



OPEN LETTER TO COMMISSION PRESIDENT JUNCKER

cc. First Vice-President Frans Timmermans
Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis

8 April 2015

Keeping your promise to make EU GMO decisions more democratic

Dear President Juncker,

We are writing to express our concerns about the European Commission's forthcoming review of Europe's rules on genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

The majority of the European Union's citizens are sceptical about GM crops in food and agriculture [1]. More than one million people signed a petition to ban GMOs until a new independent scientific body is established to assess their safety [2].

Against this backdrop, the EU's current GM crop approval system fails to deliver in many ways. Decisions to approve GMOs are based on a poor and incomplete assessment of their health and environmental risks. Any other legitimate concerns, such as their impact on conventional and organic farmers, are ignored. Finally, the Commission can decide to authorise GM crops even if a clear majority of national ministers and the European Parliament oppose authorisation. The vote on GM maize 1507 in February 2014, when 19 ministers opposed its authorisation, is a stark reminder of this glaring democratic deficit.

This situation not only undermines citizens' trust in the GM crop authorisation system, it compromises the democratic credentials of the EU as a whole. You deplore that "*Europe has lost some of its credibility. The gap between the European Union and its citizens is widening*" [3]. To us it is clear that this gap is nowhere wider than on the issue of GM crops.

On GMO authorisations you said that “*the Commission should be in a position to give the majority view of democratically elected governments at least the same weight as scientific advice, notably when it comes to the safety of the food we eat and the environment in which we live*”. You also said that you “*would not want the Commission to be able to take a decision when a majority of Member States has not encouraged it to do so*” [3]. We could not agree more.

Since 2 April 2015, national governments have enhanced powers to ban the cultivation of GM crops on their territory, even if they are authorised at the EU level. We understand that Commission services are now considering a similar measure for imports of GM food and feed.

However, such an attempt to shift the responsibility for GM crops from the EU to the national level would not make the EU any more democratic. The Commission would still be able to authorise GM crops against the majority view of the Council, the Parliament and the people of Europe. Such a measure would also be fraught with practical and legal problems, failing to better protect European citizens and the environment from the risks posed by GM crops.

We trust that you will keep your promise to enhance democratic control of GM crop authorisations so as to make the EU more democratic and to put the concerns of its citizens first.

Yours sincerely,



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[1] Special Eurobarometer Biotechnology, 2010, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_341_en.pdf

[2] Greenpeace, First European Citizens' Initiative delivered to Commissioner Dalli, 2010, <http://www.greenpeace.org/eu-unit/en/News/2010/first-citizens-initiative>

[3] Jean-Claude Juncker, Political Guidelines for the next European Commission, 2014, http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/docs/pg_en.pdf