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**Alliances for all and Europeanisation for a few :
Anti GMOs mobilisations in France¹**

Draft version. Do not quote

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Our paper intend to analyse how anti genetically modified organisms (GMOs) actions confirms some changing logics of collective action in the environmental field and a certain Europeanisation of the civil society organisations.

The study of the transformations of environmental activism has shown a tendency to institutionalisation on the one hand and to the spreading of large networks alliances on the other hand. The recent emergence of anti-GM movements, coupled with opposition to the world trade conference, is a perfect illustration since environmental associations allied themselves with some farmers trade union (José Bové's Confédération paysanne) and consumers associations. In France, the field of Environmental NGOs (ENGOS) engaged in anti GMOs action is rather fragmented locally and only a few organisations operate at the local, national and European level. Still, they have developed a perfect mix of local contentious actions, legal actions, political activities and lobbying.

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Drawing upon a European project² in progress we analyse how the anti GMOs movement has resulted in a growing professionalism of the SMOs actors and in the constitution of a network of associations. Studying anti GMOs associations in five different towns and regions Lyon, Toulouse, Strasbourg, Nantes and Paris it appears that jointly with local educational actions towards the population, regular spectacular actions (crop destructions) and national campaigns have been used to publicize GMOs and to put them on the media and political agenda. A successful framing of this issue resulted in a growing public opinion hostile to the issue and helped facilitating technical and political negotiations at the national level. Still for these French organizations, the European dimension in this matter remains confidential : most of the actors within the organisations have no command of the European mechanisms or of the transnational alliances their organisations belongs to.

Methods

Using press analysis, reputational method and directories we identified a set of organisations at the national and local levels.

We are currently conducting interviews with activists, environmental campaign managers, scientist and civil servants in charge of the GMOs issue at different level of governance³. At the moment local and national levels are being covered. This fieldwork is supplemented by the analysis of documents and surveys data available especially eurobarometers and national surveys.

After the examination of the French national and regional daily press, five local cases were retained for the fieldwork.

² The CIVGOV project seeks to examine the role of civil society organisations, broadly defined as Movement Advocacy coalitions (MACs) - comprised of social movements and issue activists and advocates – in articulating the demands of European citizens into the decision-making processes of regional, national and EU level government. The research compares across three policy spheres – regionalism, anti-racism, and environmentalism – focusing on two key policy issues in each sector Regulation of genetically modified organisms. The project is co-ordinated by Professor Carlo Ruzza, dpt of sociology, University of Trento, Italy <http://civgov.soc.unitn.it>

³ The 25 interviews were distributed as follows, they will be completed by two other sets of interviews at the national and European level.

-For Paris 3 activists from OGM dangers, and Inf'ogm, the greenpeace campaigner for GMOs

-For the area of Lyon: 2 activists in charge of GMOs from la Confédération paysanne

-For the area of Strasbourg: two activists from la Confédération paysanne and the head of the biotechnology mission of France Nature Environnement

-For the area of Toulouse: 2 Activist from Greenpeace and 1 from the local antiGMOs collective

-For the area of Nantes: 2 activist from Greenpeace and 1 the from the confédération paysanne

- Paris where the national organisations headquarters are concentrated
- The Rhône-Alpes area, around Lyon (in the South-East of France),
- The Midi-Pyrénées area, around Toulouse (in the South-West of France)
- The Pays-de-Loire area, around Nantes (West of France)
- The Alsace area, around Strasbourg (in the North-East of France).

We will first recall the structuration of the environmental field in France and the sudden emergence of GMOS as a public environmental concern before analysing the coalition and the methods used by the environmental organisation in the national framing of the GMOs debate.

1 The structuring of the environmental field in France

Historically, it is not possible to dissociate the constitution of the field of environmental movements from the slow and difficult birth of the administration of the Ministry of Environment. In the early 1970s, the State used the associations as a counter-power in the conflicts, which led to their confrontation with industrialists and locally elected officials. In this context, the administration of the environment needed a powerful and representative associational movement on which to base its own legitimacy, given its iniquitously meagre resources compared to those of other ministries (Agriculture, Economy and Finances, Industry) (MARESCA, 1995). Hence the implementation of two major kinds of measures intended to ensure greater effectiveness of public policies: on the one hand, the decree of 7 July 1977 instituting an approval procedure to protect nature and urbanism; and on the other hand, the decree of 3 July 1985 dealing with classified installations. These texts involved a participatory dimension that allowed the associations to participate in the work of a large number of national, regional and district consultative organisations, (committees for specific sites, for urban issues, district public health and hygiene issues). Also, the associations were represented on the management boards of public establishments concerned with the environment, and those for the national parks. In a way associations constitute true “external services of a ministry which has none of its own”⁴.

