

# Europe's Big NO to Half Baked GMO Compromises. European Parliament Debates EU Prohibition of GM Food and Feed

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*Political groups in the European Parliament have sent a clear message to the Commission on its GMO proposals, writes Molly Scott Cato – we are not willing to have piecemeal and vaguely-defined ‘opt-out’ legislation forced down our throats.*

*Last week something almost unprecedented occurred in the European Parliament. All the political groups joined together to roundly reject a proposal on GMOs from the Commission.*

The issue was a botched attempt to break the majority opposition to allowing GM food and feed into the single market. This followed a similarly bad proposal to [facilitate GM cultivation](#) which was voted on in January.

The Parliamentary vote this time round focused on the possibility for Member States to restrict or prohibit the use of GM food or feed on their territory.

During the plenary debate several speakers reminded the Parliament that it is a year since President Juncker agreed to democratise the EU's flawed GMO authorisation procedure. In reality, what is proposed is not democratisation but buck passing to Member States who will face significant legal uncertainty if they choose to ‘opt-out’ of GM on their territory.

With Member States unable to invoke health or environment concerns to justify such an opt-out decision, they could easily be challenged on an opt-out decision the grounds that it severely impacts the internal market.

Indeed, in a hearing with the Parliament's Environment committee, the Commissioner for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness admitted that Member States would need to “*consider the impacts of such measures very carefully.*” It is clear that under corporate pressure, the Commission has reneged on the promise to democratise the authorisation procedure.

The Commission's empty promises

The current proposal is piecemeal, only addressing issues of vaguely-defined ‘use’ whilst ignoring the even more significant issue of GMO cultivation on EU territory.

In previous negotiations on GMO cultivation, the Commission had reassured the Parliament that it would address the undemocratic procedure by which GMOs are currently approved for cultivation in the EU. Yet, rather than procedural reform, this proposal offers sloppy ‘opt-

outs' as an afterthought.

This has become another empty promise, which the Commission aims to muscle through, with a threat to the Parliament that they must accept this final offer as there will be nothing else on the table.

The Commission's attempt to steamroller its way through the democratic process has led to an unholy mess. Earlier this month, on the issue of cultivation of GMOs, at least 17 of the 28 EU Member States chose to [opt-out](#) of EU authorisations, to ensure that no GMOs are grown on their territory.

Where powers are devolved, regions can make the same demand, as [Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland](#) have done. However, despite many English councils taking a stance against GMOs, England enjoys no such protections.

Fortunately, certain EU governments have taken a more long-sighted view than the UK government. Austria, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Cyprus and Slovenia have called for a "GMO-free agriculture model" for Europe. One key proposal is that the EU should reduce its reliance on imported GM protein, primarily soya.

While most citizens across the EU continue to reject GM it is entering our food chain indirectly. This is because there is no requirement to separate GM from non-GM feed and no labelling to inform consumers. This means most non-organic meat and dairy products come from animals fed GM feed.

Time for Europe to start listening to its citizens

This whole row is badged with the slogan of the need to 'break the current deadlock' in the European Council – that is to say, making GMO authorisations quicker and easier, by circumventing the [opinion of the majority of Europeans](#). The Commission is attempting to sidestep not only the lack of democracy, but also the lack of rigour in the feeble authorisation processes.

Less than a month ago we saw the [Syngenta scandal](#), in which it was revealed that six genetically modified maize varieties, authorised for import into the EU between 2008 and 2011, carry genetic modifications that were not included in risk assessment at the time of authorisation.

Syngenta failed to notify the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the EU Commission of these additional GM traits until July 2015. Clearly there are fundamental problems with EFSA's risk assessment, if it relies on information provided by the applicant – the very same biotech firm requesting the authorisation.

Green MEP, Bart Staes, put forward an amendment to the legislative resolution, calling on the Commission "*to withdraw its proposal and submit a new one.*" This demand passed, with broad support from members of all the main groups from all sides in the European Parliament.

The Commission must swiftly come forward with a more credible proposal that addresses the fundamental problems with the system. And it would be wise to involve those of us who represent the people of Europe in its discussions, rather than relying on the weasel words of

corporate lobbyists.

In the meantime, Greens in the European Parliament will continue to argue for a moratorium on all GMO authorisations.

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