

The new approval for extending the use of glyphosate did not receive a majority in the EU

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On Friday (13.10.2023) the European Commission did not receive sufficient approval from EU Member States to extend the authorization for the use of glyphosate. The lack of a qualified majority in favor of the authorization of the herbicide casts doubt on its use over the next 10 years in the territory of the EU.

In September, the Commission published a detailed proposal for the extension of the authorization for the use of glyphosate.

A qualified majority requires the consent of at least 55% of the EU Member States, which must also represent at least 65 percent of the EU population.

A total of 18 out of 27 EU Member States voted “in favour”, three voted “against”, and six abstained. 55.03% of the EU population lives in the countries with a “yes” vote, 3.01% in the countries with a “no” vote and 41.96% in the countries that “abstained”. In view of Germany’s “abstention” position, France’s decision is currently particularly important in the dilemma for and against the use of glyphosate in Europe.

The following 18 countries voted for extending the authorization of glyphosate:

Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Cyprus.

Three countries voted against extending the authorization of glyphosate:

Croatia, Luxembourg and Austria.

The following countries adopted an “abstention” position: Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Malta.

Risks for consumers and the environment

Debates between critics and supporters as to whether glyphosate may be carcinogenic continue. There are also environmental hazards. A comprehensive investigation by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) recently did not identify any evident risks, but pointed out data gaps in several areas.

According to EFSA, the aspects that have not been definitively clarified include dietary risks for consumers and the assessment of risks for aquatic plants.

Debates continue in November

Approximately 90% of the chemical substance glyphosate is used in agriculture to keep fields free from weeds.

The Commission is expected to appeal within a few weeks and a new vote is to be held in November. Until then, changes in the proposals of the countries are possible. Possible scenarios include extending the authorization for only five years or introducing restrictions so that the pesticide can be used only where there are currently no alternatives to it.

If once again no qualified majority for or against the proposal is achieved in the Appeal Committee, the European Commission may take a decision independently. This also means that the Commission may impose a

ban on the use of glyphosate, contrary to its initial proposal.

Some government representatives see the lack of a majority for extending the authorization of glyphosate as a clear sign of mistrust by the Member States towards the European institutions. Governments are beginning to have doubts regarding the assessment of the herbicide and suspect that a new authorization may not have a legal basis.

For its part, the chemical company Bayer, which owns and markets glyphosate, is confident that in the next stage of the authorization procedure the remaining Member States will support the renewal of the authorization proposed by the Commission. “We remain confident in the safety of glyphosate, which has been used successfully in Europe and worldwide for almost 50 years.”