

P R E S S R E L E A S E

**Czech EU Presidency, Expert European Parliament
Members of PPE, S&D, Renew Europe and Greens,
Science and Industry agree: Biocontrol and Microbial
Plant Protection Products Must Access the Market
NOW**

Brussels, 13th October 2022. According to **Zdeněk Nekula, the Czech Minister of Agriculture now chairing the Agrifish Council of the European Union**, “the world is facing many challenges that relate to food security and the EU is responsible for playing an important role in securing food for not only its citizens but also for people around the world who face hunger and malnutrition. At the same time, **the EU is on a path of building more sustainable and resilient food chains.**” Deputy Minister **Jiří Šír**, addressing a European Parliament Seminar on behalf of the Minister, added: “If we use less chemicals, and we certainly want to go this direction, we need effective alternatives. Physical methods are often less efficient and more energy-consuming. **Therefore, we need to use biological agents. These must be safe, effective and widely available.**” Today’s Seminar was hosted by **MEP Martin Hlaváček** and co-organised by the International Biocontrol Manufacturers Association (IBMA) and the Microbial Plant Protection Products Task Force. IBMA President **Herman Van Mellaert**: “I am enormously encouraged by all of the statements today. **Policymakers of all major groups support the Commission’s proposal for the Sustainable Use Regulation, which will be a game-changer. They also express their commitment to take a necessary further step: to come forward with Guidelines and other accompanying measures for fast-track market access for biocontrol products.** Over 300 participants in today’s seminar agree to help nature-based biological control solutions come to the forefront to address the food security challenge rather than resort to recipes of the past which are proven detrimental to biodiversity and unsustainable. Industry representatives demonstrated how their innovation pipelines are full of essential biocontrol solutions. **This is what farmers are asking for. They are backed by one million signatories who this week call on the European Commission to take effective steps towards sustainable agriculture. Member States and the Commission this week receive a powerful signal from society, science, industry and politics that cannot be misunderstood: the SUR needs to go forward and fast-track authorisation for biocontrol and MPPPs must now be realised.**”

MEPs including **Maria Arena (S&D), Cindy Franssen (EPP), Martin Hojsík (Renew Europe) and Tilly Metz (Greens)** were united in a call on Member States and the European Commission to follow a three-step approach: 1) A proper definition of biological control and low risk accompanied by positive targets; 2) Fast-track authorisation for biocontrol products; 3) Immediate funding through CAP and other facilities for training and education of farmers. 9 million euros to train only national functionaries compares with 46 billion euros to increase Europe’s IT competitiveness vis-à-vis China and the US. “We stand for support for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises. They produce the innovation and competitiveness we need in agriculture”, said **Mr Hojsík**.

While Belgian **Minister of State and former Prime Minister Mark Eyskens** challenged all participants to come forward if they were against fast-track market access measures for biocontrol, **MEP Martin Hlaváček** (Renew Europe) stated “there is no opposition whatsoever against this.” **Prof Eyskens** therefore concluded: “**Today we should not fight over what the world will look like in 2030. We should open the market for all safe and effective plant protection products and let particularly Europe’s young farmers choose. Choice is the fundament of our Internal Market.**”

PAN Europe Board Member David Cary referred to “the 1 million signatures compelling the European Commission to now address the future use of chemical pesticides. [...] China offers us a good look at the consequences of overuse of chemicals: over 50% ground and surface water pollution creating China’s current dependency on food import.” Citing very worrying numbers of global soil degradation and spiraling environmental costs of chemical pesticides use, he proved “**that biocontrol/Microbial PPPs were neither more**

expensive nor more difficult to use than chemical pesticides. But as with any innovation, this does take education and training”, he said.

Industry experts **José Carvalho** (Certis Biologicals) and **Martin Suchánek** (Biopreparáty) presented examples of the impressive capacities of MPPPs. But the time to market was horrifying: “*more than eight years*” which is four times longer than in the US. And the cost was even worse: “*more than €7 million are spent to register microbial alternatives in the EU*”, said Mr Suchánek. Mr Carvalho indicated how these problems of the recent past could be resolved: “A fast-track procedure is needed for Biocontrol Technologies if we want to meet the targets of the F2F strategy and provide confidence to citizens in EU policies.” **Martin Hojsík MEP** fully agreed: “*This can only be achieved if there is an open, competitive, fair market that provides farmers with the best, safest, most innovative, and most effective plant protection tools*”, as he also calls for more training and education for EU growers on these biological alternatives.

Tilly Metz MEP (Greens) highlighted that already since 2009 Regulation 1107/2009 “*foresees in the possibility to fast-track authorisation procedures for biocontrol alternatives. But in 13 years, nothing has happened!*” In her view, one of the options to speed up the authorisation of biocontrol is “*to elaborate a specific implementing act or guidelines on a fast-track procedure in an inclusive and transparent way*”. **Maria Arena MEP (S&D)**, as shadow rapporteur for the SUR proposal, assessed that the transition from chemical to biological agriculture has slowly started, so “*we need to adapt the legislation to speed up this transition*”. She continued by stating that the SUR and the four implementing regulations proposed by the Commission are “*a first step in the right direction*” but also that “*we still have a long way to go toward a more sustainable food system*”. She recalled that a “*more sustainable food system is actually what we need for food security*”.

Cindy Franssen MEP (EPP) was the coordinator for the EPP group in the BECA committee on the fight against cancer. She said: “*The link between the use of harmful pesticides and cancer incidence is obvious. ... So when the Commission finally presented the revision of the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive this June, this was an important first step. ... I will even go one step further: we have to change the way we look at chemical substances in general. The reversed burden of proof and the precautionary principle are two elements that should be centre stage. ... Reduction is one thing, but substitution is maybe even more important.... The bottom line is simple: we need biocontrol products and have to get them market access as swiftly as possible.*”

From among the many chat questions and remarks – these will be answered through the [MPPPTF website](#) – Seminar co-chair MEP **Martin Hlaváček** especially quoted one, by **FAO representative Mr Gu Baogen**: “*According to experience and lessons learnt, these elements could be considered for the fast-track registration approach of biocontrol products: 1) Set rational data requirements with reduced trials and appropriate testing methods; 2) Adopt appropriate risk assessment approach and evaluation criteria; 3) Have a separate and short procedure of registration which should be different from that of chemicals; 4) Have specialists of biocontrol products and specific EU task force on the fast track registration; 5) Mutual acceptance of data and recognition of evaluation of other countries; 6) Joint review of new biocontrol products; 7) Reduced fee for registration.*”

Mr Hlaváček concluded that all speakers highlighted the urgent need for fast-track authorisation of biological control solutions through accompanying measures including a new Guideline. Also, much more can be accomplished by better implementation of Reg (EC)1107/2009, in line with this regulation’s initial intention. Co-organisers IBMA and the MPPPTF issued a joint list of items that can be implemented immediately ([link to download](#)). The relevant industries expressed their willingness to collaborate as constructive and responsible stakeholders with the EU institutions to put these into practice right *now*.
