

EU executive body wants member states to rule on GM crop ban

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European Commissioner for Competition Margrethe Vestager speaks during a media conference at EU headquarters in Brussels, Wednesday, April 22, 2015. The European Union on Wednesday opened an antitrust case against Russia's state-controlled Gazprom energy giant amid worsening relations between Brussels and Moscow. (AP Photo/Thierry Monasse)

The European Union started legislative work on Wednesday that would allow individual nations to ban the imports of genetically modified crops even if approved by the food safety authority of the 28-nation bloc.

Member states recently obtained such power when it came to the cultivation of genetically modified, or GM, crops.

Wednesday's proposal by the EU Commission will go to the European Parliament and the member states for further discussion. Giving nations the possibility to opt out from EU laws goes counter to many EU initiatives, which traditionally seek a common stance on EU policies.

"The objective is to give the majority view of national governments at least the same weight as scientific advice in the authorization of GMOs in their territory," said EU Commissioner Margrethe Vestager.

For once, European environmental campaigners and the U.S. government were united in their opposition over a GM crops issue—though for opposing reasons.

The United States, a major exporter of GM food and feed, was irked that scientific advice could be disregarded while the piecemeal approach would cut up the market of some 500 million consumers into a potential commercial quilt of 28 pieces.

"Dividing the EU into 28 separate markets for the circulation of certain products seems at odds with the EU's goal of deepening the internal market," said U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman.

The Friends of the Earth Europe action group complained the legal grounds of such legislation would be so weak as to open the EU to all kinds of international litigation, and thus still allow genetically modified crops through.

"The European Commission will still be forcing GM foods onto the public at the biotech industry's bequest," said spokeswoman Mute Schimpf.

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