

Opinion

On the proposal for regulation of the European Parliament and the Council On amending Directive 2001/18/EC as regards the possibility for the Member States to restrict or prohibit the cultivation of GMOs in their territory

The Special Standing Committee for European Affairs and the Standing Committee for Production and Trade of the Hellenic Parliament, convened in a joint session on 30 September 2010 in order to examine the proposal for regulation of the European Parliament and the Council On amending Directive 2001/18/EC as regards the possibility for the Member States to restrict or prohibit the cultivation of GMOs in their territory

Considering:

- The Commission's communication dated 13.7.2010 to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee for Regions, (COM 375(2010) final),
- The Proposal for Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council on amending Directive 2001/18/EC as regards the possibility for the Member States to restrict or prohibit the cultivation of GMOs in their territory (COM 380 (2010) final),
- The note of information by the Ministry for Agricultural Development and Food,

The Committees' members reached the following conclusions:

On the total of the proposal for Regulation:

Any initiative oriented towards strengthening the existing framework, is considered positive, as any compromise or concession concerning the authorization procedure is not deemed safe

The new proposal for regulation follows the correct direction and conforms with both subsidiarity and proportionality principles".

On the content of the proposal, the following comments are expressed:

“ It is a fact that Genetically Modified organisms are one of the most controversial technologies, very promising, but, at the same time presenting hazard of possible impact on society, public health and the environment. Moreover, the vast majority of the scientific community states that it is impossible to be on the safe side regarding possible negative impact on human health and the environment.

Long-term research and study is necessary in order to estimate potential hazards of GMOs, even if technology promises economic benefits. However, until soundly proved that GMOs and seeds or other plant propagating material (GMOs for

cultivation') are not a serious risk for public health or jeopardise the planet's ecosystems, the discussion on their liberation of use will be continued.

Due to the aforementioned, the public has a negative view concerning GMOs. 90% of the Greek citizens do not accept those products and we ought to respect public opinion when expressing reservations.

The Greek territory presents certain particularities. Big areas of the territory are under "NATURA" status, while our country presents rich and valuable biodiversity, dictating its protection. Fragmentation of cultivation fields and differentiation of agricultural production do not actually allow for the coexistence of GMOs with our conventional and organic cultivations without the risk of infection.

In what concerns issues of public health and environmental impact, it is our practice to adopt a preventive approach.

The examination of the proposal for amendment of existing European legal frame calls for special attention. At first sight it seems that the Commission's proposal grants further room to member-states for choosing whether or not they wish to cultivate GMO crops on their territory. This seems apparently positive, yet there are questions raised especially concerning compatibility of individual member-state regulations with internal market ones. More specifically whether member-states should be entitled to prohibit cultivation of GMOs in their territory, while obliged to accept free circulation and massive import of products of their harvest from other countries, since their origin is from EU member-states having authorised them. Moreover, there is the question of whether this regulation will give room for massive authorisations of GMO cultivations on part of the EU.

The new proposal actually grants member-states the freedom of restriction or even prohibition under certain conditions. We deem necessary for member-states wishing to prohibit GMO cultivations in their territory, to make use of argumentation related to environmental and public health protection, taking into consideration special national and regional parameters that have not been evaluated (or not having emerged) during authorisation process. That possibility would decrease member-states' resorting to safeguard measures and also reduce institutional expense for the Commission and ESFA.

The issue of trans-border infection must also be addressed. A member-state's choice to cultivate GMOs in its territory should be respected, yet, adequate measures must be taken in order to avoid unintended presence of GMOs in countries having chosen not to cultivate GMOs.

The potential risk assessment process must also be enhanced, as currently it is mainly based on data coming from companies asking for GMO approval.

Last, the enhancement of product traceability and labelling mechanisms is dictated.

The Committee for European Affairs of the Hellenic Parliament will continue to follow up and monitor developments of the consultation process on the proposal for Regulation on amending Directive 2001/18/EC.