

13 October 2022 EP Seminar – Transcript speech Maria Arena MEP

Good afternoon! I would like to thank the organizers for this event on such a critical topic and for inviting. I am sorry that I cannot be with you in person today, but I wanted to deliver you this important message

The biodiversity crisis is too often the forgotten one compared to the climate crisis, and yet they are both equally important and alarming. Nature as a whole is essential for our quality of life, for our health and for so many other contribution to people. It provides our basic life support.

Yet scientific assessment of the state of biodiversity and the environment are more and more alarming, report after report. Ecosystems all over the world are declining dramatically. The global rate of species extinction is already at least tens to hundreds of times higher than it was over the past 10 million years and it is accelerating.

And the drivers of this decline are clear. Human activities are a dominant influence in this dramatic trend. And among these drivers, a major one is our high level and continued use of pesticides and chemical inputs. The very model of intensive agriculture that has enabled an increase in population and wealth in our society is also one of the major contributor to the destruction of ecosystems.

We need to change our agricultural model, towards a model that would be more sustainable, respectful of planetary boundaries, and beneficial for our health and our societies. When it comes to our use of pesticides, this means a drastic decrease of our input in chemical inputs.

This is why the revision of the directive on the sustainable use of pesticides is so crucial. The principles and objectives set in the 2009 directive were looking in the right direction, but the lack of effective implementation and enforcement have made this legislation largely ineffective. The revision proposed by the Commission is the opportunity to right these wrongs and to actually put Europe on a trajectory towards less chemical pesticides.

As shadow-rapporteur on the sustainable use of pesticides regulation for the Socialists and Democrats. The Integrated Pest Management needs to be reinforced in order to prioritize non-chemical solutions, and to allow the use of chemical solutions only as a last resort. We need to have a particular focus on the most hazardous substances that are still in use in agriculture today. A 50% reduction of these most dangerous substances by 2030 is a start but I think we need to go faster and ultimately go toward the elimination of these substances.

And a solution for that is also the promotion of alternatives to chemical pesticides. In that regard biocontrol can make a crucial contribution to the transition to more agroecological farming and the use of micro-organisms is one of the alternative that needs to be put forward.

In the past, regulations have been delaying or even blocking the move toward low-risk biological alternatives to chemical pesticides. There has also been a lack of capacity and expertise to assess microbials. Differences in implementation of the Sustainable

Use of Pesticides between Member states have led to wide differences in the number of microbials authorized from one country to another. And of course there is also a resistance from the industry that has made so much profits out of the use of chemicals in agriculture.

The transition from chemical to biological agriculture has slowly started, but we need to adapt the legislation to speed up this transition. The four implementing regulations proposed by the Commission and that will soon enter into force are a first step in the right direction. These acts will simplify the process of approval and authorisation of biological pesticides that contain microorganisms. This does not mean that microorganisms used for biocontrol should be authorized without a strict evaluation of their safety for health and the environment. But overall micro-organisms are inherently less harmful and they can help in reducing the dependency on chemical pesticides and their use. More microorganisms that can be used as means of biocontrol available on the market will help to reinforce Integrated Pest Management.

Overall the development of microbials as alternatives to chemical pesticides and their greater availability will also help to promote other objectives of the Farm to fork strategy such as the increase in the share of organic crops or the move toward more agroecology. Farmers will have more alternatives available for sustainable crop protection.

We should be aware however that we still have a long way to go toward a more sustainable food system, and even with a positive step toward more biocontrol, other legislation, first of all the Common Agricultural Policy, will have to evolve drastically to truly green our agricultural practices.

Finally, as I opened this intervention with words on the dramatic state of biodiversity, I would like to conclude with a word on the different crises we are currently going through, the climate crisis, the biodiversity crisis, or the war in Ukraine. Some would like to oppose these crises and to use the fear of food security to freeze all new legislation that we need to go toward more sustainable food system or a more sustainable society in general. We need to think all these crises in coherence with each other. We cannot have responses to these different crises that will contradict each other. In the case of food systems, we cannot on what side advocate for more sustainable agriculture and less chemical inputs and on the other side push for ever more important yields or the use of fallow lands that should have stayed idle because of a baseless fear for food security.

The move towards a more sustainable agriculture and food system, for example through biocontrol, means the use of less inputs coming from fossil fuels or chemicals, for which we see today we are so dependent on the situation on global markets. More sustainable food system is actually what we need for food security.

Thanks you!