



## Greek Net of Alternative Agricultural Policy of Food Sovereignty

### GMO-Free Zones. The case of Greece

*Yiannis Tolios, Economist-Researcher (Ph.D)*

The movement against GMOs in Greece has grown considerably over the last decade and has produced some really positive results. It is a movement which embraces a vast field of collectivities and organizations (agricultural, consumers, environmental, trade-unions and other social organizations) that co-ordinate in various ways their actions (through networks and forums) and aim at banning transgenic products. However, after pass of EU legislation concerning “co-existence” of transgenic and non-transgenic cultivations, a concept has started to grow in Greece that the struggle should mainly focus on creating GMO-free zones and informing the consumers on the variety of genetically modified food ingredients, so that they would be properly educated in order to make the final choice.

Although this particular struggle is of significant importance, we consider it to be clearly “defensive” and (if exhausted strictly in this framework) of “rearguard” battles for the movement. On the contrary, what should be a clear strategic target is the immediate implementation of the Carthagena Protocol on Biosafety, which gives the right in every country to stay away of GMOs for precautionary reasons and that would eventually ban GMOs worldwide. As indicated by the CPE (Coordination Paysanne Europeenne – the European Sector of Via Campesina), the decision of many EU regions to declare themselves as “GMO-free” is an act of resistance to be applauded and supported. However, believing that these regions would stay clear of GMOs in the medium or long term is certainly an illusion. Co-existence between regions with different GMOs approaches is as impossible as co-existence between fields. Therefore, we must ask all the local authorities which oppose GMOs to put pressure towards a generalized GMO-ban in a European and global level. A peripheral ban is inadequate. A general ban is imperative, should we want to establish to our children agrarian products without GMOs. (CPE, 2006)

The Greek society is leading in anti-GMO sentiment. Greece was one the seven countries which demanded for a moratorium on GMOs in 1998 and was fiercely opposed in reversing it in 2003, while it has signed the Carthagena Protocol on Biosafety. Both the Greek governments and the Greek

Parliament parties (at least in their declarations) have stood against transgenic products, along with local authorities, scientific circles and social organizations. Of course, there have been voices favoring or not opposing their promotion.

A significant output of the opposition of the entire Greek people has been the creation of the "Greek Network Against GMOs" since the beginning of 2004, with the participation of more than 200 social organizations of various actions (trade-union, agricultural, scientific, ecological, cultural, etc.). With the "Network's" interventions, all 54 Prefectural Authorities have declared over the last years their respective regions as "GMO-free" zones. In theory, the entire Greek state could be declared as such a zone, although in reality the case is not exactly that.

In reality, despite the clear opposition of producers and consumers, the last years have signified a growing infiltration of GMO products in the Greek market. Greek authorities apparently show full political inability to control multiple corporate illegalities in distributing and processing GMFs. A research carried by the Hellenic Food Authority (EFET) in 2003, has shown that 10-12% of food contain GMOs and in corn or soya rates are even higher. Also, after the lifting of the moratorium by the EU, phenomena such as illegal distribution of GMO products as well as contaminated genetic material have grown considerably. At the same time, several multinational corporations have officially applied for cultivating genetically modified plants – mainly corn – without having taken any such license so far.

The main causes for the increasing infiltration of GMO products in the country are the lack of:

- reliable "traceability" & "labeling" mechanisms
- on-time information of farmers
- systematic control on the imported genetic material and its distribution before the test results
- relevant institutional framework of penalties, etc.

At times there have been cases of smuggling and distributing contaminated seed (393 sacks of corn Ribera), which have been used by the unaware producers in several regions of the country. These actions are certainly attempting to spread the mass-notion that pretty much everything is contaminated and resistance is pointless, as GMOs are already in our field, our shelf and our plate. Naturally, wherever transgenic cultivations were found, they were destroyed, without, however, any chance of compensation for the financial loss that the producers may have suffered.

The strategy that the "Greek Network Against GMOs" (in which the Greek Net of Alternative Agricultural Policy on Food Sovereignty takes part) has adopted includes "defensive" and "offensive" action. The early include boycotting the market, protesting outside of stores and industries, distribution of GMOs lists for spreading relevant consumers' awareness, favoring traditional and organic products as a nutrition basis, avoiding soya and corn products (as well as soya oil, corn oil, etc.). As for "offensive action", apart from fierce protesting, our main target is to put pressure on the Greek government in order to put the Protocol on Biosafety in action and declare the state as "GMO-free" zone.

Also, our claims focus on establishing zero rates in seed, food and forage contamination by GMOs; labeling all products of plant-orientation or animal-orientation, which are output of cultivating or stockfarming or using GMOs; cutting down permits to produce transgenic products; establishing that environmental and consumers' organizations would participate in GMO controlling authorities via representatives; penalizing of seed smuggling, apart from civil liability for full compensation of farmers; total and not sampling seed controls by the state before any cultivating season and prohibition of seeding before issuing the results; granting credit to local and prefectural authorities in order to acquire adequate infrastructure and personnel and implement their will to make Greece a "GMO-free" zone; publishing controls and their results by the relevant authorities; recording all users of GMO-contaminated seed and imposing penalties on importers for false certification, for willingly forging documents and for deceiving farmers and consumers, etc. Eventually, social sensitization and struggling intervention are the basis of removing transgenic products of the field, of the shelf and hopefully, of the consumer's plate.

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*e-mail: [tolios@syn.gr](mailto:tolios@syn.gr)  
[www.ytolios.gr](http://www.ytolios.gr)*