



Council of the European Union

055550/EU XXV. GP
Eingelangt am 11/02/15

PRESS

EN

PRESS RELEASE

ST 16732/14

PRESSE 638

Brussels, 10 December 2014

EU countries get more latitude on the cultivation of GMOs

EU member states will be allowed to ban or restrict the cultivation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) on their territory. This is the main purpose of a draft directive approved by the Council's Permanent Representatives Committee on 10 December.

“The green light to the directive is a very significant step towards a long-awaited goal: the full sovereignty of member states to allow, or not, cultivation of GMOs on their territories. The fruitful cooperation of the Italian presidency with the European Parliament and the Commission has led to a coherent and fair text that provides a sound legal basis ensuring member states' freedom of choice on GMOs. This is the approach we always promoted, in the best interest of agricultural producers and citizens. We are proud that this result, crucial for Europe, materializes under the Italian presidency”, says Italian Minister of the Environment Gian Luca Galletti, President of the Council.

The draft directive reflects an agreement reached between the Italian presidency and representatives of the European Parliament and the European Commission on 3 December. It still needs to be formally approved by the Council and the Parliament. If the text is confirmed by the Parliament and the Council early next year the new regime is expected to enter into force in spring 2015.

The draft directive grants member states more flexibility on the cultivation of genetically modified crops under certain conditions at two distinct points in time:

- during the authorisation procedure when a member state can ask to amend the geographical scope of the application
- after a GMO has been authorised a member state may ban or restrict the cultivation of the crop on grounds such as those related to environmental or agricultural policy objectives, or other compelling grounds such as town and country-planning, land use, socio-economic impacts, co-existence and public policy

Member states will be allowed to review their decision and ask for their territory or parts of it to be reintegrated into the geographical scope of a GMO authorisation.

Under the current rules member states may provisionally ban or restrict the use of a GMO on their territory only if they have new evidence that the organism concerned constitutes a risk to human health or the environment or in the case of an emergency.

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The new rules also provide that member states in which GMOs are cultivated must take care to avoid cross-border contamination into neighbouring member states in which these GMOs are banned. This does not apply if particular geographical conditions make these measures unnecessary.