This work was supplemented, with interviews carried out with scientists, 2 former members of the environment minister cabinet, and with two environmental journalist from *Le Monde* and *Libération*.

⁴ LASCUMES Pierre 1994, *l'eco pouvoir*, Paris, La Découverte, p.193

For Lascoumes “it is estimated that, for the last fifteen years, approximately 40,000 associations, centred on the defence of the environment, nature and cultural heritage, were created”⁵. The French institute for environment (IFEN, 2002) reports that 3% of the French population belong to an environmental NGO. The main actors environmental sector share a common historical background, and a common fragmentation: multiple local associations are concerned with these issues.

Apart from the big trans-national organisations such as **Greenpeace**, **Friends of the Earth**, **WWF**, few organisations seem to operate on a truly national level. A statement that does not mean lack of structuration. The most important federation, **France Nature Environment** (FNE), is an umbrella organisation for many local, district and regional associations (200). Nevertheless, its ties with associations are very weak.

The anti GMO national coalition

ENGOS have been able to shape national and international agendas setting in the GMO's issue, often in implicit coalitions with concerned scientific bodies or sympathetic political actors. but also by taking legal actions, or through their access to the media. (ASSOULINE, JOLY, VARNIER, 2000) note that taking the GMOs case one should note that environmental associations (FNE, Ecoropa.), the agricultural trade unions (Confédération Paysanne) and the consumers associations (UFC) have a central role in the GMOS controversy and try to make their stakes predominant on the public scene.

It is commonly admitted that Greenpeace started its campaign in the early 90s as genetic engineering became a more visible issue⁶. Although the centrality of Greenpeace in the anti GMO campaign at a European level is now well established one should note that it took a while in France to set up the GMO campaign at the national level. It is first the informal network between some French, Swiss, Belgian and English activists which allowed the birth of this campaign at a national level⁷. Anti GMOs sector is a highly fragmented one with a few central actors : **Greenpeace**, **La Confédération paysanne**⁸ and FOE. Originally, it ranges from powerful NGOs such as **Greenpeace**, **Friends of the earth**, with a general

⁵ Lascoumes 1994, p. 227.

⁶ Ansell Chris, Rahsaan Maxwell, Daniela Sicurelli 2003, *Protesting food : NGOs and political mobilization in Europe*, Paper presented at the 2nd workshop : European food safety regulation : the challenge of multi level governance, nov.2003.

⁷ Interview with A. Apoteker Greenpeace GMO campaigner, march 2004

environmental concern, specialized activists groups mainly **inf'OGM** (specialised in gathering information) **OGM dangers** and **Ecoropa** (more an expert group) which was one of the first to react against GMOs in France, to very local ones. It now includes as well farmer's unions such as la **Confédération paysanne** and la **Coordination rurale** or very broad anti globalisation movements as **Attac**. The **consumers union** undertook actions of information against GMOs. Anti GMOs MACs also emerged at the departement level bringing together local small independent associations and the local groups of large organisations like Greenpeace. More recently, at the beginning of 2000 the **federation for biological agriculture** (FNAB) felt finally concerned with a risk of contamination and joined the movement. In 2002, these organisations have grouped together around a collective structure called **Agir pour l'environnement** mobilising against the lift of the EU moratorium.

On the whole the anti GMOs movement have succeeded in gathering extremely varied organisations and its qualitative extension goes far beyond the usual limits of the environmental sector. Thus the extreme fragmentation of the sector, the complete lack of a common collective identity makes it difficult to analyze in terms of social movement⁹.

At the national level the organisations engaged against GMOs collaborate regularly with each other and some have formed solid alliances. The food fears and the high degree of NGOs expertise increased the degree of common understanding with the authorities which is much higher than in the beginning of the 90.

