

Letter to the President of the Republic of Cyprus

Dear President Nikos Christodoulidis,

As a collective of stakeholders — farmers' and organic farmers' organizations, actors in the organic sectors (processing and distribution), citizen and environmental protection associations and movements, consumer protection associations — we would like to share with you our very serious concerns about the project to deregulate GMO plants resulting from New Genomic Techniques (NGTs) currently being considered by the European Union.

We are deeply concerned about the rush surrounding this dossier : speeding up decisions, sequencing votes, intense political pressure to reach an agreement after the vote in the European Parliament's ENVI Committee. This haste is all the more incomprehensible given that, as it was some thirty years ago, it is part of an economy of promise: to date there are only three GM plants from NGTs on the market (1) and **nothing has been proven about the ability of GM plants from NGTs to deliver on their promises**, whether they relate to so-called "sustainability" or to other "improvements" put forward by manufacturers, and it is also **illusory** to think of sustainability by plants alone. Until agricultural systems **are fundamentally transformed to become more resilient**, no plant will be able to respond to the ecological and climatic problems faced by farmers. In addition, there is no **sufficient scientific hindsight** to assess the real risks associated with these plants. Finally, **hundreds of patents have already been filed**, which should alert us to the **predation** of biotech companies and **the loss of food sovereignty** that will result directly from it.

In addition, out of the 49 NGTs under development, only 2 are developing sustainability criteria: the arrival of NGTs on European soil will therefore not be intended to meet the challenges of adapting to climate change. Finally, this deregulation will probably not have a positive impact on the economy: the first two NTGs marketed were economic failures.

The experience of GMOs resulting from transgenesis should nevertheless alert us. Twenty years after their introduction, only four species (cotton, soya, maize and rapeseed) account for 99% of the world's GMO cultivated areas, based on two almost exclusive traits: herbicide tolerance and the production of insecticidal substances. This double concentration has led to a marked erosion of biodiversity and an increase in the use of pesticides. Let us not repeat the mistakes of the past today.

These potential impacts on biodiversity are of concern to Member States and in particular to island Member States. In this respect, the responsibility of Cyprus, currently holding the Presidency of the Council, is unique. Island ecosystems are more vulnerable, less resilient, and the uncontrolled introduction of new genetically modified plants could have irreversible effects. The lack of protection measures for local seeds and organic farming is a cause for great concern, especially since the safeguard clause has been removed

We would also like to point out that during the trilogue negotiations, crucial requirements of the European Parliament's mandate were abandoned : the effective right of consumers to choose their food through mandatory labelling and traceability, as well as the guarantees linked to patents, have been greatly weakened. This development runs counter to the principle of transparency and the trust that citizens are entitled to expect from the European institutions.

We do not understand how a text that flouts the precautionary principle, weakens consumer choice, and favours the interests of an ultra-minority of multinational seed companies can be imposed without a thorough debate. This deregulation risks depriving Member States of their food sovereignty, without any clear liability for these companies in the event of damage related to NTG plants placed on the market.

At the same time, existing and proven solutions — non-GMO agriculture, organic farming — have demonstrated their positive impacts on the environment, climate and biodiversity, while proving their robustness and economic competitiveness. They would be penalised by the hasty marketing of these new GMOs.

Consequently, we solemnly ask you, in the context of the Presidency of the Council that you hold, not to rush the steps and decisions that are under way. We call on you to ask the Member States again : what real credibility should be given to promises that, at this stage, are not based on solid factual foundations ?

The upcoming decision is fraught with consequences. It will determine the future of European agriculture and food and will have cascading and irreversible effects on food systems, farm size and viability, the number of farmers, biodiversity, and ultimately our food sovereignty – and our sovereignty in general.

European citizens, like the Member States, must not be deceived again. We are counting on the responsibility and lucidity of the Presidency of the Council to circulate these legitimate doubts and to open a debate that is equal to the stakes.

Please accept, Mr. President, the expression of our highest consideration.

- ASSOCIATION BIO CONSOM'ACTEURS: Julien Kien (President)
- ASPRO-PNPP: J François Lyphout (President)
- COLLECTIVE VIGILANCE OGM and PESTICIDES 16: Patrick Rivolet (President)
- FNE (France Nature Environnement): Antoine Gatet (President)
- FOLL'AVOINE: Mireille Lambertin (President)
- FUTURE GENERATIONS: Nadine Lauerjat (General Delegate)
- GIET (International Group for Transdisciplinary Studies): Dr. Frédéric Jacquemart (President)
- NATURE & PROGRESS: Bruno Viennois (Spokesperson)
- OZO (Objective Zero GMOs): Philippe Mouchette (Coordinator)
- POLLINIS: Julie Sohier (General Delegate)
- RSP (Farmers' Seeds Network) Simon Bridonneau (Co-President)
- SYNABIO: Thomas Breuzet (President)
- GMO 46 vigilance: Rémy Pesant (Member of the solidarity college)

(1) <https://www.enga.org/newsdetails/new-report-shows-market-reality-of-new-gmos/>