Life sciences and biotechnology: a strategy for Europe

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution on biotechnology drafted by Elisa DAMIAO (PES, P). (Please refer to the document dated 21/10/02). Parliament called for primary responsibility for coordinating the biotechnology strategy to be conferred on one Commissioner in particular and on a directorate-general created to that end so as to ensure greater consistency in Community activities. It felt that there is a need to enhance and broaden public debate and access to objective information. Consumers must have the opportunity to address questions to scientists and to receive answers from them. On international cooperation, Parliament stated that biotechnology alone will not help to overcome hunger in the world and that other methods, for example a better distribution of available food, are currently more important. However, given the ever-increasing world population it might also be necessary to use genetically modified crops to produce enough food. Should a developing country wish to use biotechnology, the EU and Member States ought to provide support so that it can strengthen its own capacities. Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to promote the Johannesburg process for sustainable development and include technology transfer as one of the preconditions for sustainable development in the developing countries. Biotechnology, if applied prudently, can contribute to sustainable development because it helps to save energy and raw materials and can lead to less pollution. Parliament repeated its insistence that there should be a universal and specific ban at the level of the United Nations on the cloning of human beings at all stages of formation and development. On the question of the environment and agriculture, Parliament supported the establishment of legal thresholds for the adventitious presence of GM foods and feeds which enable consumer choice, are set at practically appropriate levels and are based on scientific assessment, provided these products have been established as safe by EU standards. It called for the immediate implementation of Directive 2001/18/EC on the deliberate release of GMOs into the environment. This must take place within the framework of an overall strategy for green genetic engineering in which products containing or produced from genetically modified material or must be unambiguously labelled and traceability ensured in order to give consumers the greatest possible transparency and full freedom of choice.