Although alliances are not purely instrumental, the key actions involve very few people within each organisation concerned and may provoke some divisions among the organisations concerned. The best example is given by the **Confédération paysanne** where the local members, farmers do not share all the anti globalization concern of their mediatic leader : Jose Bové. The anti gmos mobilization are not seen as priority by the farmers nor the anti globalization stands taken by the union at the national level.

The next step of the research will be the in depth analysis of the constitution of this network, the way it operates, the relations between the actors and the way they relate to political institutions and external parties, political or not. A first acknowledgement is that the political

⁸ La confédération paysanne is a left wing farmers union born in 1987

⁹ See Diani Mario, « Social movements contentious actions and social networks » in Diani, McAdam Doug, 2003 *Social movements and networks relational approaches to collective action*, Oxford, OUP.

parties were amazingly unresponsive to the subject, and many of them still are. More surprising, even the Greens caught in internal organisation debates showed little concern.

In addition NGOs are progressively recognised as an independent form of expertise and various expertise or regulatory committees now use to include members who represent NGOs. For genetically modified organisms, this is the case both for Commission de Génie Biomoléculaire and Comité de Biovigilance.

Common campaigns

-January 1998 : GMOs alert

Greenpeace, France Nature Environnement – FNE, family associations, consumers movements, the Confédération paysanne launch “GMOs alert” a public opinion campaign against the dissemination of GMOs.

-January 2003 GMOs : who will be liable?

“Agir pour l’environnement” – To act for the environment” is the widest alliance of anti GMOs MACs and they launched this campaign against the European moratorium and to calim a regulation for responsibility in case of dissemination. Actions were mainly aimed at political authorities at European ad national level.

-No GMOs in my district.

With this campaign a local level is addressed through a national level. It urges local authorities to establish GM-free zones. Launched in 2000 by local groups like ATTAC 45, and national associations like the Mouvement Ecologiste Indépendant, Terre Sacrée, which gained 300 mayors signatures. In 2002 this campaign became a national one and 12 national organisations support it¹⁰ The campaign provides them with a leaflet and a model of administrative order to ban GMOs cultivation. By march 2004, 10141 mayors had rejected GMOs cultures in their district. A success, if one thinks that the local elected officials are often typically distrustful of environmental protest associations¹¹

-Legal monitoring an legal action

Some anti GMOs organisations have gathered their forces to monitor the juridical developments in the field of GMOs at the local national and international level. Jurists and

¹⁰ Les Amis de la Terre, Greenpeace, Agir pour l’Environnement, ATTAC, Coordination Nationale de Défense des Semences Fermières, Confédération paysanne, Fédération Nationale des producteurs de l’Agriculture Biologique, OGM Dangers, Coordination rurale, CNAFL Fédération Nature et Progrès, France Nature Environnement.

¹¹ See Fillieule Olivier, 2003, « Local environmental politics in France : Case of the Louron Valley 1984-1996 », *French Politics*, 1, p. 305-330

associations collect and exchange all information regarding bans, trials, international treaties, WTO, patents pending, patents regulation, or current judiciary procedures

-Greenpeace campaigns

Greenpeace French GMO's campaign has several classical components. The publication of a guide of alimentary products with GMOs traces was probably the most original and well perceived in France. This blacklist resulted an efficient pressure on producers and retailers to produce and sell GMO-free products. This list got an extensive press coverage and compelled the mass distribution sector to ban GMOs products from their supermarkets.

Free seeds

Nature et Progrès allied with Confédération Paysanne and the national federation for biological agriculture (FNAB) mobilise against the obligation for farmers to use only registered seeds.

Lobbying.

At the national level a few associations have been extremely active. Greenpeace of course which had a privileged relationship with the ministry of environment but also some smaller structures like OGM dangers lobbying French MPs

Crop destructions

Crop destruction have been widely used coupled as a “scandalization” tactique.

Such an arsenal combined with efficient support within press allowed the anti GMOs movement to gain a consistent media coverage.

