

# The government criminalizes the illegal import, production and distribution of unauthorized and counterfeit plant protection products

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The government has approved a Draft Law amending and supplementing the Criminal Code, which provides for a penalty of up to 4 years of imprisonment and a fine from 2,000 to 4,000 leva for carrying plant protection products across the state border when the act does not constitute a minor case and is in violation of the established procedure.

The draft law criminalizes the manufacture and distribution of unauthorized and counterfeit plant protection products. It is to be examined and voted on in the National Assembly.

For a comment on this news, we approached Mrs. Neli Yordanova, Director General of the Bulgarian Crop Protection Industry Association (ARIB), whose members include the Bulgarian representations of leading global agrochemical companies.

*"This is an issue on which ARIB has repeatedly alerted the institutions in Bulgaria and we have proposed specific changes to the regulatory framework for amending and supplementing the currently effective Criminal Code in the direction of criminalizing the placing on the market and distribution in the Republic of Bulgaria of unauthorized PPPs. Plant protection products are a tool for risk management in agricultural production, aimed at achieving a high health status of crops. The European regulatory regime is highly restrictive. The strategic objective is compliance with environmental and health standards. The criminalization of illegal import, manufacture and distribution of unauthorized for use and counterfeit plant protection products is a radical measure against these acts, a counteraction to economic crimes which, in addition to the risks to human health and the environment, are associated with concealment of income and taxes – factors with an extremely negative impact on legitimate business."*

*This initiative is also supported by other non-governmental organizations that are familiar with the growing problem and the need to take real action against illegal pesticides – the Bulgarian Association for Crop Protection (BARZ), Associations of Bulgarian Beekeepers.*

*The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (MAFF), the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency (BFSA) and the Central Laboratory for Chemical Testing and Control (CLCTC), responsible for the authorization, use and control of plant protection products, supported the measures for introducing regulatory mechanisms into the national legislation to overcome the problem of placing unauthorized PPPs on the market.*

*Indicative of the growing problem are the quantities of confiscated illegal products – as a result of inspections carried out under the international operation SILVER AXE V (coordinated by Europol and OLAF), over 25 tonnes of illegal PPPs were seized in our country last year. "*