

Conclusions of the Chair 10 October

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The Chair thanked the participants for the discussion which was useful to complement the first meeting. He informed the group that those who could not attend have provided written contributions which go in the direction of his conclusions. He thanked them for this.

The Chair drew the following informal conclusions from the discussion:

On GM food and feed imports: the majority view (with some nuances) is that the time lag in approvals between the EU and other countries represents a threat to EU agriculture, and that this impact needs to be factored in the on-going discussions (in particular in Council). Moreover,

1. Within the current rules which should be maintained and respected there is a need to accelerate the procedures. In this respect, there is a lot that both the Commission and the Member States can do to assist in the implementation of the existing legislation
2. There is widespread confirmation of trust in EFSA and a science-based approach which should remain the basis of the EU decision making process.
3. The Commission should continue to work on possible technical solutions for low level presence of non approved GMOs in imported food and feedstuffs. There are different views on how this can be achieved.
4. A number of studies have been launched by different Member States. This is welcome. The results should be shared among Member States. Other Member States are encouraged to carry out their own studies on the issue of GM food and feed imports.
5. On the need for socio economic assessment in GMO approval, the Chair noted that there are different opinions. He expressed doubts about the merit and feasibility of developing a standard methodology at EU level, and considered that scientific evaluation should remain the key element for making sound decisions. The Chair made it clear that any discussion of including socio-economic evaluation in the approval process should not complicate the decision-making process or result in additional delays.

On cultivation: The authorisation procedure in place should be applied correctly – decisions could be made faster without compromising safety. On a case by case basis, special attention should be paid to the protection of biodiversity: this would not require the establishment of a community framework. The Chair referred to the 21% growth in GMO cultivation in 2007 which illustrated a growing interest in using GMO inside the EU.

On public opinion: the Chair noted that the public feels ill informed about GMO. He felt that there is a need to enlarge the debate and include other stakeholders: agriculture representatives should be more vocal.

Debates need to be deepened – studies currently being carried out should be used for a more informed debate. It should not be left to certain stakeholders who have legitimate but vested interest in it. As regard a long term strategy on public communication at EU level, the Commission will reflect on this.

Political conclusions

The Chair informed the participants that this meeting concluded a first cycle. He would now report to the President along the following lines:

- Europe has the strictest GMO legislation in the world. But the EU does not make full use of it to its advantage.
- He noted that the views expressed during the meeting were not fully in line with the voting pattern in regulatory committee and in Council.
- There is a need to reflect about these two issues at Prime Ministerial level.

He invited the participants to report the discussions of the group to their heads of government and stressed the importance of drawing their attention on ongoing discussions in the Council (in particular the forthcoming debate on GMO at the informal Environment Council 20 October and the Council conclusions of the Environment Council of 4 and 5 December), in order to have a richer debate. He recalled the importance for Primer Ministers to look at the wider picture.

The Chair closed the meeting informing the participants that he will contact them, and his colleagues in Heads of Government's offices, probably in November to inform them on how the Commission intends to proceed.