



## **PAN Europe position paper on the US-EU trade talks: Profit for multinationals more important than healthy food and the environment?**

Is it the mission of European food policy to realise maximum profit for big multinational companies or to provide healthy food and environment for people?

If you look at the trade negotiations between the US and Europe, it sounds like only trade and profit matter. Costs need to be lowered in the eternal race to the bottom. And since tariffs are already low, “non-tariff barriers” (read regulation) will be the main target of the talks. While European Commission claims that health standards will not be affected we cannot be so sure. Pesticides industry is pushing hard for more deregulation, harmonisation and a limit to future legislation<sup>1</sup>.

Health standards already now do not sufficiently protect people and the environment and costs are already externalised massively to society in terms of health care (pesticide residues in food/water, contamination of rural citizens), soil deterioration (fertilizers), biodiversity decline (monocultures, pesticides), climate change (fertilizers and deforestation for soy/palm cultivation) and subsidies (taxpayers' money). Deregulation will without doubt lead to more pollution, harmonisation will always result in the lowest common denominator available and less protection of people and limiting future legislation will stop the much needed extra protection of people and the environment based on current scientific knowledge. Profit for multinationals generally builds on huge losses for society.

Let's take the example of pesticide residue food standards. They were harmonised at European level already in 2009 and indeed the least strictest food standards anywhere in Europe were chosen for harmonisation. Soon it was shown that this was a wrong approach and Food Authority EFSA had to change a range of standards in the next years back to prevent immediate health damage. Many residue standards already are relaxed for no other reason than to serve European trade, disregarding the high level of protection for humans as required by legislation (the lowest exposure possible). And the standards are unsafe for more reasons. Cumulative effects of residues are not calculated and the unscientific single-exposure approach maintained. EFSA now failed to come up with methods to protect people for 9 (!) years while it was decided already in the 2005-Regulation cumulative should be taken into account. We can suppose cumulative will fall victim to a future trade deal.

Another example is the new landmark policy in 2009-pesticide Regulation to ban pesticides with endocrine disrupting properties. While the European Commission had to present the criteria to assess endocrine disrupting chemicals by December 14, 2013, they did not. Instead, probably also because of the ongoing talks, Commission Secretary-General Ms. Day stopped the process, sidelined leading DG Environment and demanded an impact assessment. Now already for a year nothing happens and the public is left unprotected. The full-stop happened after a massive lobby of pesticide industry (and UK) with exaggerated profit losses of potentially banned pesticides. A pure health regulation falls victim to economic assessments. We can be quite sure the democratically accepted rules on endocrine disrupting chemicals will be watered down and brought back to

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.agprofessional.com/news/Industry-urges-stronger-regulatory-framework-between-US-EU-250208671.html>

traditional risk assessment, an approach frozen somewhere in the 70-ties of last age, with limitless opportunities to prevent a ban.

And will we get Atrazine back after the trade deal? Atrazine is a very dangerous herbicide, banned in Europe in 2004 because of the widespread groundwater pollution. Atrazine is also well-known in scientific literature for its endocrine disrupting properties. Atrazine is causing harm to the development of frogs and amphibians at very low doses and in various reports held responsible for the extinction of amphibians in different areas.

More problems are ahead of us. Pesticides industry proposes in their position paper of March 2014 to undermine the EU-signed Aarhus convention on access to information and asks for more regulation on data protection. And of course the controversial undermining of the EU legal system by a dispute-panel capable of fining EU because of the 'damage' of strict (health) rules will be on the agenda.

Trade issues have turned into a religion in Europe, no higher value in life than trade it seems. No trade talks on quality of products and life as one might think but on quantity. And this quantity should be delivered by industrial agriculture and biotechnology, only increasing the dominance of multinational agri/seed/biotech-companies. A dogmatic belief in the goods of high yield industrial growing practices has convinced many policy makers in trade sections but not the public. No surprise the talks are kept secret.

The public is very much aware of the downsides of loss of food diversity, loss of biodiversity and loss of healthy food. More than 75% of people in Europe consider the risks of pesticide residues in food as their nr. 1 health concern. They might not know exactly that up scaling of farming and dominance of food production by multinationals is at the basis of trade policy and that this will put an end to food sovereignty, but they are concerned.

Do the claimed billions of profit -if the hypothetical extra profit is realised at all- justify the massive losses for society? PAN Europe does not think so. We would favour trade talks on the quality of products, on establishing the highest level of protection of people and the environment, taking into account recent scientific insights on harmful effects of endocrine disruption and developmental toxicity. This is what the European legislation demands, but is quickly forgotten by Commission at implementation level. More and more evidence is accumulating that many chronic diseases and cancers are linked to chemicals and preventing harmful effects should be the priority of European policy in trade talks.

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Brussels  
March 28, 2014.