ITEMS DEBATED

FOOD SAFETY

GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOOD AND FEED - *PUBLIC DELIBERATION*

The Council reached an overall political agreement by qualified majority, with the Luxembourg, United Kingdom and Austrian delegation indicating their intention to vote against, on the draft Regulation on genetically modified food and feed, on the basis of the Presidency compromise subject to an amendment made at the meeting, which the Commission endorsed. A Common position will be adopted at a forthcoming Council session, after finalisation of the texts, and sent to the European Parliament for a second reading in accordance with the co-decision procedure. The aim of this draft Regulation is to harmonise and improve the assessment procedure for the authorisation of genetically modified food and feed and the labelling requirements for GM foods and feeds, with a view to provide the basis for the assurance of a high level of protection of human life and health, animal health and welfare, environment and consumers' interest in relation to genetically modified food and feed, whilst ensuring the effective functioning of the internal market.

The main elements of the compromise are:

- a 0,5 % threshold limit set for food containing traces of adventitious GMOs that are unauthorised but have nevertheless been assessed as being risk-free : the Presidency compromise suggests to limit the application to GMOs which have received a positive scientific assessment of Community scientific committees or European Food Safety Authority before the date of application of this Regulation and was present in the food or feed in a proportion no higher than 0,5% (which could be reduced by means of a committee procedure) for the maximum proportion of GMO during a transitional period of three years following the entry into force of the Regulation;

- a 0,9 % minimum threshold regarding the scope of application for labelling rules below which GMOs would be exempted from the labelling requirements; this threshold could be reduced by means of a committee procedure; the current labelling requirements for GMOs would be extended to all products for which an authorisation is given under the Regulation, regardless of the detectability of the DNA or proteins;

- the setting of an authorisation procedure for the placing of a GM food and feed on the market; under the agreed procedure, the application for authorisation would be sent to the competent national authority of a Member State. The scientific evaluation would be undertaken by EFSA. On the basis of EFSA's opinion, the Commission will draft a decision to be dealt with by comitology.

A specific provision is inserted for seeds intended for cultivation, by which EFSA shall ask the national competent authority to carry out the environmental risk assessment.