Media coverage¹²

The main goal was to make this issue public and to put GMOs on the media and political agenda. Greenpeace succeeds in 1996 : when they intercept ships transporting genetically modified soybeans in Hambourg, *Libération* one of the main daily newspapers runs a headline recalling the mad cow disease : ‘the mad soy alert’. Originally covered by scientific journalists, GMOs will soon be covered by environmental journalists. And public perception will also be dependant on a growing negative media coverage. This agenda setting process was definitely successful.

¹² Our analysis of protest events related to GMOs is still in progress.

The growing hostility of the public opinion¹³

The confrontation of compiled data stresses the rise of environmental preoccupations as a major issue for French people. This trend is continuous since the emergence of environment as social stake in 70's. Surveys conducted by the French Society of polls (SOFRES) reveal that 97% of French people consider environment as "very important" in 2001, against 94% in 1989 (PANIS LELONG, 2000). Moreover environment protection is a highly positive connoted value. In 2001 it gathered 69% of positive opinions, an increase of 14 points regarding 1996 edition.

Nevertheless priority to action in the field of environment remains strictly subordinated to other social urgencies. In 2000, IPSN Barometer puts the light on a subjective risk hierarchy, in which deterioration of the environment is ranked by only 10% of people as "most worrying problem for French society", far behind unemployment (13%) and security in suburbs (37.8%).

Regarding the evolution of the optimism index towards biotechnologies employed by Eurobarometer, French people seem to have constantly lost enthusiasm during the 1991-1999 period (from 0.56 to 0.25 on a +2/-2 scale), and then they have regained some trust in biotechnologies between 1999 and 2002, following the European general trend. Nevertheless, data quoted from Eurobarometer surveys on biotechnologies show that French are since 1996 among the less supportive to GM food in the European Union¹⁴. Moreover, the rate of French favourable opinions towards GM food decreased all along the 1996-2002 period, while a reversal happened for all countries –excepting Germany, Italy and Netherlands- between 1999 and 2002. Then the optimism index results are globally sustained by French trust in biotechnology applications to medicine (for instance genetic tests). According to IPSN Barometer, genetics frightens only 31% of French people in 1995, and 38% in 1996, taking in account the bias the formulation of the item ("genetic *manipulations*" in 1996) creates.

¹³ To assess French opinion on environmental topics needs the mobilisation of particularly diverse sources. Indeed, besides Special Eurobarometers focused on environment but also more specific problems as biotechnologies and means of transport other national barometers are available. Surveys from the Centre for Study and Observation of Life Conditions (CREDOC) and the Interregional Observatory on Politics (OIP), annual barometers on risks and security from the Institute for Nuclear Protection and Safety (IPSN) are completed thanks to *ad hoc* surveys conducted by polling organizations.

¹⁴ For a european level analysis see Bonny Sylvie (2003) « Why are most Europeans opposed to GMOs ? Factors explaining rejection in Franc and in Europe », *Electronic journal of biotechnology*, 6,1 15 april 2003 (on line).

Nevertheless, the 2000 and 2001 IPSN Barometer editions show that more than 70% of interviewees consider GM plants as dangerous for society. Moreover, it is one of the topics people mostly think authorities are lying about, besides chemical and radioactivity issues.

These results can be partly explained by the preservation of a strong agricultural sector in France, and the concomitant sensitivity to unintentional dissemination risks of GMOs in the environment. Moreover, a public scandal took place in June 2000, around the discovery of contaminated seeds, reinforcing previously existing public mobilisation on the BSE crisis.

French sensitivity to risks presented by food products is also illustrated by Eurobarometer N°49 on food safety (conducted in 1998). With 92% of positive answers, French people are the most supportive in European Union to strict labelling when genetically modified organisms are present in food products. They are also the most supportive to the creation of a “no-GM” labelling, as 83% of people interviewed back up this idea.

Such an opposition is also linked to a suspicion towards a loose public control and a regulatory process which resulted defective in the 90's (BSE, contaminated blood scandal, etc)¹⁵. These scandals and the food scares related to them sustained a strong public distrust of authorities and commercial firms. In the end, the impervious attitude of the political system opposed to the MACs activism allowed the ecological movement to gain a high credibility in the public opinion.

