



**Pesticide
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Brussels, 03 December 2020

PAN Europe reveals: Member States act against EU pesticide reduction

Brussels, 3 December, 2020: European Council documents acquired by Pesticide Action Network Europe (PAN Europe) and its members

show that Austria takes an open and direct position in the Council of Agriculture Ministers against the EU Commission's strategy aimed at reducing pesticide use by 50 percent by 2030. Indirect criticism of the Commission's 50% reduction target was expressed by Lithuania and Ireland. The other Member States have so far taken no position or expressed neutrality on this issue.

Gaining access to documents under the public right to access EU documents, PAN Europe, in cooperation with GLOBAL 2000, scrutinized the positions of Member States within the Council of the European Union's Working Party on Agricultural Questions.

These documents are part of a draft conclusion currently prepared by the Council, as a response to a Commission report criticising Member States for the poor implementation of the Directive on the Sustainable Use of pesticides (SUD). In particular, the European Commission argues that national implementation plans lacked clearly defined and result-oriented objectives to reduce the risks and impacts of pesticides on human health and the environment. The European Commission also announced in this report its intention to revise the SUD to reduce the use and risk of chemical pesticides by 50% by 2030, thus implementing the pesticide reduction target of the European Green Deal.

However, the documents reveal a clear gap between the Commission's ambitions and the rest of the EU Council. The German EU Presidency, for example, doesn't acknowledge EU member states' grave lack of effort in implementing pesticide legislation and instead offloads the responsibility on the Commission. Only very few Member States seem ready to engage and materialise the European Green Deal's ambition of a more sustainable EU economy.

As for the Member States:

- France is the only one to have proposed the inclusion of a reduction target into the SUD revision but insists on using an inappropriate indicator,
- France, supported by Sweden, proposes to expand the SUD to include pollinator protection
- Portugal recognises – as we read it - the need to upgrade the rules on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to make sure mandatory Integrated Pest Management (IPM) becomes part of the standard CAP payments, while France recognises that the various CAP instruments should be aligned to be able to encourage the needed pesticide use reductions.

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“This whole process, which happens behind closed doors, is unproductive and wrongly done. EU Citizens have a right to know that the German presidency decided, of its own accord and under the pretext of neutrality, to avoid the 50% pesticide reduction debate, and deprive EU Citizens to benefit from better food, unpolluted water and a sustainable environment” says Henriette Christensen, senior policy officer for PAN Europe.

"By opposing the EU's pesticide reduction target, the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture is acting as spearhead of the international pesticide lobby in Brussels. This is unacceptable and deeply shameful", says Helmut Burtscher-Schaden of the Austrian environmental protection organisation GLOBAL 2000. "We call on the responsible Minister Elisabeth Köstinger to correct this disastrous agricultural policy course immediately. If necessary, Environment Minister Gewessler must draw a red line here".

Background:

- Directive 2009/128/EC aiming to achieve sustainable use of pesticides in the EU (SUD) was adopted in 2009 with the aim to *reduce the risks and impacts of pesticide use on human health and the environment and promoting the use of integrated pest management and of alternative approaches or techniques such as non-chemical alternatives to pesticides to reduce dependency on the use of pesticides.*
- As part of the implementation member states of the EU were obliged to establish National Action plans (NAP) in 2013 to reduce risk to set up their quantitative objectives, targets, measures and timetables. PAN Europe has prepared several reports, studying the NAP, highlighting the bad implementation by Member States, for instance [this report](#).
- The European Commission prepared a report in [2017](#) commenting on the lacking implementation encouraging Member States to revised their NAPs accordingly, but as the report that the European Commission prepared in [2020](#) shows this has not happened.
- The 2020 report from the European Commission is among others based on conclusions from audit undertaken in 2018-19, to [Austria](#), [Bulgaria](#), [Cyprus](#), [France](#), [Greece](#), [Hungary](#), [Ireland](#), [Lithuania](#), [Portugal](#), [Romania](#), and [Spain](#).
- The European Parliament prepared a [REPORT](#) on the European Commission's first SUD evaluation, the European Council did a round table of ministers to welcome the report but no official 'Council Conclusion' were prepared.
- The European Court of Auditors prepared in 2020 several special reports highlighting the failure of EU pesticide regulation, first did a [report](#) concluding that there has been 'little

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progress' in the implementation of the SUD, then a [report](#) concluding failings in EU actions to protect biodiversity (in particular pollinators).

