

## EU Commissioner Andriukaitis sacrifices science to trade interests

Reply from the Commission to the letter sent by civil society organisations ignores concerns about the safety of genetically engineered plants

28 June 2019 / The EU Commission has replied to a joint letter sent by more than 40 organisations from science, environmental protection, lobby control, food production and agriculture. The organisations were warning about the outgoing EU Commission might approve around a dozen genetically engineered plants on the basis of scientifically unacceptable risk assessment. However, the reply received from the cabinet of Commissioner Andriukaitis simply states that the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has sole responsibility for risk assessment. This claim is simply incorrect. Rather, it is the responsibility of the EU Commission to ensure that legal requirements are fulfilled before GE plants are approved. This responsibility cannot simply be shifted on to somebody else.

To justify its opinion, the EU Commission claims that EFSA has already addressed the safety concerns and that these are, therefore, not new. However, the letter sent by the organisations does not claim that these are all completely new concerns. The organisations point to gaps and flaws in the risk assessment process, some of which have been ongoing for years, without have ever been examined in detail. As a result, the safety of the genetically engineered plants is not demonstrated as requested by law.

“During his term in office, EU Commissioner Andriukaitis has mostly represented the interests of industry. Very often, scientific arguments were subordinated to the interests of international trade, in particular, to avoid a trade war with the US. However, economic interests should not be forced through at the cost of weakening the protection of human health and the environment,” says Christoph Then for Testbiotech . “The new EU Commission will have to clearly set other priorities to safeguard its credibility.”

Currently, the EU Commission has offered to increase the amounts of GE plants imported into the EU, they hope this will deter the US from levying tariffs on cars exported from the EU to the US. Furthermore, Andriukaitis is also caving in to pressure from industry and the US in regard to new methods of genetic engineering: just recently, at a conference in the Netherlands he was heavily promoting the weakening of EU GMO legislation as a way of aligning with US standards.

Around 70 genetically engineered plants are already allowed for import and usage in food and feed in the EU. There are no studies on long-term or combinatorial health effects arising from diets containing a mixture of these plants. In recent years, the EU Parliament has repeatedly voted against further EU market approvals. However, these votes were completely ignored by the EU Commission.

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