Resolution on the draft Commission implementing decision renewing the authorisation for the placing on the market of products containing, consisting of or produced from genetically modified soybean A2704-12 (ACS-GMØØ5-3) pursuant to Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council

2019/2828(RSP) - 10/10/2019 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 426 votes to 208, with 20 abstentions, a resolution objecting to the Commission draft implementing decision renewing the authorisation for the placing on the market of products containing, consisting of or produced from genetically modified soybean A2704-12 (ACS-GMØØ5-3) pursuant to Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

On 29 August 2017, the authorisation holder Bayer CropScience AG submitted to the Commission an application for the renewal of that authorisation (the renewal application). On 29 November 2018, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) adopted a favourable opinion on the renewal application.

Complementary herbicides

Recalling that soybean A2704-12 was developed to confer tolerance to glufosinate ammonium-based herbicides, Members noted that a number of studies show that the cultivation of herbicide-tolerant genetically modified (GM) crops results in a higher use of those herbicides. As a consequence, it has to be expected that crops of soybean A2704-12 will be exposed to both higher and repeated doses of glufosinate, which will potentially lead to a higher quantity of residues in the harvest.

Glufosinate is classified as toxic for reproduction (1B) and the approval of the authorisation of glufosinate in the Union expired on 31 July 2018. In addition, questions remain about the carcinogenicity of glyphosate.

Comments from Member States

Member States made many critical comments during the three-month consultation period following the publication of the EFSA favourable opinion. The most critical comments concern the impossibility of properly assessing the risks relating to the use of soybean A2704-12 in food and feed, owing to the insufficient number and variety of field studies, a general lack of data on glufosinate residues and the absence of any chronic or subchronic toxicity studies.

Upholding the Union's international obligations

A recent report by the UN's Special Rapporteur on the right to food found that hazardous pesticides have catastrophic impacts on health and the potential to lead to human rights abuses against farmers and

agricultural workers, communities living near agricultural lands, indigenous communities, and pregnant women and children.

As regards the import of genetically modified soya, Members stressed that soya production is a key driver of deforestation in South America. The European Union is the world's second largest soya importer and the majority of the soya imported into the Union is for animal feed.

The analysis by the Commission found that soya has historically been the Union's number one contributor to global deforestation and related emissions, accounting for nearly half of the deforestation embodied in all Union imports.

Undemocratic process

The Commission deplored the fact that, since the entry into force of Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003, authorisation decisions have been adopted by the Commission without the support of the opinion of the Member States' committee and that the return of the dossier to the Commission for final decision, which is very much the exception for the procedure as a whole, has become the norm for decision-making on GM food and feed authorisations.

On the basis of these considerations, Parliament called on the Commission to:

- withdraw its draft implementing decision;

- suspend any implementing decision regarding applications for GMO authorisation until the authorisation procedure has been revised in such a way as to address the shortcomings of the current procedure, which has proven inadequate;

- withdraw proposals for GMO authorisations if no opinion is delivered by the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health, whether for cultivation or for food and feed uses;

- not authorise any herbicide-tolerant GM plants without a full assessment of the residues from spraying with complementary herbicides, of metabolites and commercial formulations as applied in the countries of cultivation;

- fully integrate the risk assessment of the application of complementary herbicides and their residues into the risk assessment of herbicide-tolerant GM plants, regardless of whether the GM plant concerned is to be cultivated in the Union or imported into the Union for food and feed uses;

- not authorise the import for food or feed uses of any GM plant which has been made tolerant to a herbicide that is not authorised for use in the Union, in this case glufosinate;

- not authorise the import of GM soybeans, unless it can be shown that their cultivation did not contribute to deforestation.

Parliament reiterated its alarm at the fact that the Union's high dependence on imports of animal feed in the form of soybeans causes deforestation in third countries. It urged the Commission to review all its current authorisations for GM soya in the light of the Union's international obligations, including under the Paris Agreement, the CBD and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).