As the world looks to Europe to lead on evidence-based decision-making, we must not continue to let politics trump science. Decision-making processes for the approval of new products in the EU must provide legal certainty, and be based on the best available science to promote growth, innovation, investment as well as consumer confidence and safety. Our press release and joint statement signed together with 18 European associations, published ahead of the Commission’s legislative proposal to reform the decision-making system known as ‘comitology’, emphasise these concerns.

As the comitology proposal starts to be debated by the European Parliament and Council, our concerns remain the same. The current comitology system, which is poorly implemented for GM crops, already foresees up to two Member State votes on each safety-assessed product. The Commission has proposed to add up to two more votes, which would lengthen the procedure even further. Time and predictability are essential for company investment decisions in any global region.

Like all of the EU’s product authorisation systems, the existing one for GMOs was co-decided by the European Parliament, and it foresees a thorough safety assessment overseen by EFSA, followed by Member State voting on the authorisation of the product. Where, despite clear evidence that the GM plant in question is as safe as a conventionally bred plant, Member States cannot reach a qualified majority in favour or against authorisation, the Commission is required by the GMO legal framework and by the Charter of Fundamental Rights to adopt a decision on the application.

We strongly agree with the EU Commission that Member States should take their responsibility when voting. The hypocrisy of numerous EU Member States which refuse to vote in favour of GM import approvals only to then import those same GM soybeans roughly equaling the weight of their entire populations each year, is unacceptable. However, it is difficult to see how a more convoluted decision-making process, as the one now being proposed by the Commission is, will encourage countries to stand behind the facts not to mention their needs. The signal given by adding new layers of votes on safety-assessed products is the opposite one to increased trust in the EU’s agencies and science.

EuropaBio continues to emphasise the urgent need for science-based, reliable and innovation-friendly authorisation systems. It is very regrettable that the Commission has committed regular maladministration by unduly delaying the current approval process for GMOs, as confirmed by the European ombudsman in January of 2016. MEPs can now choose to stand up for innovation and evidence-based product authorisation procedures and support the development and application of a fair and functioning internal market, or they can chose to fuel the perilous fire that is slowly eroding trust in the EU institutions, its agencies and science altogether.

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