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The authorisation of GMOs keeps being one of the most debated and controversial issues in Europe, both at political and scientific level. This is particularly true when authorisations concern the deliberate release of GM crops into the environment, thus, their cultivation in the European territory.

The main problems originate from the structure of the GMO decision-making process or, to be more precise, from the practical implementation the European Commission gives to the existing legislative provisions. The entire authorisation system is based on the opinions provided by a single EU body, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), which are directly translated by the Commission into decisions, with no consideration of diverging scientific opinions or societal and economic impacts of GMO cultivation. This violates EU law, according to which a broader consideration of GMOs risks and impacts must precede any authorisation.

The problems that this over-centralised system can create become evident when the risk assessment carried out by the only scientific body in charge of it (EFSA) is not satisfactory and the European Commission refuses to exercise its role of risk manager. Since years member states, independent scientists, environmental and consumers' organisations and farmers groups are criticising the EFSA for failing to adequately assess the risks of GMOs and the EU Commission for failing to manage scientific uncertainties and implement the precautionary principle.

The current EU risk assessment procedure is totally inappropriate because it cannot consider the unpredictable effects of GMOs. More and more scientific studies demonstrate the inability of the current GMO risk assessment procedure to evaluate and predict the negative impacts of GMOs and their potential for harm.

On 4 December 2008, after months of debates in Council, the 27 EU Environment Ministers unanimously concluded that EU legal provisions on GMOs are not implemented properly and the current GMO risk assessment must be substantially improved.

Time has come for the European Commission to act on the conclusions reached by member states and seriously reform the current flawed authorisation system. Until existing EU legal provisions on GMOs are properly implemented, all proposed GMO authorisations should be immediately withdrawn.