The anti GMOs capacity to influence policy outcomes

Until 1996 French public policy was in favour of the development of GMO's. No activists organisation succeeded in the mobilization on such a technical topic. As Marris (2000) underlines "the situation was well under control by the stake holders: a small and homogenous group scientists, who work in molecular biology, civil servants in the DGAL (Direction of Food at the Ministry of Agriculture) and executives of firms, who work in molecular biology."

¹⁵ See the findings of the 'Public Perceptions of Agricultural Biotechnologies' (PABE) final report, and especially Marris Claire (2001) "Public views on GMOs: deconstructing the myths. Stakeholders in the GMO debate often describe public opinion as irrational. But do they really understand the public?" *EMBO Reports* 2(7): 545-548.

GMOs policy evolved from 1996 onwards and was forced to take into account demands for a more precautionary approach to environmental and health risks and for more transparent and participative decision-making procedures¹⁶.

Three different stages can be outlined in the history of French policy towards GMOs, illustrating the politicisation and publicization process of the topic.

The first policy to emerge concerns the framing of authorisation issues to develop biotechnologies in the matter of food. This task is allotted to both the Genetic Engineering Commission (CGG) and the Biomolecular Engineering Commission (CGB), two public structures created in 1976 and 1986 but reformed thanks to the integration of 1990 EEC directives in French law¹⁷. The CGG delivers its advice on the uses of GMOs for research and development (confined uses), the CGB on the possible dissemination of GMOs in environment and marketing (deliberate release), whereas the ultimate decision relies on a consultation between the Minister of Environment and the Minister of Agriculture. Therefore, despite a strictly regulated process of authorisation, the GM food file cross-disciplinary character turns it into a political issue between different governmental departments.

Indeed, from 1997 to 2002 contradictory official statements were upheld by Ministers of Agriculture and Environment, partly explained by the new political configuration after the left-wing-coalition victory in the 1997 parliamentary election and the competition among *Les Verts* (the biggest electoral ecologist party in France). The necessity to strengthen the position of the Environment department in the government, of *Les Verts* in the political coalition and of the Minister in the party can explain why the Minister of Environment defended the possibility of reconsidering already delivered authorizations while the Minister of Agriculture opposed it. In 2003, diverse GM food products are authorized for culture, importation and transformation, others (like a variety of maize) only for importation and transformation¹⁸. But as various interviews with some former cabinet members in both ministries showed, that the main reason for the alteration to such policy lies in the ministerial lobbying (especially from Greenpeace members), and on the strong but confidential opposition to GMOs by a few scientists on one side and on the campaigns launched on the other side.

¹⁶ Marris C. (2000) *Swings and roundabouts: French public policy on agricultural GMOs 1996-1999*, Paris, Centre d'Economie et d'Ethique pour l'Environnement et le Développement (C3ED).

¹⁷ Directive 90/219/EEC on contained use and directive 90/220/EEC on deliberate release transcribed as Law n°92-654 (07-13-1992) on control of GMOs use and release

¹⁸ Since 1998 a moratorium on transgenic colza and beet has been applied, reinforced by the common declaration of France, Italy, Denmark, Greece and Luxembourg supported at the Luxembourg European Ministers of Environment meeting on the suspension of new authorizations in 1999.

The second expanded public policy affects the quality of information relayed to the public. The norms granted in this matter mostly come from the application of the 1997 European regulations concerning traceability and labelling GM-food products in French law¹⁹. Moreover, association activism in bringing cases to the courts compelled the government to make the implantation of GMOs test sites public²⁰.

The third public action developed consists in opening the public debate and trying to involve civil society in the policy-making process. The composition of the CGB already integrated representatives from industry, agricultural production, consumers' associations, environmental NGOs, workers in the field of GMOs. Nevertheless the systematisation and publicization of this policy began in 1997, as Prime Minister Lionel Jospin proposed to organize a national debate on Genetically Modified plants. Entitled "Conference of Citizens on GMOs use", it took place on June 1998 between specialists and 14 citizens. In July 2000 a citizen debate on GMOs was announced to be launched in September and October, then in August 2001 representatives from associations were invited to a working session with Agriculture and Environment departments delegates in order to draft out a "Charter on Genetically Modified Organisms uses".

At last Gmos in the public sphere?

