Veille citoyenne d'information sur les OGM et les semences

2024, a year of vigilance on the GMO file

Par

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The European Commission's proposal to deregulate GMOs made in 2023 will not have come to an end before the European elections, as its promoters had hoped. However, beside the fact that this proposal is not the only file concerning GMOs, the forthcoming period of suspension of European parliamentary work could be used for bilateral discussions.

Neither Spain or Belgium, which have successively held its presidency, have managed to secure a mandate from the EU Council to negotiate with the European Parliament on the proposed deregulation of GMOs. A recent briefing requested by Spain at the Council of Agriculture Ministers on Tuesday, March 26, 2024, did not make a difference. With MEP elections scheduled for June 2024, the planned trilogue between the two bodies and the European Commission may not get underway immediately.

A new European Parliament at work

The 720 MEPs elected in June will find on their table a version of the deregulation proposal - a shaky one - already amended by their predecessors on February the 7th. The elected MEPs are expected to get to work after having formed their political groups, elected their chairmen, vice-

chairmen and committee representatives, and after having validated the candidacy put forward by the member states of the European Union for the presidency of the European Commission.

When they will start their work in the autumn - in addition to the informal exchanges beforehand - the MEPs should have a new element at their disposal. An opinion from the European Food Safety Authority is expected in July 2024. This opinion was requested by the Parliament, on February 22, 2024, on the opinion of French experts, who consider the criteria proposed by the European Commission "*without scientific basis*".

Member states may continue to work

The EU Council is not concerned by the European elections. There is nothing to prevent it from continuing to negotiate a common position among the member states, a common position which does not exist today. From January 1 to June 30, 2024, Belgium holds the presidency of the European Union, followed by Hungary until December 31, 2024, and Poland until June 30, 2025. These two countries, reluctant to deregulate GMOs, could make the file move forward less quickly than pro-deregulation advocates would like.

For the time being, discussions between member states may no longer involve their ministers or permanent representatives in Brussels (the equivalent of ambassadors). Mobilizing these players requires progress in bilateral negotiations, which to date remain blocked, notably on the issue of patents as raised by Poland. On March 26, 2024, Spain presented a note to member states. Supported by Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden and the Czech Republic, this note stresses that for these countries, it is important "*to continue joining efforts so that the Council can reach an agreement on this important proposal [the European Commission's July 2023], which could provide the Europen Union with a legal framework adapted to these techniques*". Put on the agenda under « *Any other business* » points, this note did not require a vote.

From now on, the possible meetings, if no surprise occur, could be the "*Working Party on Genetic Resources & Innovation in Agriculture (GMO) & Other Innov. Rel. Agri*", putting around the table officials from the member states, which could discuss matters in a more discreet way from April to September 2024.

Other files than just the GMO plants

The deregulation of GMO plants is not the only file to be monitored in Brussels. GMO micro-organisms, for which the European Commission has already mobilized its work force with a view to a possible proposal for similar deregulation, is another. GMO micro-organisms and pharmaceuticals produced by them are in fact already the subject of partial deregulation negotiations in medicine.

Last but not least, a proposal put forward by the European Commission in 2023 on plant reproductive material continues to make its way through the institutional processes. If adopted, this text could, according to certain players such as the Confédération Paysanne, put an end to farm-saved seeds and "*liberate*" patented GMOs for example.

The year 2024 is therefore a year of transition for the European Parliament. For its part, the Council of the European Union can continue to move forward, all the more discreetly as the focus shifts to the elections for MEPs and the appointment of a new European Commission.

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