

Brussels, December 6, 2021

Open letter to Ms. Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission

Banned pesticides: concrete actions are urgently needed

Dear President of the European Commission von der Leyen,

The European Commission has promised to stop exports of EU-banned pesticides. Almost a year after this announcement, we, the undersigned Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are concerned about the slowness of the Commission to act on the shameful practice of double standards on pesticides.

The new investigation by the NGO Public Eye and Uearthed has revealed that European authorities have given the green light to export applications for almost 3900 tonnes of neonicotinoids, largely to countries that are crucial areas for biodiversity. This impressive tonnage only covers the period between 1 September and 31 December 2020, just when we were 70 MEPs and 70 NGOs calling to ban the export of banned pesticides to the EU and to stop the import of agricultural products made with these same pesticides.

In its response, the Commission acknowledged its international commitment, under the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainable Development published in October 2020, to ensure that dangerous chemicals banned in the EU, including pesticides, are not produced for export. The European Commission is now saying it will come with a legislative proposal in 2023.

2023 is too late.

In France, the law on food includes a ban on the production, storage and circulation of plant protection products containing active substances not authorized in the EU and this law will come into force in January 2022. Europe can no longer delay on this issue. European companies continue to profit from exporting pesticides known to be too dangerous for human health and the environment to many third countries, of which a large group exports food produced with these chemicals back to us. Two weeks ago, we learned that the EU continues to produce and export on a massive scale three insecticides (imidacloprid, thiamethoxam and clothianidin), which are considered to be "bee killers" and a serious threat to biodiversity. These neonicotinoids have been banned since 2018, but some 15 countries still grant temporary derogations, in particular to sugar beet producers.

This practice is a crime.

The export of highly toxic pesticides is an important issue for food safety, public health and environmental protection. In the Farm to Fork Strategy own-initiative report, we welcomed "the Commission's commitment to promoting the global phasing out of pesticides no longer approved in the EU and to ensuring that hazardous pesticides banned for use in the EU [...] are not exported outside the Union". The report also stresses that "agri-food products from non-EU countries must be subject to the same requirements, including zero-tolerance of residues of substances meeting the cut-off criteria". Early September, the European Commission has announced the intention to delete the import tolerances for two neonicotinoid insecticides (clothianidin and thiamethoxam), which are no longer approved for use in the EU) in imported food products.

These commitments are welcomed, but we now expect concrete actions and we will ensure that they are ambitious and taken quickly.

Signed and endorsed by the following Members of the European Parliament:

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Pascal Arimont (EPP)

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