



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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NOTE

from : General Secretariat of the Council
to : COREPER/COUNCIL
Subject : GMOs : the way forward

At its meeting on 16 May 2008, COREPER decided, when setting up the provisional agenda of the next Environment Council (5 June 2008), to add a new "B" agenda item on GMOs upon the request of the French delegation.

Delegations will find hereto a background note drawn up by the French delegation concerning this agenda item.

GMOs
Discussion at the Environment Council Meeting on 5 June
BACKGROUND PAPER

I/ Context:

- The production of GMO plants (PGM) in open fields has one characteristic: it rapidly introduces, over large surface areas, living structures with new genetic characteristics, which have numerous interactions with the ecosystems and, for many of them, difficult to foresee at present.
- Consequently, the GMOs are the subject of debates and give rise to a large number of questions among scientists, the public, certain agricultural and agri-business sectors which want to protect the specifications of their production from the dissemination of the GMOs, the elected representatives and NGOs with regard to their impact on the environment, the ecosystems, the living species, the risks of dissemination and the quantities of phytosanitary products used in the long term.
- The subject was briefly brought up, under a variety of points, at the Environment Council meeting on 3 March at the request of France which submitted subjects for consideration. A large number of delegations intervened to ask that the Council give the question consideration and that it should be taken up again in more substantial form at the Environment Council meeting on 5 June.
- On 7 May, the Commission held a political discussion concerning both the procedures for current authorisations and its more general approach to this question. On this occasion, the Commission particularly decided to ask the EFSA for additional information on the assessment of certain GMOs with regard to the environment, to look for a technical solution before the summer to determine the low level of unauthorised GMOs in human and animal foodstuffs, to work with the EFSA to clarify the possible impacts of the cultivation of GMOs on human health and the environment, such as the results of observation and experimentation have indicated, and to make a good distinction between the assessment and the management of the risk.
- In view of these recent developments, a political discussion among the Ministers of the Environment on 5 June would appear necessary. On 3 March, a large number of Member States were in favour of this.

II / Areas for consideration:

In this context, consideration could be undertaken in the following fields:

1/ increase in the assessment, particularly with regard to the environment, such as defined by the appendices to directive 2001/18/EC and the EFSA guidelines, particularly in the following fields:

- An assessment of the toxicity of the PGMs producing insecticide molecules taking inspiration more from the similarity of these toxins to phytosanitary products and resorting to more refined statistics and a better awareness of the effects on non-targeted species.
- A thorougher awareness of the risks linked to the use of the herbicides involved in the culture of certain PGMs which are tolerant to them, through an analysis on the middle and longer term.
- The awareness, in the risk assessment of GMOs conducted for authorisation procedures, together with scientific, sanitary and environmental criteria, of socio-economic criteria such as the collective benefits and costs of certain GMOs in the medium or long term, the agronomic impact and the impact from the use of the GMOs on the various production methods.
- At first, an assessment methodology of benefits should be defined and used to guide the decision-maker before authorising a GMO. The decision must nevertheless base on risk criteria regarding health and environment, in order to be compatible with WTO rules.

2/ improvement in the functioning of scientific expertise. On one hand, expertise practices between Member States must be harmonised, on the other hand, the range of scientific disciplines to be called on has to be broadened.

The opinions of the Member States (through their national agencies) in the opinion given by the EFSA, must be given better consideration

3/ the rapid definition at European level of labelling thresholds for GMO seed on the basis of relevant criteria enabling guarantees to be given to the producers, the sellers and the users of farm and conventional non-GMO seed. Afterwards, consideration should be given to the traceability thresholds for products without GMOs within the same perspective of a guarantee for the actors in the long term.

4/ further details on the room for initiative left to member States to control the culture of authorised GMOs in an appropriate manner.

France is proposing to study more precisely the room for manoeuvre allowed by the regulation and to envisage a closer coordination with the EFSA on possible special measures regarding GMO management in the frame of particular ecosystems, agricultural systems or specific geographical areas.