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Brussels 2 February 2022

Revealed: How the European Council torpedoes transparency on pesticide use

Environmental organizations demand action from member states in trilogue

Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Europe and the environmental organization GLOBAL 2000 - Friends of the Earth Austria reveal in their report “[Taking Aim with a Blindfold on](#)” how a group of Member States in the Council do their best to prevent the collection of data on pesticide use by farmers.

This comes as the trilogue on the regulation on statistics on agricultural input and output (the SAIO proposal) starts tomorrow. If the Council's position prevails, important goals of the European Green Deal will not be achieved.

Reducing the use and risk of pesticides by 50% by 2030 is a key measure to halt biodiversity loss and protect people's health under the European Green Deal. However, meaningful data on which pesticides are used where, when and in what quantities to produce our food is lacking.

That is why the European Commission presented the proposal for the SAIO regulation in February 2021. This proposal would require that Member States :

- submit statistics on pesticide use to Eurostat on an annual basis (instead of every five years as is currently the case),
- gather these data from existing farm records on pesticide use (instead of voluntary surveys based on a more or less representative sample of farms),
- and that farms keep and transmit their records electronically in the future (which is already a frequent practice).

While the European Parliament preserved and improved the key elements of the SAIO Proposal relating to pesticide data, Member States in the Council diluted the proposal in many far-reaching ways. If the Council's position prevails, this will literally make it impossible to monitor the EU pesticide reduction target by 2030.

Documents from these non-public Council meetings obtained by PAN Europe and GLOBAL 2000, invoking their right of access to EU documents, reveal that these dilutions were largely driven by a group of ten member states. These had coordinated their (mostly destructive) amendments to the Commission proposal among themselves. This “Group of Ten” included Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and Spain.

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 40 consumer, public health, and environmental organisations, and women's groups from across Europe.



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A comparably large number of member states, in turn, initially welcomed the Commission proposal and expressed few to no objections. In the end, it was a large majority that adopted the watered-down Council position.

"Behind closed doors, *member states have fought a race to the bottom.*" explains Natalija Svrtan, a researcher at PAN Europe *"Any suggestion by a Member State to water down the Commission proposal was systematically accepted by the rest of the Council. It is shameful for the Council to act so destructively on important biodiversity legislation. This way, we will not be able to solve the major challenges of the biodiversity crisis in Europe"*.

Only Germany and Austria voted against this Council mandate, two countries that had previously been at the forefront of the watering down the process as members of the "Group of Ten". In the case of Germany, the change of position came with the recent change of government; in the case of Austria, the motives are less clear. What is clear, however, is that the trilogue will begin on 3 February and that the positions of the Council and the Parliament are very far apart.

"For a law to emerge at the end of the negotiations that provides useful data on the use of pesticides, the Council will have to move towards the Parliament", explains Helmut Burtscher-Schaden, Biochemist at GLOBAL 2000 and one of the authors of the report. *"The fact that France, a country that was not actively involved in the watering down, now holds the Council Presidency is an advantage. It is also an advantage that Germany, a country that was at the forefront of sabotaging the legislative proposal, is now acting constructively"* says Burtscher-Schaden, who is cautiously optimistic about the negotiations in the trilogue.

Annexe: Report "[Taking Aim with a Blindfold on - The Council's Attempt to Undermine the Green Deal's Pesticides Promise](#)".

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