Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
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Resolution 1795 (2011)[1]

Genetically modified organisms: a solution for the future?

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in agriculture continues to be a topic of debate, and all the more so since the issue is not dealt with in the same way from one country to another.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly notes the diversity of approaches and of political and legal solutions, ranging from the American approach based on "substantial equivalence" to the European approach which hinges on the precautionary principle.

3. The Assembly also refers to the international standards and treaties such as the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the Codex Alimentarius and the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention), as well as its own Resolution 1419 (2005) on genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

4. The introduction of GMOs may hinder the capacity of species to adapt and may disrupt relations between them, modifying the natural balance of ecosystems.

5. GMOs may also give rise to hazards in health, environmental and economic terms. Consequently, it is important to properly study the impact of the coexistence of different forms of cultivation (GMOs, conventional, agrobiological).

6. However, some experts stress that the development of GMOs and genetically modified plants would help to develop competitive, innovative and sustainable agriculture and protect the environment. They also believe that GMOs could, to a certain degree, help boost the green economy.

7. The Assembly nevertheless notes that there are numerous and serious risks linked to GMOs in the farming and food sector and draws attention to the need to use genetic engineering technology responsibly and appropriately as a means of increasing agricultural productivity in the world.

8. The Assembly is aware that many uncertainties remain as to the consequences of the horizontal transfer, by viruses, of genetic materials from GMO crops.

9. At the same time, it is clear that climate change is increasingly threatening agricultural production owing to rising temperatures, changes in rain cycles and more frequent flooding and drought, and GMOs could, to a certain extent, provide a means of combating famine and the food crisis.

10. Consequently, the Assembly recommends that Council of Europe member and non-member states:

10.1. introduce regulations to define good agricultural practice where the production and use of GMOs are concerned;

10.2. establish documentary traceability, as prescribed in Regulation (EC) No. 1830/2003 concerning the traceability and labelling of genetically modified organisms and the traceability of food and feed products produced from genetically modified organisms and amending Directive 2001/18/EC;

10.3. frame and harmonise policies in the fields of public information, consultation and participation regarding the future of GMOs;

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1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 11 March 2011 (see Doc. 12531, report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Le Grand).–

10.4. ban the cultivation of GMOs containing antibiotic-resistance marker genes;

10.5. conduct studies to clarify the impact of the possible transfer of genes from genetically modified crops to human beings;

10.6. seek to systematically protect biodiversity, particularly in protected natural areas;

10.7. take the necessary steps to label products containing GMOs or derived from animals fed with GMOs;

10.8. ensure that all expert studies and appraisals concerning GMO issues are performed completely independently and transparently;

10.9. ensure the effective independence of European and national health evaluation agencies.

11. The Assembly also recommends that the European Union guarantee the right of its member states to decide whether or not to cultivate genetically modified plants and, if such cultivations exist, to establish GMO-free zones.