

Contained use of genetically modified micro-organisms GMM (amend. Directive 90/219/EEC)

1995/0340(SYN) - 20/05/1998

The safe use in laboratories of genetically modified micro-organisms, which include the Aids and Ebola viruses, was a priority for the Committee when it adopted a recommendation on the subject by Mr Antonios TRAKATELLIS (EPP, Gr). The recommendation is for a second reading in the House, under the cooperation procedure, on the Council's common position on genetically modified micro-organisms (GMMs). It was adopted by 19 votes to one with two abstentions. The accidental release into the environment of GMMs (which also include salmonella and rickettsia) could jeopardize whole ecosystems. On the other hand, some GMMs can be used by scientists to produce valuable substances, such as human insulin. The dual aim of the measure proposed, therefore, is to provide a common framework for the development of this new technology while at the same time protecting human health and the environment. The common position embodies the Council's stance on a Commission proposal for a directive amending Directive 90/219/EEC on the contained use of GMMs, ie within an enclosed area (eg a specially insulated laboratory). The common position incorporates - entirely, partly or in principle - 29 of the 57 amendments adopted by Parliament at its first reading in March 1997. However, according to Mr Trakatellis, substantive EP amendments have been omitted. Hence the committee's decision to reinstate amendments from the first reading. One key amendment retabled aims to change the legal base from 130s(1) (environment, cooperation procedure) to 100a (internal market, codecision procedure). The committee also reinserted in the directive precise criteria for assessing risk - something which lies at the heart of the proposal - in place of the more general guidelines preferred by the Council. Moreover, according to the committee, a contained environment must avoid (not, as the Council wants, merely limit) contact between GMMs and the general population and the environment. In addition, the committee believes that official inspections must be carried out to ensure that users are complying with the directive and GMM users must keep appropriate records. Other amendments provide for users to take out adequate accident insurance. The committee is of the view that "legally responsible users of genetically modified micro-organisms shall have full civil liability for any damage to human health and the environment caused by the uses in question". It also wants improved information for the public.