At first public authorities were very reluctant to claims of public debate and transparency. The anti GMOs movement has repeatedly stressed the refusal of the authorities to organise a public inquiry in 1990 about biotechnologies when the European directives should have been transcribed in France. At the time scientific experts and French administration considered a public participation in such a matter pointless and potentially dangerous. A few MPs evoked the difficulties emerged with nuclear energy. This position changed in 1998 with a citizens conference on the use of GMOs in food and agriculture organised at the Parliament based on the conference held in Great Britain in 1994. 14 citizens were gathered to debate with specialists after a few days of training.

A citizens debate took place in september 2000 with 66 forums organised, and after some more crop bashing the government asked the Economic and social council (a consultative structure representing civil society) organised a public debate in February 2002

¹⁹ Regulation for Novel Foods and Novel Food Ingredients (EC 258/97) and Labelling Regulation (EC 1831/97)

²⁰ Decision from Paris Administrative Court, on March 1st of 2001

Finally the political system has shown a certain availability to improve the participation of the public to the decision making process. Yet the way the government used these findings is not clear yet.

The last procedure in the matter resulted a failure : the environment ministry organised an on line consultation about the future tests from the 23rd april to the 7th may 2003. In two weeks only 550 mails were received. Half of them were part of specific petitions against GMOs.

The attempts to integrate civil society members into decision-making in a context of growing scandalization mostly failed to channel the expression of disagreement, which keeps on going beyond the bounds of official consultation.

A fairly limited europeanisation²¹

This limited europeanisation regards protest²² as well as lobbying actions. Most of the organisations express their demands through national channels and most of the protests target national levels or local experimental fields²³. The relationship to Europe is very contrasted and differs a lot depending mainly on the local or national dimension of the organisations and on their resources.

At the local level most of the organisations do not feel concerned with the European dimension. The actors can barely figure out the institutional European organisation, they seem only vaguely aware of the impact of European public policies. Obviously they have no direct access to this level governance. The only exception lies in the contacts with some European MP members.

Conversely, it is an important concern at the national level. The actors are aware of the huge political and administrative issues at stake. For instance they are all worried about the future lifting of the european moratorium, knowing they will have to engage an other round of actions. Still most of them only a vague idea of the decision making process at the European level. A few people monitor Brussels legislations. Unsurprisingly there is a very strict division

²¹ By europeanisation of protest we intend the participation in euro movments cf. Tarrow Sidney 1995 « The europeanisation of conflict reflection from a social movement perspective », *West european politics* 18,2, p.223-251.

²² For the environmental sector in France, see Fillieule Olivier 2003: « France », ch.3 in Rootes Christopher, *Environmental protest in Europe*, Oxford University Press.

²³ As noted by Kettner, Vera 2001. "The European conflict over genetically-engineered crops," ch. 10 in Doug Imig and Sidney Tarrow, eds., *Contentious Europeans*. Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

of labour in this matter, and lobbying and interest representation is then left to the representative in Brussels, when there is one. Very few organisations incorporate the European dimension in their strategies and actions repertoires.

Against a common view which always insists on the transnational mobilisation²⁴ in GMOs it should be stressed that the involvement in transnational alliances is only meaningful for the main organisations like FOE, Greenpeace belonging to G8 or Confédération paysanne which participated in the creation of the Confédération paysanne européenne CPE²⁵ and belongs to an international structure like Via Campesina. Others rely on these structures to be represented at the European level. As such the European level is not considered as a level of action by most of the organisations.

The Europeanisation and the birth of new contentious or representation of interests repertoires applies to a limited set of organisations ; it was translated by a change of working methods at the heads of organisations and as a supplementary political and legislative dimension to manage.

Conclusion

Anti GMOs succeeded in making the GMOs controversy public. Naming it, labelling it (Greenpeace campaigns) they managed to make the invisible visible. The media coverage they gained, the judicial decisions, the new public regulations made the GMOs exist in a society where the risk is less and less accepted.

Europeanisation of the civil society is in this field a very optimistic hypothesis : it appears more like a new division of labour within the most institutionalised movements.

Ten years ago the predominant attitude towards biotechnologies and GMOs in France was indifference. The government management of the issue was purely technical and marked by the culture of secrecy, which has characterised for years the elaboration of French public policies. We believe that the anti GMOs mobilisations represent a very efficient example of an organisational coalition of which we plan to take the study further.

