EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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Hearing

Socio-economic dimensions of GMO cultivation

To keep the door open for research

Concluding remarks

Breve nota di background:

1) L'**evento** è legato alla presentazione da parte della Commissione nell'aprile scorso della valutazione "sulle implicazioni socioeconomiche della coltivazione degli ogm basata sui contributi degli Stati membri, come richiesto dalle conclusioni del Consiglio Ambiente del dicembre 2008". Il documento conclude che è difficile fare passi avanti in questo tipo di valutazioni se in UE gli ogm sono coltivati in pochissimi stati membri e se alcuni di essi (Italia e Bulgaria) non inviano contributi. Quindi invita tutti ad approfondire il tema, anche proponendo criteri metodologici per misurare l'impatto s.e. degli ogm.
2) Sul **miele**: Sul caso del produttore tedesco che ha presentato ricorso alla Corte di giustizia europea perché il suo miele recava tracce di Mais Mon810 coltivato in un campo di prova a 500 metri dalla sua proprietà, la Corte ha concluso che "non rientra più nella nozione di OGM una sostanza quale il polline derivante da una varietà di mais geneticamente modificato, la quale abbia perso la sua capacità riproduttiva e che sia priva di ogni capacità di trasferire il materiale genetico da essa contenuto". Tecnicamente quel miele NON era ogm. Ma, vista la legislazione europea, deve essere considerato un "alimento prodotto a partire da OGM", quindi non può "essere immesso in commercio senza previa autorizzazione".
3) **Il caso**: nell'agosto 2010 un gruppo di attivisti ha distrutto i campi di prova scientifica in cui si coltivava la vite transgenica prodotta dall'Inra a Còlmar, in Francia. Il 14 ottobre scorso sono stati condannati in 62 per danni "materiali, scientifici e morali".

SPEECH - ***To keep the door open for research***

GREETINGS

I wish to thank the General Directorate for Health and Consumer Policy for giving to me the opportunity of outlining the concluding remarks of this meeting, in which many authoritative speakers have taken the floor. Thanks to Commissioner John Dalli, that opened this conference, thanks to all the speakers and thanks to Paola Testori Coggi, who's going to take the floor after these my brief considerations, to deliver the Closing statement.

Hopefully the today debate could be considered as one of the steps in defining a scientific funded evaluation of socio-economic impacts of gmo's cultivation. We have a difficult task ahead us, because we have to draw the lines of a scientific methodology for this kind of evaluation, with shortage of evidence, since in Member States gmo's cultivations are rare. But this is a fundamental task if we want to have a correct orientation in taking scientifically based decisions. That should be considered a priority.

FROM EU TO WORLD

The ongoing debate in Europe on the cultivation of gmo's involves considerations on the preservation of a specific agricultural asset and social and cultural heritage.

To fit economical and social consideration with scientific ones, is one of the main challenges of the debate having place on the Commission legal proposal on gmo's cultivation in EU and on the position the EU Parliament expressed on the subject.

On this specific issue I wish to recall the position approved from the Agriculture Committee of the European Parliament, addressing its opinion to Environment Committee. The new regulations should take in account the protection of the right of citizens to know if the food they eat has been produced from gmo's, and to choose accordingly, **as much as** the protection of the freedom of choice of farmers. For those who want to cultivate gmo's and those who don't want at all, underlining their gm-free option.

To do so, Member States should put in place scientific funded co-existence rules on their territory. These rules should allow us to break the deadlock that in Europe is "de facto" blocking in many Countries the gmo's cultivation, even if it is not for production but for the experimentation trials in open field.

Let me say that, looking at nowadays scenario, this last event is quite worrying.

Today, agriculture must meet a rising food demand at global level. But it is also subject to a

number of environmental constraints that concern its ability to ensure a stable food supply. I do not refer only to the necessary reduction of environmental impact of agricultural production. I refer also to challenges like the climate change.

On one hand we have a growing world population, with large groups acquiring more purchasing power, that means ability to buy more rich and complex foods, like milk and animal proteins. To meet this demand we should boost agricultural production.

On the other hand we have to reduce environmental impact of agricultural production and taking in account the effects of climate change. Climate change will affect more and more food supply stability, increasing the frequency of extreme weather events and making crops more vulnerable to parasites and diseases.

It is a double challenge, economical and ecological. It is occurring in a trend of declining productivity. Fao and Oecd estimated that in the next years the trend of annual growth of production will be slower than in the past, moving from an annual average of 2,4% registered in the past decade to 1,7%.

Traditionally, research and innovation have been the main drivers of productivity increases. But today we are seeing a slowdown in investments in agricultural research, public and private.

In this scenario I do not think that is clever for the future of Eu to leave behind any kind of agricultural research.

TO KEEP THE DOOR OPEN TO RESEARCH

We can discuss on the opportunity of a large-scale use of gmo's in the EU agricultural context. But with the above mentioned challenges to tackle, the kind of natural constraints to be overcome and the uncertainty regarding food supply, our mission must be to **maintain a high level of competence in public research's bodies on every branch of agricultural research, included gmo's.**

Biotechnology applied to agriculture, and genetic engineering research as a part of it, offer the opportunity to do with higher accuracy and efficiency, a job that all farmers in the world have made over the centuries, selecting the most productive and resistant species and creating new ones.

As a relatively young field of investigation it can present some unknowns. But the only way to solve unknowns is through research and experimentation.

Europe seems the unique place in the world where this is not widely acknowledged.

In the rest of the world, especially in the emerging economies, there is general awareness on the role that this kind of research can have in fighting food insecurity. **China, India and Brazil are investing billions in agri-biotechnology public research. Can EU lag behind?**

Research does not stand alone in the society. The social acceptance of research has social and cultural aspects that have to be taken in account. **But also food security is a priority**.

We could propose, as many research bodies already do in Europe, to give public research some priorities. For instance, to investigate on kind of gmo's that can deliver environmental public goods: plants that need less water to grow, with more nitrogen efficiency, crops with drought resistance, or plants delivering high quality nutritional values.

I am convinced we must keep the door open to research, any kind of research, including Gmo's, that can be useful to meet the challenges of the food security.

To do this we need strong rules of co-existence, taking in account social, economical and research reasons. Only a scientific approach can help us to have a pragmatic vision and make European agricultural able to respond to the production and environment challenge we have to face.