

Brussels, 25 June 2002

Better worldwide management of GMO's: the EU ratifies the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety

Worldwide access to better information on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) moved a step closer today when the European Union ratified the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. The Protocol is designed to protect biological diversity, and, in turn, human health. It will establish an Advanced Informed Agreement (AIA) procedure which ensures countries are given the necessary information to make informed decisions on whether to import GMOs intended for introduction into the environment. The EU's action should be an incentive for other countries to ratify this Protocol, ensuring it comes into force quickly.

Environment Commissioner Margot Wallström said: « *This is a global issue which needs global action. The Cartagena Protocol establishes one set of basic international rules for dealing with GMOs. The Protocol will ensure countries, exporters and importers have the necessary information to make informed choices about GMOs. This Protocol will particularly help developing countries, which often lack the resources to assess the risks of biotechnology.*

If we are promoting free trade on a global scale we must ensure that protecting the environment and human health is taken into account. This is another example of our commitment to finding multilateral solutions for global problems. Last month the EU ratified the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change. These measures contribute to our overall aim of sustainable development.

We call on countries to ratify and implement the Cartagena Protocol and we urge those who are not in a position to ratify to contribute to the achievement of its objectives on a voluntary basis. »

The Cartagena Protocol sets out the first international legal framework for the cross-border movement of GMOs on the basis of the 'precautionary principle'. It contains documentation requirements for shipments of GMOs and establishes a Biosafety Clearing House (BCH) to facilitate the exchange of information on living modified organisms and to assist countries in the implementation of the Protocol.

110 countries have signed the Cartagena Protocol so far and 20 have ratified it, including Spain and The Netherlands. Fifty ratifications are necessary for its entry into force. During 2002, the rate of ratifications has increased considerably. A survey conducted during the third meeting of the Inter-Governmental Committee of the Cartagena Protocol (ICCP) indicated that 25 countries intend to ratify before the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in August, and 20 more before the end of this year. This would mean the Protocol will enter into force in spring 2003.

Notes to Editors

The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted a supplementary agreement to the Convention known as the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, on 29 January 2000, after more than three and a half years of complex negotiations. The Protocol is legally binding and was the first Multilateral Environmental Agreement (MEA) concluded in the new millennium.

The Protocol's entry into force has been prepared by the Inter-governmental Committee of the Cartagena Protocol (ICCP), created by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The ICCP has adopted an Action Plan for Building Capacities for the Effective Implementation of the Protocol. It has established a Roster of Experts to provide advice to developing countries, *inter alia*, on risk assessment, and prepared a compliance mechanism.

The EU already has an extensive legislative framework on GMOs and the Commission has recently proposed a new Regulation, aimed at implementing the Cartagena Protocol, which specifically addresses the issue of the transboundary movement of GMOs.

The third meeting of the ICCP was held in The Hague from 22 to 26 April 2002.