

Transparency of EU risk assessment in food chain

Following controversies surrounding the authorisation and renewal of certain sensitive products, such as active substances in plant protection products (glyphosate, neonicotinoids) and genetically modified organisms (GMOs), the European Commission proposed to revise the transparency rules in these policy areas. The European Parliament is expected to vote during its December plenary session on the report of the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) Committee, and on a mandate to start interinstitutional negotiations.

Background

On 11 April 2018, the European Commission adopted a [proposal](#) for a regulation on the transparency and sustainability of the EU risk assessment process in the food chain, amending the 2002 'General Food Law' Regulation as well as eight legislative acts dealing with specific sectors in the food chain: GMOs, feed additives, smoke flavourings, food contact materials, food additives, food enzymes and flavourings, plant protection products, and novel foods. The proposal is a follow-up to the European Citizens' Initiative '[Ban glyphosate](#)' (2017); and in particular to concerns expressed in the initiative regarding the transparency of the scientific studies used to evaluate pesticides. On the other hand, the proposal also responds to a [fitness check](#) of the General Food Law', completed in January 2018.

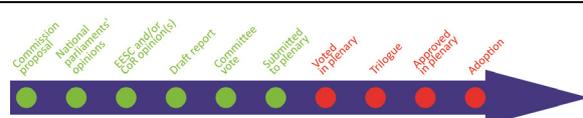
European Commission proposal

The proposal aims at improving public access to industry studies used by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) in its risk assessments. The Commission proposes that all studies submitted to EFSA are made public at an early stage of the risk assessment, through EFSA's website. Confidential information would be protected in justified circumstances, with EFSA assessing whether a confidentiality claim is justified. A register of studies commissioned would be set up, to enable double-checking that an applicant has not held back any unfavourable studies. Stakeholders and citizens would be consulted on studies submitted. In exceptional circumstances, the Commission could ask EFSA to order additional studies, financed from the EU budget. The EU Member States would be asked to propose experts, from among which would be selected the members of EFSA's scientific panels. Among the most controversial points of the proposal are the timing of the publication of the studies, and what information should remain confidential. The proposal was not accompanied by an impact assessment.

European Parliament position

On 27 November 2018, the European Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) adopted its [report](#) by 43 votes in favour to 16 against, with one abstention. It voted for publication of the studies at the beginning of the assessment process, as proposed by the Commission. The changes proposed include: nomination of experts based on a call for expressions of interest, although Member States could also nominate experts; audits of testing facilities to include third countries too; not limiting citizens' rights of access to EU documents or the Aarhus Convention right of access to information; publishing minutes and voting results of standing and appeal committees; confidential information could be published where an over-riding public interest in disclosure exists or urgent action is needed to protect public health, animal health or the environment; and the possibility for an applicant to ask for re-examination of a confidentiality claim in case of a disagreement with EFSA.

First-reading report: [2018/0088\(COD\)](#); Committee responsible: ENVI; Rapporteur: Renate Sommer (EPP, Germany). For further information see our 'EU Legislation in progress' [briefing](#).



EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service

Author: Tarja Laaninen, Members' Research Service
PE 630.317 – December 2018



This document is prepared for, and addressed to, the Members and staff of the European Parliament as background material to assist them in their parliamentary work. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the Parliament. Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy. © European Union, 2018.

epres@ep.europa.eu (contact) <http://www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu> (intranet) <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank> (internet) <http://epthinktank.eu> (blog)