisation process undergoes reform

2 objections to GMOs were voted today

Making GMO authorizations more democratic

Little by little, the European Parliament is trying to install more democracy and transparency into the EU decision processes. Indeed, following its Committee on Industry in April, the European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional affairs (AFCO) just adopted a position which calls for profoundly reforming the way the EU approves GMOs, active substances contained in pesticides or any product or substance susceptible of having an impact on human health or the environment.

Indeed, the current system (called "comitology") has been dysfunctional for years, in particular in relation to GMOs. When it comes to their authorisation, the EU Parliament only has a symbolic role in the matter, whilst Member States have been unable to reach a common decision for the last 3 years. This leaves the Commission alone to decide, and the threats from biotech companies to take the Commission to court has led it to deliver the requested authorizations, thereby systematically ignoring the Parliament's position.

AFCO calls for total transparency on the draft authorisation texts as well as on Member States' opinions and voting behaviour, at every stage of the process. Even more importantly, the report proposes to end the Commission's power to decide on its own: either the Member States reach a qualified majority in favour of a product, or it can't be authorised at all. Finally, to avoid the endless reiteration of political stalemates, AFCO calls for the possibility of the European Parliament or the Council to rescind implementing powers given to the Commission when the situation so requires.

Pascal Durand, Greens/EFA rapporteur, commented, "*It is high time that EU Citizens finally have an easy access to the positions their governments are defending in their names when they negotiate in Brussels. We need the EU decision making on GMOs and other products to be more transparent and democratic*"



Meanwhile, imported GM crops continue to enter the EU

But while the issue is being discussed in the European Parliament, GMO authorizations have not stopped, quite the contrary. Since the debate started in February 2017, the Commission has tabled 14 new authorizations (seven maize, 4 soybeans, one cotton, one oil-seed rape and one beetroot), which bring the number to an impressive 25 GMOs since December 2015 - more than the two previous Commissions combined!

The last two on the table - the poetically named maize GA21 from Monsanto and Syngenta, and maize 1507 x 59122 x MON 810 x NK603 from Pioneer - are particularly problematic, as they have been engineered to tolerate some of the worse herbicides on the market, and especially the very controversial glyphosate.

The European Parliament, coherent with its criticisms of the decision process, today adopted two objections to the authorization of these genetically engineered crops for import into the European Union. Like with the 23 previous tabled GMO authorizations, the Member States were not able to come to an agreement. The Commission's decision on these two GM maizes is awaited for the coming weeks.

Bart Staes, MEP responsible for the Greens/EFA on the GMO question, commented "*The European Parliament has consistently made clear its opposition to GM authorisations. There are still many unanswered questions surrounding the impacts of these GMOs on our health and the environment. Furthermore, we already know that the herbicides they have been made tolerant to, as well as some of metabolites, are dangerous to health. The current approval system is clearly not fit for purpose, and we welcome the Commission's willingness to reform it. However, it is not just the process that is flawed. The Commission needs to look beyond the demands of big-agri firms and pursue a policy that will meet the needs of Europe's consumers and farmers in a more effective and sustainable way.*"

No reform possible without the Member States

It would seem logical that Member States would support a reform aimed at giving them more power, and which would end this difficult situation. But while the European Parliament has - slowly - started to deal with this file - for its part, the Council, composed of the EU Member States, has apparently decided this file is not important enough for them to work on it. This raises the following question: are Member States happy to continue to hide behind the big bad Commission, which they can then go home and blame in front of the cameras, or will they finally take responsibility for decisions taken “in Brussels”?

The problem is, whatever the European Parliament decides, the rules will not change without the Council’s agreement. The reform can still move forward, but only if the national governments feel pressure from their citizens to really care about democracy and transparency in the EU by coming out of the dark. As Greens/EFA, we are pursuing our work for a more sustainable, democratic and more transparent European Union!

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Quote from Terry Reintke

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Responsible MEPs



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