

Advice on Genetically Modified Organisms (October 2005)

In December 2004, the “*Plataforma Transgénicos fora do Prato*” NGO Group asked the Council for an advice on the European Commission’s authorization to all members of the Union to cultivate 17 varieties of genetically modified corn, as well as on the recent national legislation on this matter.

The Council established a Working Group therefore coordinated by Counsellor Luísa Schmidt, which did not engage in scientific debates and decided to examine the facts and the existing legal instruments (or otherwise its inexistence) with a view to withdraw coherent and based conclusions and recommendations. These were aimed at public authorities and were also let to inform the public opinion more accurately.

Based on responsibility and precautionary principles, the Council considered it was urgent to overcome the existing legal gaps in terms of the genetically modified corn varieties, which are already included in the Common Catalogue of Varieties of Agricultural Plant Species. Thereby, it promoted the approval of adequate regulations to complement decree law n. 160/2005 of September 21st, and reaffirmed the conclusions and recommendations of CNADS previous advice on GMO (2000).

The Council’s main recommendations:

- a. In order to safeguard the agricultural biodiversity as a support to agricultural production of relevant economic value and taking into account Portugal’s atlantic/mediterranean characteristics, it would be worth trying to make the most of the comparative advantages of local specific crops.
- b. Any decisions about GMO cultivation in Portugal should require an assessment of the economic and social impacts, in comparison to traditional and / or organic crops and taking into account the relevance of small farming in the rural development and a balanced land use.
- c. To make an accurate assessment of the new investments to be made by the Public Administration.
- d. The quality tourism should not be forgotten. It involves an increasingly informed and demanding public, which has been showing its opposition to GMO.
- e. To promote a widespread national debate, engaging not only those that directly intervene in the potential GMO introduction process but also all citizens concerned.

- f. To adopt a moratorium which by suspending the provisions of decree law n. 160/2005 up to the publication of the complementary regulatory legislation allows a prior public discussion, the possibility to establish Transgenic-Free Zones, namely in Protected Areas, and gives the Public Administration time to get ready and prepared for the various tasks it will be assigned in this particular area.