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EP fails to protect consumers and the environment from biocides

Today, the European Parliament (EP) has set the course for a new European system concerning the authorisation and marketing of biocides for household and other uses. PAN Germany, PAN Europe, HEAL, HCWH Europe, WECF and EEB criticise the EP vote on the biocide regulation. The new provisions are imbalanced and fall behind other areas of current EU chemicals law, like REACH or the pesticide regulation. The EP allows an oversized EU-experiment on consumers and the environment because related risks of biocides will be not sufficiently considered or tackled, while nearly all products with biocides can now be widely distributed in Europe.

In their first reading position on the biocide regulation MEPs favour an EU-wide authorisation of almost all pest control agents or preservatives. More than 50.000 products are sold annually in Europe even though the risks for consumers and the environment have not sufficiently been evaluated yet. Instead of filling the gaps of the existing authorisation system, the EP added new challenges and created additional loopholes. Although there are some positive amendments main NGO concerns on the Environment Committee report were not considered. "Politicians do not ensure that manufacturers provide sufficient data for a biocide authorisation which enable identifying all risks and harmful effects on pregnant women, children or water ecosystems. It is possible that problematic biocides will be tested as harmless", criticises Carina Weber, Executive Director of PAN Germany.

The ban on highly hazardous substances will now be weakened. "There are several vague derogations which offer loopholes for continues marketing of the most harmful biocides even if alternatives exist. This is not acceptable", highlights Gergely Simon, biocide expert and board member of PAN Europe.

"A Member State would not have the flexibility in future to refuse an EU-authorisation of a certain problematic product in its territory in order to protect citizen's health from their harmful effects like antimicrobial resistances", says Anja Leetz from Health Care without Harm.

While MEPs underline that biocides should not have any harmful effects on human health, especially for vulnerable groups like children, they don't follow this principle through in the overall resolution. For example, provisions for labelling biocide-treated carpets and clothes fall significantly behind the original Commission proposal. "We regret that MEPs voted against adequately informing consumers about possible health impacts of biocide-treated products. Hazard statements or warning labels can be left out, and precautionary statements do not include vulnerable groups", states Anne Stauffer from Health and Environment Alliance.

"The EP agreed on an accelerated and easier marketing of insecticides, wood preservatives or disinfectants. Many experts and scientists such as the international scientific association Collegium Ramazzini (1) demand a reduction of those harmful products", outlines Elisabeth Ruffinengo from





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Women for a Common Future. Industry has created a lucrative market for antimicrobial household cleaners, insecticides or odourless socks.

However, NGOs welcome the outcome of the vote on nano-biocides for which specific safety assessment methods are required, as well as consumer information through mandatory labelling. Because of their novel properties, nano-biocides may pose new risks. "For instance, nano silver can be more toxic than ordinary silver, which may have adverse impacts on the environment even at very low concentrations. The requirement of specific testing methods is essential for the protection of human health and the environment", says Louise Duprez from the European Environmental Bureau.

The NGOs urge the environmental ministers to address the shortcomings.

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Background information:

Joint NGO recommendations on the EP vote (Brussels 2010): <http://www.pan-germany.org/deu/~stellungnahmen.html>

(1) Collegium Ramazzini (2010, 17 September): Control of Biocides in the European Union. The Collegium Ramazzini Calls for Action to Protect Human Health. Hyperlink:

http://www.collegiumramazzini.org/download/Biocide_Recommendations_CR.pdf

