Resolution on the draft Commission implementing decision authorising the placing on the market of products containing, consisting of or produced from genetically modified soybean MON 87708 × MON 89788 × A5547-127

2020/2535(RSP) - 13/05/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 477 votes to 181, with 23 abstentions a resolution **objecting** to the draft Commission implementing decision authorising the placing on the market of products containing, consisting of, or produced from genetically modified soybean MON 87708 × MON 89788 × A5547-127 pursuant to Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

On 28 October 2016, Monsanto Europe N.V., on behalf of Monsanto Company, submitted a request to the national competent authority of the Netherlands for the placing on the market of foods, food ingredients, and feed containing the genetically modified soybean MON 87708 × MON 89788 × A5547-127. On 22 May 2019, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) gave a favourable opinion on the application.

Complementary herbicides

Recalling that MON 87708 × MON 89788 × A5547-127 soybean has been developed to confer tolerance to glyphosate-based herbicides, Members stressed that it has been shown that the cultivation of herbicide-tolerant GM crops results in a higher use of herbicides, due in large part to the emergence of herbicide-tolerant weeds. As a consequence, it is to be expected that crops of GM soybean MON 87708 × MON 89788 × A5547-127 will be exposed to both higher and repeated doses of the complementary herbicides (glufosinate, dicamba and glyphosate), which will potentially lead to a higher quantity of residues in the harvest.

According to a study validated by the scientific community, glyphosate accumulates in genetically modified soybean. Following a pilot project in Argentina, it was shown that genetically modified soybeans contained surprisingly high levels of glyphosate residues. In addition, there are still questions about the carcinogenicity of glyphosate. Glufosinate is classified as toxic for reproduction (1B) and the approval for the use of glufosinate in the Union expired on 31 July 2018.

Members also raised the issue of the lack of maximum residue limits (MRLs) and related controls.

Undemocratic decision-making process

Parliament stressed that the Commission recognises that the fact that GMO authorisation decisions continue to be adopted by the Commission without a qualified majority of Member States in favour, which is very much the exception for product authorisations as a whole but which has become the norm for decision-making on GM food and feed authorisations, is problematic.

Whilst the Commission itself recognises the democratic shortcomings, the lack of support of the Member States and the objections of Parliament, the Commission continues to authorise GMOs.

Upholding international obligations

Members recalled that Regulation (EU) No 1829/2003 requires the Commission, when drafting its decisions, to take into account legitimate factors including the Union's obligations under the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDOs), the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Parliament also reiterated its concern that the EU's heavy dependence on imports of animal feed in the form of soya beans is causing deforestation abroad. It called on the Commission not to authorise the import of genetically modified soya unless it is demonstrated that their cultivation has not contributed, directly or indirectly, to deforestation.

Recommendations

On the basis of these considerations, Parliament considered that the Commission's draft implementing decision is not consistent with EU law and asked the Commission to withdraw its draft implementing decision.

The Commission is also invited to:

- not authorise the import of genetically modified plants for food or feed use which have been rendered tolerant to a herbicide not authorised in the Union, in this case glufosinate;

- commit itself, in the next evaluation of the MRL legislation and the farm to table strategy, not to allow the presence of possible residues of toxic pesticides, such as glufosinate, in food and feed imports into the EU;

- ensure effective controls of agricultural products imported from third countries with a view to ensuring a high level of health protection and a level playing field for European food production;

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

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

- review all its current authorisations for GM soybeans in light of the Union’s international obligations, including those under the Paris Climate Agreement, the UN Convention on Biodiversity and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Parliament reiterated its call for the implementation of a European vegetable protein production and supply strategy, which would enable the Union to become less dependent on GM soybean imports and to create shorter food chains and regional markets.