²⁴ For an overview see D

²⁵ Martin JC, Les mobilisations paysannes rôle et place de la confédération paysanne, paper presented at the conference Les mobilisations altermondialistes, Paris Dec.2003.

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CHRONOLOGY

1983

First transgenic vegetal to be created

1986

First experiment in open field

1990

Two European directives granted on GMOs:

- Directive 90/219/EEC on contained use
- Directive 90/220/EEC on deliberate release

1992

- July 16th

Transcription of the two EEC Directives in French law: law n°92-654 (07-13-1992) on control of GMOs use and release

1997

- February 12th

Prime Minister Alain Juppé announces the interdiction of transgenic corn seeds cultivation

- November 27th

Prime Minister Lionel Jospin authorizes transgenic corn commercialisation, and announces the launching of a “biovigilance” disposal and of a national debate on genetically modified plants

1998

- January 27th

Greenpeace, France Nature Environnement, Nature & Progrès (environmental associations), the Confédération Paysanne (agricultural union), Associations Familiales Laïques, Alliance Paysans-Ecologistes-Consommateurs launch “Alert to GMOs”, a campaign against the diffusion of GMOs

- May 28th and 29th

The OPECST (Parliamentary Office for scientific and technologic choices evaluation) organizes public auditions on GMOs in agriculture and food.

- June 20th and 21st

The “Citizens Conference on GMOs use” takes place at the National Assembly. 14 citizens are discussing on GMOs topic with scientists

- September 2nd

European regulation on labelling GM food is enforced

- Regulation for Novel Foods and Novel Food Ingredients (EC 258/97)
- Labelling Regulation (EC 1831/97)

- September 25th

After Greenpeace appealed to it, the Council of State decides to differ transgenic corn commercialisation, on behalf of the “precaution principle”. Confirmation on December 11th

1999

- August 31st

French industrial groups announce the launching of a “non GM label”, in agreement with farmers

2000

- January 24th to 29th

Adoption of a “protocol on biosecurity” at the Conference on World trade of GMOs in Montreal

Publication of the report from the parliamentary inquiry commission on “sanitary transparency and security of food industry in France”

- May 25th

The government decides to destroy infected parcels in which forbidden GM colza seeds have been unintentionally sowed, because they were mixed to authorized non-GM colza seeds

- June 21st

A regional daily newspaper reveals that 3,000 hectares in South West have been infected with GM corn imported from the United States and mixed to non-GM corn seeds

July 5TM

Marylise Lebranchu, minister for little and medium enterprises, trade, craft industry and Consumption, announces the launching of a “citizen debate” on GMOs (organisation of 66 forums since September to October 2000)

- August 5th

The government decides to eliminate 46 hectares of cultivated soya seeds

2001

- February 8th

Opening of José Bové’s trial in Montpellier, after the illegal destruction of transgenic rice on June 5th

- March 1st

After France Nature Environnement’s appeal to the Paris Administrative Court, the government is compelled to publish the list of sites where GMOs experiments are realised

- April 12th

Enforcement of the Directive 2001/18/EC on GMOs voluntary dissemination in the environment, replacing Directive EEC/90/220

- July 23rd

The French Association for Health and Food security (AFSSA) publishes an advice on sanitary consequences involved by the unintentional presence of GMOs in conventional seeds, recognizing the reality of this contamination

- July 25th

The government announces the launching of a consultation between authorities and associations in order to achieve a “Charter on GMOs experimentation transparency”

- August 10th

The first meeting for the redaction of a “Charter on GMOs” takes place, but several associations decide not to attend to it

- August

Anti GMOs militants destroy transgenic corn plants cultivated in the South of France

2002

- January 23rd

The European Commission grants a proposition for a global policy on biotechnologies

- February 4th and 5th

The French Social and Economic Council organizes a public debate on GMOs, especially on field experimentations

- August 6th

The European Union grants the Protocol on Biosecurity (so-called Carthagen Protocol)

2003

- January 14th

French Minister of Agriculture refuses to abrogate the European moratory on GMOs

- February 26th

A court in Montpellier condemns José Bové and René Riesel to ten months in jail. A campaign opens to obtain Bové’s liberation.