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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Council

Subject: Ministerial Conference "How to maintain GMO-free agriculture in Europe",
21 August 2015, Ptuj, Slovenia
– *Information from the Slovenian delegation*

Delegations will find attached an information note received from the Slovenian delegation on the above mentioned subject to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the meeting of the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) on 22 October 2015.

Ministerial Conference “How to maintain GMO-free agriculture in Europe”

(21 August 2015, Ptuj, Slovenia)

In the margins of 53rd International Fair of Agriculture and Food AGRA, a ministerial conference “How to maintain GMO-free agriculture in Europe”, in organisation of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food of the Republic of Slovenia and in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture of Hungary, took place on 21 August 2015 in Ptuj Slovenia.

The ministers and representatives from Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Poland, Serbia and Slovenia exchanged views on whether maintaining the GMO-free agriculture constitutes a competitive edge and an opportunity for agriculture in Europe, and what measures need to be adopted so as to materialise this vision. The debate was initiated on a basis of contributions from a representative of the European Commission and the Faculty of Agriculture and Life Sciences, University of Maribor, representatives of Donau Soya Association and experts of the Research Institute of Agricultural Economics of Hungary and Institute for the Control and Certification of University of Maribor.

All the participants of the conference were of the opinion that the cultivation of genetically modified (GM) plants and placing on the market of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are opening up many issues to be resolved by the governments and their citizens, and that the attitude towards the GMOs does not only define the current agricultural and environmental policies, as any relative actions taken and decisions adopted are linked to lasting impacts, and are determining the future of agriculture, food quality, nature, and biodiversity.

They reaffirmed their shared position about the importance of ensuring the sustainable development of agriculture and of cultivating the quality and safe food by applying such cultivation methods that pose no threat to biodiversity or to the environment. In this respect, maintaining the autonomy of countries in decision-making on releasing GM plants into the environment and ensuring that the democratic will of the governments in the GMO-authorisation procedures is of outmost importance.

Participating countries exchanged views on challenges with regard to restricting or prohibiting the cultivation of GMOs. Some of them shared their plans relating to the implementation of Directive (EU) 2015/412 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2015 amending Directive 2001/18/EC as regards the possibility for the Member States to restrict or prohibit the cultivation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in their territory.

Activities under way and those planned to be implemented in participating countries so as to increase the protein feed self-supply were also presented at the conference. Participating countries expressed their commitment to put additional efforts to ensure a higher level of self-sufficiency in non-GM feed and protein legumes, on the one hand, and to finalise joint policies and standards in the field of production of food “produced without the use of GMOs” on the other hand. A special focus was given to activities aimed at raising public awareness and educating consumers in this respect, by providing them trustworthy information and by means of labelling as the latter empowers the consumer to choose between GM food or GM-free food.

At the end of the ministerial conference a Joint Declaration (see Annex) laying down guidance and specific action proposals to contribute to development of GMO-free agriculture model was adopted by the following participating countries: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, **Bulgaria**, Cyprus, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Poland, Serbia and Slovenia.

Joint Declaration of the Ministerial Conference

“How to maintain GMO-free agriculture in Europe”, 21 August 2015, Ptuj

Under the initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food of the Republic of Slovenia, and in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture of Hungary, the ministers responsible for agriculture met on 21 August 2015 in Ptuj, Slovenia, to exchange views on whether maintaining the GMO-free agriculture constitutes a competitive edge and an opportunity for agriculture in Europe, and what measures need to be adopted so as to materialise this vision. They discussed the challenges of restricting or prohibiting the cultivation of GMOs, a legislative proposal providing the possibility for Member States to prohibit use of GM food or feed on their territory, how to ensure the supply of non-GM feed and protein legumes and how to approach the consumer (by creating common rules on the identification of foodstuffs coming from holdings using non-GMO feed and schemes "produced without the use of GMOs").

The cultivation of genetically modified (GM) plants and placing on the market of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are opening up many issues to be resolved by the governments and their administrations citizens. The attitude towards the GMOs does not only define the current agricultural and environmental policies, as any relative actions taken and decisions adopted are linked to lasting impacts, and are determining the future of agriculture, food quality, nature, and biodiversity.

With the aim to contribute to development of GMO-free agriculture model, the participating representatives of EU Members States and representatives of Western Balkans adopted the following conclusions.

We

1. ACKNOWLEDGE that our task is to ensure the sustainable development of agriculture and production of quality and safe food by applying such cultivation methods which pose no threat to biodiversity and to the environment and maintain the diversity of agricultural production methods and traditions;

2. RECALL that there are still certain questions about the long-term consequences of release of GMOs into the environment;
3. EMPHASISE the need to develop a common approach to ensure possibilities for the GMO-free cultivation zones;
4. EXPRESS our concern regarding the potential impact of a restriction or prohibition of use of GM food and feed, in particular in terms of functioning of the internal market, its fragmentation and distortion of competition; and SINGLE OUT the lack of legal certainty for those countries that decide to impose such restriction or prohibition;
5. Bearing in mind the dependence on imported protein sources, SINGLE OUT the importance of ensuring a higher level of self-sufficiency in non-GM feed and protein legumes;
6. LOOK FORWARD to further cooperation and putting additional efforts to finalise joint policies and standards in the field of production of food "produced without the use of GMOs"; and in this regard, REITERATE the importance of locally produced food as well as the importance of a consistent traceability of products intended for human consumption;
7. UNDERLINES the importance of informing the public about the findings and research in the field of GMOs; REAFFIRM the need to continue to raise awareness and educate consumers by providing them trustworthy information and by means of labelling as the latter empowers the consumer to choose between GM food or GM-free food.

Adopted in Ptuj, Slovenia, 21 August 2015.