

## EU Commission hosts a secret 3-day meeting with the pesticide industry as their exclusive guest - Lobby time!

**The EU Commission shows its close ties to the industry in a 3-day event on pesticide regulations with the industry as the only invited stakeholder. The meeting is held from 5-7 December in Braunschweig, Germany, called 'Zonal Authorisation Procedure Improvements and Developments' (ZAPID). (1) It offers the pesticide industry a unique opportunity to lobby policymakers from the Commission and EU Member States' public servants and meet at dinners, coffee breaks and even at a Christmas market. This new scandal by DG Sante questions, once more, the Commission's independence. PAN Europe asked the EU Commission to reverse course and stop organising this kind of privileged meetings. (2)**

The meeting is jointly organised by the European Commission and the German Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety (Ministry of Agriculture), it gathers all EU Member States to agree with the pesticide industry on how to implement EU law.

Hans Muilerman, senior chemicals officer at PAN Europe said: 'It is against the law to design implementation of the law exclusively with industry, excluding all other stakeholders. It is a grave violation of the legal obligations in the pesticide regulation and the EU Food Law to make an "independent, objective and transparent assessment"'. (3)

Recently, the EU reapproval of glyphosate has clearly shown once again that important guidelines for pesticide assessment are co-written by the industry. Instead of applying EU pesticide law in a strict way, the European Commission and Member States designed its implementation in a way that includes major conflicts of interest in the toxicity testing and risk assessment phase and tends to disregard current scientific insights. Protocols strongly favour industry studies and exclude most independent research, toxicity is not properly assessed and there are many loopholes to keep very toxic pesticides on the market even when it is proven that they are highly problematic. This leads to authorisation of substances that are very harmful to health and the environment.

Hans Muilerman, added: 'It seems that DG Sante did not yet understand that having secret meetings with the pesticide industry is not acceptable anymore. Back in 2018, PAN Europe published a report that highlighted that most pesticide guidelines involved industry experts in their design. We here have another evidence of who the Commission serves: industry rather than citizens' health and the environment!'

In our study (4) on EU pesticide risk assessment methods we described how 11 out of 12 are developed or promoted by industry. They allow harmful effects observed in animal safety studies on pesticides to be swept under the carpet. For example, tumours seen in test animals can be classified as 'irrelevant' for humans, harmful pesticide residues in groundwater are classified as 'acceptable', the dying of 100% of non-target insects after spraying with pesticides is labelled 'acceptable' and safe levels can be assumed for carcinogens. The methods are not designed to protect health and the environment as initially planned in the EU Pesticide Regulation, they are designed to prevent a ban on harmful pesticides.

### A pattern where commercial interests prevail

Putting the industry's interest on a platform is a pattern in pesticide policy. Over the past years, 3 zonal meetings have been organised by Member States with, again, the pesticide industry as the exclusive guest, while other stakeholders (health and environment organisations, animal welfare groups, journalists...) were not invited. This is also the case for a number of other secret meetings like the 'risk envelope' meeting (2010), PAI meeting (2017), meeting on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation (2018), and the EPPO (5) expert group on minor use (2018). There is no public information on these meetings or their minutes. For each of them, the industry was invited exclusively, denying all other stakeholders this opportunity. To move one step further in the direct lobby of Member States, the industry asked for a workshop on the same topics and got their way in Dublin (2016) with great opportunities to create network bonds with the decision-makers during dinners and coffee breaks and corridors. The meeting was kept secret for several years. Now, again, the industry asked for an exclusive workshop and again they got their way, in Braunschweig, 5-7 December 2023.

**Pesticide Action Network (PAN Europe)** is a network of NGOs working to reduce the use of hazardous pesticides and have them replaced with ecologically sound alternatives. We work to eliminate dependency on chemical pesticides and to support safe sustainable pest control methods. Our network brings together over 45 consumer, public health and environmental organisations and women's groups from across Europe.



## Saving costs instead of saving humans' livelihoods and its environment

Both industry and the national authorities (ministries of agriculture) aim at further 'harmonising' decision-making on pesticides, even possibly abolishing the national authorisation. For industry, this would save the costs of testing and designing dossiers on the pesticide product (the formulation), for the ministries (and the related authorisation body), it would save costs of evaluation. Both also have an interest in removing 'blockades' in getting pesticides on the market and for ministries, this would lead to easy access to pesticides for 'their' farmers. Historically, it has become evident that most national ministries of agriculture are not very much interested in the objectives of pesticide Regulation, the protection of citizens and their environment. This makes the cosy relations of industry and Member States even more questionable. All topics discussed in Dublin and Braunschweig are about cost-reduction and none is about increasing the protection of citizens and the environment. One example is mutual recognition, allowing studies to be recognised in other EU countries, also between zones and saving costs for industry, even when it leads to comparing 2 pesticides with different compositions. This is opposed to EU law and case law that foresees that all pesticides must be tested. Another example is minor uses, a provision that allows 'minor' crop pesticides without a proper safety evaluation: this is favourable to industry and chemical-intensive farmers. One more point of discussion is the toxicity of formulations: EU law and case law obliged Member States to test these products before putting them on the market (active substances, co-formulants, adjuvants, etc.) but Member States discuss with industry to avoid real testing. As a final example, another industry-driven policy that is opposed to EU pesticide law: the 'risk envelope', grouping the testing of crops to prevent individual evaluation of safety. The industry will be pushing to keep farming as intensive as it is by promoting drone spraying, genetically engineered crops, precision farming and all kinds of technical 'solutions' to avoid pesticide reduction programmes. They try to avoid the implementation of prevention techniques & non-chemical methods (IPM, Integrated Pest Management), which have been a legal requirement for farmers since 2014.

## Stop this industry-friendly approach


Martin Dermine, PAN Europe executive director said: 'In 2019, the PEST Committee from the European Parliament explicitly asked the European Commission to put an end to such conflicts of interests and ensure that EU pesticide policies are designed independently. The fact that the Commission organises such meetings is unacceptable and shows how little importance they give to Parliamentary requests. Today, PAN Europe has written a letter to Commissioner Kyriakides to demand to stop these secret meetings with Member States that are intended to water down the implementation of EU rules on pesticides.' (6)

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- (1) [Invitations to Industry and Member States for meeting in Braunschweig](#)
- (2) [PAN Europe letter to EU Commission, December 4, 2023](#)
- (3) Art. 36.1, Pesticide Regulation 1107/2009. Art.6.2 of Regulation 178/2002, the EU Food Law.
- (4) [Industry writing its own rules](#)
- (5) European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation - a forum gathering the Member States and the Pesticide Industry that influences EU pesticide policies
- (6) [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0023\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0023_EN.pdf)



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