

Berlin: “We are fed up!”

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The protest under the motto “We’ve had enough!” in the German capital is organized every year on 16 January in parallel with the world’s largest exhibition for agriculture, food and horticulture “Green Week”. The topic of GMOs in Europe and Bulgaria. Mission impossible?

With this act of disagreement with the official agricultural policy in the country, the protesters say “no” to intensive agriculture, the excessive use of chemical fertilizers and plant protection products, the inhumane treatment of farm animals in industrialized farms, the excessive use of antibiotics in livestock production, as well as the use of GMO feed and food.

The topic of GMOs worldwide and in our country

The topic of GMOs is particularly sensitive for Europeans, including Bulgarians. At the same time, the pressure from the lobbies of multinational companies engaged in the breeding of seeds from

GMO crops, as well as in the production of products containing GMOs, on the EU to liberalize this segment is increasing! It has gone so far that the World Trade Organization (WTO) drew the EU's attention to the fact that it is trying to restrict international trade because of its restrictive policy. As of 25 April 2015, European legislation allowed greater flexibility and transferred responsibilities to the Member States. These countries may themselves impose a ban on the cultivation on their own territory of genetically modified agricultural crops that are on the EU's authorization list. The topic has a second dimension – imports and trade in GMO products, as well as products that contain GMO ingredients. The procedure is as follows: the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) issues an opinion, on the basis of which the EU grants authorization for the cultivation of GMO hybrid crops or for the import and trade of products containing GMOs. For information, so far in Europe there is only one agricultural crop under authorization – this is the maize hybrid of the American seed company Monsanto – MON 810. The approved GMO products (feed or products containing GMOs) are many more, and not few are those that are currently in pending status. Nineteen EU Member States have already announced their decision not to cultivate GMO agricultural crops. Besides Bulgaria, these are Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia. Belgium has renounced GMOs in the Wallonia region, and the United Kingdom – in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

How did developments in the sector of GMO goods for import and trade unfold?

The EC presented a draft law, which stipulated that Member States have the possibility to prohibit at national level the import and sale of feed, food, food additives, cosmetics and medicines containing GMOs, authorized by the EC. However, on 13 October the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety of the European Parliament voted against this draft law, arguing that the proposed text is at odds with one of the key principles of the EU – the free movement of goods. On 28 October, with a very convincing majority, the MEPs blocked the right proposed in the draft law for the governments of each Member State unilaterally to prohibit the import and sale of GMO crops for feed and food products (as well as food additives, cosmetics and medicines) containing GMOs. 557 MEPs voted against the EC proposal, 75 supported it and 38 abstained. The majority backed the conclusions of the rapporteur from Italy, Giovanni La Via, according to whom an individual embargo on the import of products containing GMOs would create problems for free trade in the EU, as well as the risk of disrupting protein balances.

What do these developments around GMOs mean specifically for Bulgaria?

Our country has introduced a complete ban on the cultivation of GMO agricultural crops, which is in response to public attitudes and expectations. The risk that the territory of the state will be contaminated through the transfer of pollen from neighboring countries is considered negligible. The basis for such a statement is the fact that in Serbia, North Macedonia, Greece and Turkey there are no GMO plantings and these countries prefer to maintain this status. The exception is Romania, but fortunately European regulation requires EU Member States that cultivate GMO

agricultural crops to guarantee, through buffer zones, that they will prevent the transfer of the “contamination” to neighboring countries. Also significant is the fact that GMO agricultural crops approved in Europe are sterile, and thus the possibility of pollen transfer is practically excluded.

GMOs in Europe? The intrigue is present, and dynamics, tension, speculation and expectations are not lacking...