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Sofia

For immediate release

GMOs ban in Bulgaria – decision by Bulgarian society

97% of the Bulgarians are of the opinion that Bulgaria should continue to stand up for the existing bans for GMO growing on its territory, including before the European Union. This is indicated in the last research made by the National Centre for Public Opinion Research. There has not ever been such definite unanimity about any issue in the Bulgarian society so far. The National Assembly took into consideration the public will and adopted the most restrictive law in the EU on March 18, 2010. Thus Bulgaria again remains the country with the strictest law for GMO release into the environment.

The new law keeps the ban for growing tobacco, vine, oil-bearing rose, wheat, and all vegetable and fruit cultures.

It is **prohibited to release into environment GMOs:**

- in protected territories (natural and national parks, reserves) and protected areas of Natura 2000, as well as in the buffer zones of 30 km from their boundaries
- within distances less than 10 km from stationery bee-hive, within distances less than 7 km from organic farms

144 members of Parliament in the hall voted in favour of this suggestion, only 1 against and 3 abstainers.

With regard to all allowed by the European Commission GM hybrids, the members of Parliament accepted that Bulgaria will automatically enable a **precautionary article** if another EU member country has already banned the hybrid.

The persons and organisations that violate these regulations will be imposed fines from 250000 to 500000 EUR.

The Parliament decided that the products in the market containing GMO should be **labeled with twice as big letters** compared to the other part of the text on the packages and with different colour and fonts.

More than 17900 citizens signed the petition *Bulgaria Free of GMO*, and more than 5100 – the ban of the GM maize MON810. 15% of the Bulgarians kept up in details with the development of debate on GMO law and 50 follow it in general. For the last 3 month 27 groups against GMO have been registered in Facebook with more than 55000 members. In 8 cities 16 protests and several informal spontaneous actions against the changes in the law have been organized. Several thousand publications in all media – electronic, printed, national and regional. Thousands of cards against

GMO drawn by children have been addressed to the Prime minister and European Parliament!

The Bulgarians did not give up even after they understood that the Prime minister had met with the US ambassador James Warlick who manifested himself quite non-diplomatically as an advocate of the GMO technologies.

Mothers, environmentalists, organic farmers did not give up even after the statement of the European Parliament Chair prof. Jerzy Buzek who claimed that the battle against GMO cannot be won.

All sleepless nights, attendance to committees, petitions and meetings gave results and were a test for the democratisation of the country and the building of civil society in Bulgaria.

“The most successful and strongest citizen campaign in Bulgaria in our new history turned entirely the attitudes of the policy makers for acceptance of a liberal law. Bulgarians showed strong concerns not only about their own health but about the nature and the rural areas. The European Commission has to take into consideration the will of the Bulgarians”, said Svetla Nikolova from AGROLINK Association and a representative of the *For the Nature* Coalition.

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AGROLINK's mission is to promote sustainable agriculture, to coordinate national organic farmers' network, to support protection of the environment and the implementation of sustainable development principles