

[2] **DECLARATION OF BALKAN CONFERENCE "GMO-FREE BALKANS"**

Organizations and participants who have participated in the Balkan Conference in Thessalonica, November 25th to 27th 2005, movements and local authorities that undertake activities against Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO), co-sign the following declaration, which is the result of detailed speeches and exhaustive dialog.

1. The GMO threat

Despite the strong reactions from the citizens and the decision of the totality of the Greek local authorities to disapprove the distribution of unsafe food by declaring Greek prefectures "GMOs free", specific actions concerning the activation and application of Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety are not yet present. Although the Protocol was signed by all European Union member countries and by a great number of other ones and despite the existence of many European Directives on traceability and labelling:

- A great number of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), namely the in vitro "mutated" products, seeds, animal feed (which would have never been created as a result of the physical process) are already distributed in the Balkan markets. These GMOs are promoted, grown and distributed without barriers, against active laws and directions, with no means to be detected and without labels that demonstrate their existence. Their producers and distributors use a variety of legal tricks and consumers' ignorance to bring them to the market.

- The market control mechanisms as well as the laboratory control mechanisms of our countries are either insufficient or ineffective.

- Growing and distribution of GMOs is a threat to fair competition, while the conventional, organic and traditional cultivations are contaminated or threatened with contamination and the co-existence between GM and non-GM cultivations has proven to be impossible.

- There is a threat of the full dependence of farmers, processors, food market and scientists world wide, from the companies that produce and control GM-seeds, chemical fertilisers and plant drugs. This threat hides the danger of integrated control of any input to agricultural production.

- The changes in physical environmental processes and in wild plant species due to genetic contamination are unforeseen and incalculable. This concerns also animals, birds and insects that eat GMOs and GM-substances (such as enzymes, proteins, toxins), substances that are for the first time produced in earth's biological history.

- There is a continuous effort concerning the legal and managerial enforcement and the promotion of views – a promotion of views that even extends to "influencing" school programmes and books – of the interests of the multinational companies. These companies achieve increasing profits by trading GMO products without taking into account consumers' and farmers' interests and needs.

- Continuing and even blackmail pressures from the multinationals which apply bio-technology and the USA governments lead to a

lack of application as regards to the content of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. This practice threatens the public health and the biodiversity.

- There is a continuous approval of the European Commission concerning the GMOs. This approval takes the form of authorising the growing and distribution of GMOs in the European Market, since the end of the Moratorium of 1999.

- There are increasing threats within the frame of the so-called neo-liberal-globalization and the World Trade Organization. Under the "free trade regulation" they set no limitations and commitments, which should result to the application of the existent international agreements. These should concern the protection of the nature and the protection of human and labor rights.

2. The Society of the Citizens denies the current situation

Despite the methods described above, consumers and farmers provide growing reactions to:

- Become experimental "subjects" for the multinational biotechnology companies

- Transform farmers to modern earth-working-slaves, completely depended of a small number of multinational companies which produce and distribute the GMOs

- Accept the patenting of the universal property in genetic material and its transformation to commercial products for a few multinational companies

Today, in all countries of South-Eastern Europe, the number of movements against the incursion is growing. These movements resist to the introduction and application of genetic engineering in food production and distribution. To achieve this goal it is obvious, that there is the need for co-operation of productive, scientific, consumer, professional and non-governmental organizations and movements against the neo-liberal-globalization. It is necessary to develop common decisions and design common activities to influence political decisions.

So far, hundreds of organizations in the extended European Union and other European Countries are co-operating in a net of mutual information sharing and mutual support. The common objectives are to assure GMO-free production and to claim for agricultural techniques that assure world food efficiency and fair trade rules.

In the Balkan countries, there is small-scale land property and a rich and sensitive natural environment. Here the objectives are to provide support to the farmers, to develop agricultural production with respect to natural resources, human health and animal health. These objectives should be met regardless of the financial and political interests of different groups. This model cannot compromise to the application of genetic engineering.

Common in all Balkan countries is also the preservation of natural, non-industrialized food, the lack of awareness among the farmers and the insufficient control capacity to avoid GMOs in the food chain. Our common threats concern field trials and commercial cultivation of GMOs, the

contamination of local varieties, ground and food, the dependence from the multinational companies and the loss of markets.

Until now, the protests in Europe are growing in number and the citizens are fighting for the right to deny GMOs "from the farm to the shelf". This struggle uses every possibility to influence political decision making process (including Local Authorities, Governments and European Council as well as the citizens and International Organizations).

We can achieve a different and better World

The Balkan Conference which takes place in Thessalonica is part of a greater common effort and its objectives are, to share information and the development of a sound basis for a continuous cooperation among the Balkan countries so that GMO-free Balkans will be achieved.

