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Press Release

Environment/Agriculture/Seeds/EU/Innovation

New EU seed regulation: Parliament report fails to address threat to biodiversity and human rights

ARCHE NOAH: Today's report on the new regulation on seeds of the European Parliament is only a start – further improvements needed

Brussels, Vienna – New limitations, new bureaucratic hurdles, less diversity. Today, 16 November, Herbert Dorfmann of the European People's Party (EPP) published his report on the European Commission's proposal for a new regulation on the production and marketing of seeds and other plant reproductive material (PRM), such as fruit trees, potatoes or vine. Mr Dorfmann, from South Tirol, is the responsible rapporteur in the Agriculture Committee of the European Parliament. "The European Commission wants to apply rules intended to regulate the formal seed market to biodiversity conservation and informal farmer seed systems. The current proposal would thus have devastating consequences for the conservation of the remaining diversity of our cultivated plants – precisely in the face of the climate crisis when we urgently need more genetic diversity and decentralised seed production to create resilience" explains Magdalena Prieler, Policy Officer for ARCHE NOAH in Brussels.

ARCHE NOAH welcomes Mr Dorfmann's initiative to improve some key aspects of the European Commission's proposal, especially clarifying that the seed marketing rules should only apply to commercial actions. However, we still miss an explicit freedom to transfer plant reproductive material for the purpose of its conservation and sustainable use, analogue to the exemptions foreseen for breeding and scientific purposes.

In July 2023 the European Commission proposed to replace the existing 10 directives on the production and marketing of PRM, which date back to the 1960s, with one single regulation. The proposed text significantly expands the scope of the legislation to capture all actors involved professionally in any way in the production, maintenance, or marketing of PRM. It introduces new limitations on the transfer of seeds, and new bureaucratic hurdles and regulatory costs for the smallest operators. "Under the proposed rules for these actors, community seed banks like ARCHE NOAH but also public gene banks would no longer be able to pass on traditional varieties from their collections to individual farmers for their conservation in the fields. In the face of the climate crisis, the cultivation of endangered varieties in a number of different locations is vital to their preservation", says Magdalena Prieler for ARCHE NOAH. The revitalisation of old varieties can provide new revenue streams for farmers and opportunities for rural development, for example as seen with the ancient Austrian winter race "Laufener Landweizen", a traditional wheat variety adapted to the local conditions.

Mr Dorfmann's report proposes 59 amendments to the Commission's proposal. The amendments focus primarily on technical clarifications to the text, including improved definitions of the terms "marketing" and "final users". However, Mr Dorfmann also proposes to remove proposed safeguards in relation to the cultivation of herbicide tolerant varieties, and to significantly narrow the definition of "organic heterogeneous material". This concept was introduced only last year to legally allow the sale of diverse populations for the first time in the EU since the seed legislation was introduced in the 1960s. Critically, the report does not ease the massive new bureaucratic burden for small operators, or its failure to implement

the right of farmers to sell their farm-saved seed, as enshrined in 2018 in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP). The other 95 Members of the European Parliament in the Agriculture Committee now have until 4 December 2023 to submit their own amendments to the Commission's proposal. "ARCHE NOAH calls for a clear exemption from the scope of the regulation for all transfers of PRM for the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources and agro-biodiversity, proportionate rules for small operators, and full implementation of the farmers' rights", says Magdalena Prieler from ARCHE NOAH. A discussion in the Committee is planned for 27 November 2023, followed by a hearing with experts from the sector on 28 November 2023.

Only yesterday seed movement organisations across the EU launched the **petition "Raise our forks for diversity!"**. "The EU seed law reform is a key decision for the future of our food and agriculture. We have to raise our forks for diversity on our fields and plates and against laws that only serve the agro-industry", the organisations demand. The conservation and sustainable use of locally adapted crop diversity must be the over-riding priority of the EU seed laws

Sign the petition here: www.raiseourforks.org

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