Facing the impending food crisis allowing European farmers to adopt biotechnological crops

The Congress of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party convening in Dublin, Ireland, on 2-4 June 2022:

Considers that:

- Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and consequent European Union sanctions against Russia and its ally Belarus will cause a shortage of fertilisers and main food commodities and an increase in their price on the global market because Russia and Belarus are among the main producers and exporters of fertilisers in the world and, among the main exporters of food commodities, Russia is the first exporter of wheat, the second of sunflower seeds oil and rape seeds oil and the third of barley, while Ukraine was the first exporter of sunflower seeds oil, the second of barley, the third of maize and rape seeds and the fifth of wheat;
- climate change is raising average temperatures and consequently the water demands of plants;
- most of the Mediterranean countries are experiencing a year of acute drought that puts all crops at risk;
- the drought conditions will make it very difficult to grow several crops including conventional wheat and corn;
- fumonisins are neurotoxic and carcinogenic toxins, also capable of causing spina bifida in the fetus, produced by microscopic fungi that parasitise maize. Fumonisins are mainly produced in stressful conditions for the plant, such as low humidity conditions. This fungi also grows in the tunnels dug in the caryopsides by the borer larva;
- among genetically-modified maize, drought resistant varieties allow to avoid the destruction of the crop or the impossibility of cultivating due to lack of water while borer insect resistant ones allow to avoid crop losses and not to us insecticides against this insect. Both types of varieties also reduce the presence of fumonisins and avoid throwing away the contaminated crop;
- the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has already positively assessed the food safety for human health of genetically-modified drought resistant or drought and insects resistant maize varieties already grown in the USA and which are already being imported into the European Union;
- there is a need to change the authorisation process in EFSA (European Food Safety Authority). We do not want to compromise on safety but

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as it is today there is a lot of bureaucracy involved in the process of authorisation;

- in Argentina and Brazil drought resistant genetically modified wheat is already cultivated with very good results.
- both agricultural machinery and ships loaded with tens of thousands of tons of soybean have to cross the Atlantic Ocean headed to Europe need diesel fuel whose cost is increasing ever more, as well as its utilisation is cause of strong greenhouse gas emissions;
- the European Union imports about 92% of the soybean intended for animal feed and over 90% of the imported soybean is genetically modified, largely coming from Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil and the USA, where the cultivation of genetically modified plants is the norm;
- soybean cultivation requires less water than other crops like conventional wheat or maize and much less nitrogen fertilisers than other crop commodities;
- genetically-modified glyphosate-tolerant soybean has been imported in the European Union since 1996;
- throughout Europe glyphosate is used, even on soybeans, but only before the seedlings emerge from the seeds. Therefore, the use of glyphosate does not substantially change, but only at the moment of its application. It means that, with glyphosate non-tolerant crops, five or six other herbicides are added, which are much more expensive and much more dangerous for health and the environment;
- in 26 years use of genetically-modified glyphosate-tolerant soybean there have never been any safety concerns and EFSA has repeatedly stated that this variety is safe for both human and livestock consumption, and it has always been approved by breeders, processors and large retailers, even in the feed chains of higher quality and organoleptic and commercial value;
- unlike the European Union following the USA,China and India are moving forward faster genetic improvement of plants by simplifying the authorisation procedure of new varieties of plants obtained through genome- editing technology, if they do not contain exogenous genetic material except for short insertions;
- the new defence technology based on RNA interference (RNAi) would allow to target parasites and pathogens of agricultural plants in a precise and non-indiscriminate way;
- with the exception of only one type of borer insect resistant genetically-modified maize in Spain and Portugal, European farmers are not allowed to cultivate genetically-modified plants, so they are forced to use those that are no longer competitive, as well as pesticides to defend them, with detrimental repercussions for the same farmers, negative effects on the consumers health and wallet and environmental damage;

- for both RNAi technologies and genetically-modified plants, open field trials, under controlled conditions, are essential for verifying their effectiveness and environmental safety. However in several European Countries obtaining authorisation to open field trials is extremely difficult. In Italy experimentation in the open field is forbidden. As a consequence, Italian researchers are progressively losing the know-how and funding from European programmes, the Italian farming community was deprived of knowledge and information on the real potential risks and benefits of these technologies and of new products of highly good potential for Italian and European Union agricultural production, and over 40 different genetically-modified varieties of species typical of Italian agriculture.

Calls for:

- the EFSA to evaluate environmental safety of drought resistant genetically-modified maize varieties already imported by European Union and, in case these evaluations had a positive outcome, the Council of the European Union and European Commission to authorise them for cultivation;
- the EFSA to evaluate health and environmental safety of drought resistant genetically-modified wheat varieties and, in case these evaluations had a positive outcome, the Council of the European Union and European Commission to authorise them for both feeding and cultivation;
- the European Union to allow the cultivation of the genetically-modified glyphosate-tolerant soybeans variety starting from the present sowing season 2022;
- Member States to allow the cultivation of genetically-modified maize variety resistant to borer insect already approved by European Union and the others genetically-modified that European Union could approve for cultivation;
- Member States to simplify authorisation procedures to allow RNAi technologies and genetically-modified plants to be tested in open experimental field, allowing citizens to visit them to see with their own eyes the real benefits and useful solutions implemented to make European agricultural supply chains more resilient, more productive and safer, and to get to know directly from research experts;
- the European Union to simplify the procedure of authorisation of genetically-edited plants that do not contain exogenous genetic material except for short insertions, subtracting them from the previsions foreseen by the Directive 2001/18;
- the ALDE Party and national liberal parties to politically mobilise to reach these objectives.