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 87751 × MON 87701 × MON 87708 × MON 89788, pursuant to Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council

2020/2891(RSP) - 17/12/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 472 votes to 194, with 30 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 87751 × MON 87701 × MON 87708 × MON 89788, pursuant to Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

The application for marketing authorisation was submitted by Monsanto Europe N.V. a, on behalf of Monsanto USA, to the competent authorities of the Netherlands on 17 December 2015. On 26 September 2019, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) adopted a favourable opinion on the application.

Main concerns from Member States

Members pointed out that Member States have submitted many critical comments to the EFSA, including that:

- no analysis has been done regarding glyphosate residues or glyphosate metabolites on the stacked GM soybean, that there has been no testing of the possible synergistic or antagonistic effects of the Bt toxins with the herbicide residues;

- questions on the safety of the stacked GM soybean and derived food and feed remain unanswered;

- the potential long-term reproductive or developmental effects of the food or feed have not been assessed and that, due to missing information, the safety of the stacked GM soybean cannot be fully assessed.

In addition, an independent scientific analysis concluded that no final conclusion can be drawn regarding the safety of the stacked GM soybean, that the toxicological assessment and the environmental risk assessment are unacceptable and that the risk assessment does not fulfil requirements for assessing risks to the immune system.

Complementary herbicides and lack of residue analysis

Members pointed out that the cultivation of herbicide-tolerant GM crops results in a higher use of herbicides, which is due in large part to the emergence of herbicide-tolerant weeds. It is therefore to be expected that crops of the GM maize will be exposed to both higher and repeated doses of glyphosate, which will potentially lead to a higher quantity of residues in the harvest.

In addition, there are still questions about the carcinogenicity of glyphosate. In 2015, the International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organization has, contrary to the EFSA and the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), classified glyphosate as probably carcinogenic to humans.

Members also noted:

- that there is a lack of maximum residue limits (MRLs) and related controls;

- that side-effects have been observed which may affect the immune system following exposure to Bt proteins and that some Bt proteins may have adjuvant properties, meaning that they can increase the allergenicity of other proteins that they come into contact with.

Respect for international obligations

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

However, a Commission analysis 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 decision-making

Members recalled that the vote in October 2020 of the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health delivered no opinion, meaning that the authorisation was not supported by a qualified majority of Member States.

The Commission recognised 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.

Recommendations

On the basis of these considerations, Parliament considered that the Commission's implementing decision is not consistent EU law. Consequently, it called on the Commission to:

- withdraw its draft implementing decision;

- move forward with the utmost urgency concerning the development of sustainability criteria, with full involvement of Parliament;

- take into account the EU’s obligations under international agreements, such as the Paris Climate Agreement, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN sustainable development goals;

- stop authorising GMOs, whether for cultivation or for food and feed uses, when no opinion is delivered by Member States in the Appeal Committee;

- not to authorise herbicide-tolerant GM crops until the health risks associated with the residues have been comprehensively investigated on a case-by-case basis;

- the potential long-term reproductive or developmental effects of the food or feed have not been assessed and that, due to missing information, the safety of the stacked GM soybean cannot be fully assessed;

- not to authorise the import for food or feed uses of any GM plant which has been made tolerant to a herbicide-active substance that is not authorised for use in the Union.

Parliament reiterated its consternation that the EU’s high dependence on imports of animal feed in the form of soybeans causes deforestation in third countries.