- In December 2019, the European Commission presented its [European Green Deal](#) aiming at making EU's economy sustainable.
- In May 2020 the European Commission published the [biodiversity](#) and [farm-to-fork](#) strategies on 20 May 2020. Both strategies envisage as a central measure a 50 percent reduction in the use and risk of pesticides throughout Europe by 2030, as a follow up to the [response](#) that the European Commission gave to the 1,3 million EU citizens who signed the European Citizen Initiative 'Ban glyphosate and protect people and the environment from toxic pesticides'.
- On 25 May 2020, the European Commission sent its [report](#) to the 27 EU Member States and the European Parliament. The Commission report concludes that the aim of revising the SUD includes the 50% reduction in use and risk of chemical pesticides by 2030 target.
- In June, the European Parliament decided not to make a report this time, but instead react to the EU strategies.
- In July 2020, the German Presidency surprisingly decided to put the response to the EC report on the Council agenda – and make it the subject of a political consultation process asking all EU Member States to reflect on following questions of relevance to the SUD: Do you have general comments regarding the conclusions of the Commission especially regarding their completeness and their conclusiveness? How can the implementation of the integrated pest management be improved? Based on these replies the German presidency prepares an initial text for 'proposal for Council Conclusion without making references to the 50% use reduction target.
- The decision-making process in the Council is currently still ongoing and should be completed before the end of the year according to the plans of the German Council Presidency, was the subject of a request for documents to be issued by PAN Europe and G2.

Conclusion

The latest draft that we have seen does not recognize the negative influence of pesticides on biodiversity, despite hundreds of studies making that link (including Geiger et al. 2010, Beketov et al. 2013, Pelosi et al. 2013, Woodcock et al. 2017, Sanchez-Bayo and Wyckhuys, 2019) most recently echoed by the European Environment Agency's report on the State of Nature in the EU 2020.

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Instead it argues that the farming sector is already delivering biodiversity benefits and that moving towards another system will become too expensive by saying '*HIGHLIGHTS that IPM is to a certain extent already part of today's farming*' and '*STRESSES that incorporating alternative methods and technologies on farm level also requires adaptation and adequate investment and demonstration while that further changing practices it should not lead to a disproportionate economic burden for farmers*'. This actually means that Member States are very happy with the extent of the decline in biodiversity despite the clear evidence of collapse.

This is an extremely serious situation. Not only for Europe's citizens, animals and plants but also for the farmers themselves. Several researchers have been trying to put a value on the activity of insect-provided ecosystem services. Pollinators add a value of US\$215 billion per annum to crop production (Gallai et al. 2009), while the economic value of natural pest control has been calculated to represent a global annual value of 400 billion US\$ per year (Costanza et al. 1997). The present trajectory of biodiversity loss means that in Europe this gift of nature is now almost gone.

Actually, it seems that neither the German presidency nor several Member States actually understand IPM. They don't understand that IPM is a systematic approach to crop production requiring all parts to function together. They don't understand the huge progress made across several greenhouse crops, orchards and vineyards. They aren't taking the time to see the huge strides towards IPM by those arable farmers who have already made progress despite their own lack of ambition. They don't understand that the present high input/high output system of farming exposes farmers to severe financial risk and they don't understand that because of careful soil, land and crop focus of IPM, farmers undertaking it actually are less exposed to losses.

In reality, pesticide use compromises natural pest control which, in turn, increases pesticide dependency. In agriculture, the vast majority of potential pests are controlled naturally by insect predators, such as ladybirds or parasitic wasps. When these beneficial insects are eliminated, through habitat loss or pesticide use, pest problems are seriously aggravated. To break this negative spiral, the agroecosystem needs to be diversified so that populations of natural pest enemies can regenerate and protect crops from pest damage. Largescale projects in the Netherlands and the UK have shown that conventional farmers who developed landscape structures targeted to insects providing natural pest control could reduce pesticide use by 90% while yields were maintained or even increased.

The way forward is for farmers to embrace the ecological transition that the European Green Deal is proposing and with this stop killing towards managing pests in an approach of working with – not against - nature. IPM is a part of EU legislation because EU policy, even at heads of government level, recognises its vital role. Incredibly, Member States, seem incapable of understanding this.

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[ENDS]

See also:

[Materials and Methods](#)

[Analysis of Documents](#)

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