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 maize MON 88017 (MON-88Ø17-3) pursuant to Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council

2020/2894(RSP) - 17/12/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 489 votes to 185, with 22 abstentions, a resolution objecting to the draft Commission implementing decision renewing the authorisation for the placing on the market of products containing, consisting of or produced from genetically modified maize MON 88017 (MON-88Ø17-3) pursuant to Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

The application for renewal of the marketing authorisation was submitted by Monsanto Europe N.V., on behalf of Monsanto, USA, to the Commission on 10 July 2018. On 29 January 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:

- the monitoring plan based on consent given by Decision 2009/814/EC and the monitoring reports have fundamental shortcomings and are not in in line with Directive 2001/18/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council or with relevant EFSA guidance;

- the studies are not sufficient and that further experiments are needed to determine the exposure and subsequent effects and risks for non-target organisms from the exposure to Bt proteins via manure or sewage, and that due to missing information the environmental safety of GM maize MON 88017 cannot be fully assessed.

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:

- doubts remain about the validity of safety studies to assess acute toxicity and degradation in digestive fluids with Cry3Bb1 and CP4 EPSPS proteins produced in a recombinant E. coli strain were used;

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

- the use of Bt GM crops leads to continuous exposure of the target and non-target organisms to Bt toxins.

Undemocratic decision-making

Members recalled that the vote in September 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.

The EFSA is called on to:

- widen its risk assessment in order to fully take into account all interactions and combinatorial effects between Bt-toxins, GM plants and their constituents, residues from spraying with the complementary herbicides, the environment as well as impacts on health and food safety;

- no longer accept toxicity studies based on isolated proteins which are likely to be different in structure and biological effects compared to those produced by the plant itself, and to require that all tests are carried out with tissue from the GM plant;

- request data on the impact of the consumption of food and feed derived from GM plants on the intestinal microbiome.