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Press release

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Attack on seed diversity at the Agriculture Council today

ARCHE NOAH: EU agriculture ministers must speak up- dissemination of rare varieties and farmers' rights under massive threat

Schilttern, Vienna, Luxembourg - Today, the progress report on the new EU seed legislation will be presented at the Council of EU Agriculture Ministers in Luxembourg. ARCHE NOAH has analysed the revisions to the proposed legislation which have been available since end of last week and is sounding a double alarm. First, rules for the commercial seed market are to be applied to activities to save seed diversity in a completely inappropriate way. Second, farmers are to be denied the basic right to sell their seeds. "The proposed revision is an attack on diversity and a gift to large agrochemical companies," analyses Magdalena Prieler, seed policy expert at ARCHE NOAH. It would make it impossible to preserve diversity and violate the EU's international obligations. "Rules that work well in member states like Austria and the Netherlands would be lost for decades to come. Agriculture ministers must now speak out clearly in favour of diversity-friendly rules and for our food security," demands Prieler.

Two months ago, the European Parliament adopted a position on the proposed legislation that, despite some weaknesses, recognises the importance of diversity, in spite of strong pressure from the agrochemical industry. Now the EU agriculture ministers are discussing the future regulation, which will be binding for EU Member States. Significant changes of the text for the worse are emerging. For example, complicated bureaucratic requirements and controls for the commercial seed market will also apply to the conservation of rare varieties. These are impossible for conservation initiatives, which are often small and volunteer-run, to comply with, and in many cases the proposals would effectively ban this crucial basic work for our food supply. This would also mean that the EU and its member states would be breaking their international obligations under the FAO Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources. EU seed law forms the basis for which cereals, vegetables and fruit can be grown in the coming decades and will then end up in the gardens and on the plates of all citizens - or alternatively will be lost.

"Member states such as Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, and the Netherlands have had good experiences with appropriate rules for diversity. Instead of listening to them, the text presented by the Belgian Presidency of the Council proposes drastically restricting the transfer of diversity for the purpose of conservation in line with the demands of the agrochemical industry," explains Prieler. Farmers' rights are also under serious threat in the new proposal: contrary to the international legal obligation under the UNDROF Convention, farmers are to be prohibited from selling their own seeds and plant propagation material. "Especially in times of climate crisis, we must enable farmers to buy successful seeds from neighbouring farms that operate under similar conditions - and not make them completely dependent on international seed corporations," says Magdalena Prieler.

The current text also contains other problems: individual breeders would no longer be allowed to register new conservation varieties and seed savers would no longer be allowed to pass on their seeds to organisations such as ARCHE NOAH. It also remains unclear whether seed libraries, schools and kindergartens would also fall under the industry rules and would therefore effectively no longer be able to carry out activities with seeds.

"Important achievements for diversity, which have long been tried and tested in countries like Austria and which allow diversity seeds to be passed on in small quantities, are threatened by the current proposals. Seed companies have apparently successfully lobbied the EU agriculture ministers to allow almost exclusively their own seeds in future. If this proposal goes through, it would be a disaster for European agriculture and diversity, for our independence from a few global corporations, for farmers who have a human right to their own seeds, and ultimately for citizens who want and need diversity on their plates. The EU agriculture ministers must now change course and make diversity seeds and farmers' freedom of choice a priority," concludes Magdalena Prieler from ARCHE NOAH.

Further Queries:

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