We want to protect:

- ❖ Our food
- ❖ The agriculture and our farmers
- ❖ The natural environment

We organize the response of civil society:

- In Greece
- In the Balkans
- In Europe
- On the whole planet

We are trying to achieve co-ordination with the neighboring Balkan states:

- ❖ In mutual information exchange
- ❖ In scientific knowledge
- ❖ In social precaution
- ❖ In social and political action

The legal dimension

We are campaigning for a complete ban on GMOs. This is a goal that remains crucial and feasible. The steadily growing reaction of citizens against GMOs, the International and Community Law allow us to pursue this goal.

It is entirely in the rights of every country to protect the public health and the environment by declaring its territory GMO-free.

There is the absolute need for the establishment of a National Panel on Biosafety. This panel will be the central administrative mechanism for controlling and applying the current legislation.

There is the absolute need for the establishment of a National Consulting Institution on GMOs, which will ensure the full and efficient citizens' and stakeholders' involvement in the process of placing GMOs on the market.

A regulation of matters related to co-existence is necessary. This regulation should include the requirement of a total purity of seeds and the establishment of liability for GMOs. It should ensure that the importers and

growers of GMOs are held liable and face administrative or criminal penalties for any damage caused.

The countries which have expressed their opposition to GMOs should apply in an effectively way the safety clause, insist on their denial of GMOs and widen their alliances.

The consumers dimension:

It's very important that the consumers notice and read the labels. That's why we ask that GM-foods have a colour mark on them and are placed on separate shelves. Furthermore, a simplified food and animal feed labelling system should be full established.

The consumers have the power to enforce the feeding of animals with natural, GMO-free animal feed:

- by declaring their will, by signing petitions to EU and to governments
- by the consumption of less and of better quality meat as well as by the consumption of milk products and of eggs derived from animals fed safe, certified "non-GE" feed.

The consumers have the power to force EU and the Balkan governments to finance and to conduct independent studies on GMO impact on environment and health. These studies should be carried out by independent scientists and with the participation of organisations for society control.

The producers dimension:

As producers and as consumers we ask:

- The respect on behalf of the EU and of the Balkan governments of the decisions of local societies and of local authorities everytime they declare their regions GMO-free.
- The promotion of a proposal for the establishment of the appropriate legal framework which assures GMO-free Balkans and Europe, in a world that denies catastrophic applications for any purpose. We demand zero thresholds for GM-contamination and zero thresholds for GM-presence in seeds.
 - The development and expansion of an appropriate laboratory infrastructure and the strict application of laws and traceability rules for the immediate punishment of those who break them.
 - The maintenance and protection of the agricultural civilization in a way that allows farmers and producers to own, to purchase, to reproduce locally and to use natural seeds, local genetic material and animal feed of their choice. This approach assures the growing of products safe for the public health and of the appropriate quality, avoiding GMO contamination.
 - The enforcement of qualitative, traditional, Protected Designation of Origin-labelled products and the local biological/organic products in each region
 - The protection of consumers' right to purchase qualitative, safe and healthy products, with proofed absence of GMO. Until a complete ban on GM-ingredients is imposed, we demand their labelling. As far as animal

products are concerned, we demand their labelling, if they are derived from animal fed GM-animal feed.

- The protection of public health, agriculture and the natural environment by the scientific community and the public authorities. This can be achieved with the application of the principles of prevention, sovereignty, precaution and subsidiarity. This necessitates a European Union where decision-making does not only concern the opinion of a small minority of non-elected experts but involves the participation of the overwhelming majority of citizens and local authorities.

- The creation and maintenance of a bank of domestic genetic material for the reproduction and conservation of domestic local animal races.

- The establishment of transnational controls on the cultivation and distribution of seeds, animal feed and agricultural products between the Balkan countries as well as the establishment of “observatories” in all Balkan countries.

The Balkan Network, which is now constituted, will contribute to the establishment of an Observatory on GMOs and of an Internet site, so that everything that happens in the Balkan countries relating to the cultivation and distribution of Gmos will be immediately communicated. In this way coordinated actions can be organized in many countries at the same time.

The movement against GMOs is the expression of a moral choice of citizens, institutions and organisations with innocent motives and goals. It objects to the degradation of human values, to the abuse of scientific knowledge, to plans that involve harming the common interest.

We are all committed to provide to the coming generations the heritage of a rich variety of seeds, plants and animals. The distribution of GMOs in the environment threatens food safety and environmental sustainability of the whole planet.

We call citizens to take this matter into their hands.

The Co-organizing Organizations and Networks