



Lamy: biotech's man behind enemy lines?

Is EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy as stalwart a defender of the EU's biotech rules as he would like you to think? He has certainly given that impression during his public appearances since the United States launched a World Trade Organisation (WTO) challenge to the EU moratorium on the marketing of genetically modified (GM) products. In reality, however, Lamy has consistently opposed strict regulation of GM products, a position that starkly contradicts the wishes of European citizens. According to a recent opinion poll, 71% of Europeans refuse genetically modified food and no less than 95% support labelling.

Only months after becoming trade commissioner, Lamy caused a major scandal at the November 1999 WTO ministerial in Seattle when he tried to cut a deal with the United States to set up a WTO working group for developing GM product rules. EU environment ministers furiously rejected Lamy's deal, which ran counter to the previously agreed EU negotiating position.¹ Letting the WTO decide about GM product regulation would have been a disaster for environmental and consumer protection.

In the last few years, Lamy and the rest of the European Commission have worked hard to lift the *de facto* moratorium on approvals of new GM products.² The moratorium was introduced by the EU member states in 1999 in response to consumer pressure. The European Commission considers restrictions on biotechnology a threat to the EU's international competitiveness and in talks with the US administration, high-level trade officials time after time have made clear that the Commission was determined to restart the approval process as soon as possible. These were no idle threats: The Commission has put EU member states under consistent heavy pressure to abandon the moratorium.

Only when the United States decided to launch the WTO challenge in June 2003, had Lamy no choice but to don the hat of dauntless defender of the EU approach against GM products.

Lamy has also consistently opposed the EU's new labelling and traceability rules for GM products, which were approved in July 2003.³ Together with EU Commissioners Liikanen (Enterprise) and Monti (Competition), Lamy argued against strict rules and prompted "a very vociferous debate in the Commission".⁴ In the end, the European Parliament ensured that the final labelling and traceability rules, while still not ideal, went far beyond what Lamy and his pro-industry allies found acceptable.

Notes:

- 1 *Update on Seattle meeting*, World Development Movement, December 4, 1999.
- 2 Lamy's fellow EU Commissioners Fischler (Agriculture), Byrne (Consumers), Busquin (Research), and Wallström (Environment) were also fiercely opposed to the moratorium.
- 3 "EU Proposes Strict GMO Labelling Rule; Action Likely to Aggravate US Concerns", *International Environment Reporter*, August 1, 2001.
- 4 According to an anonymous EU Commission official, quoted in: "EC Defends Rules on Labelling, Traceability for Products Containing GMOs", *International Environment Reporter*, August 29, 2001.

For links to the referred documents, see: <<http://www.wtocancun.com/biotech.html>>

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