

March for GMO-free regions

5th April 2006

*NGO-March towards the EU-Conference “The Freedom of Choice”,
4-6.April in Vienna*

23rd January 2005

Background:

During the Austrian EU-Presidency in the first six months of 2006 crucial decisions for setting the course in the field of genetic engineering (co-existence within the EU, WTO-judgement) will be taken. The EU-conference on “genetically modified, conventional and organic crops”, ironically called “The Freedom of Choice” will take place in Vienna from the 4th to the 6th of April 2006. It is envisaged as a conference of experts and politicians aiming at building the frame for coexistence. Reports of the EC-Commission as well as the different member states will be presented at this occasion. As there is a limited number of participants, only very few selected NGOs have been accredited.

The NGO-understanding of “Freedom of choice” is different to that of the EU-Commission: Coexistence of GMO and GMO-free agriculture does not work on a small scale level, neither biologically nor economically. There is widespread public concern, that conventional and organically grown crops are successively contaminated by GMO. Therefore the NGOs demand a legal framework, that enables local or regional authorities to declare their territories as GMO-free regions.

The “March of GMO-free Regions” is planned as a big action, supported by many NGOs and individuals, to visualize the European-wide resistance against GMO. It is aimed to be a European-wide signal, by offering tangible and easy-to-understand-symbols to the international media as well as through the involvement of active NGOs from the whole Europe. NGOs, politicians, farmers and citizens of the different European countries will march towards the conference, under the banners and signs with the name of their region, country, city or village. They will carry local agricultural products, sometimes their local traditional clothing, symbols against genetic engineering and of our campaign against GMO.

The action is organised by a broad network of environmental NGOs, farmers associations and other organisations in Austria together with international NGOs and regional movements against GMO. As we want to symbolize the European regions, we very much rely on NGOs and individuals from all over Europe to take part in this action, whose success could be crucial for the future of GMO-free agriculture in Europe.

The NGO’s objectives:

Our central demand is our interpretation of the “Freedom of Choice”:
The Right to declare regions as GMO-free

We support the *Petition “GMO-free regions and local areas”* addressed to the EC-commission, which is already agreed upon, translated in many languages and supported by many provinces, local communities and individual. See: www.gmofree-europe.org

We will present the “*Vienna Declaration*” to the Conference, a brief document with our position towards coexistence and our understanding of GMO-free-region.:

The „March for GMO free Regions“

The day of the “March for GMO-free regions” is the 5th of April, as this is the day, when the EU-conference will be opened by Commissioner Fischer-Boel, Austrian minister Josef Pröll among others.

The participants will arrive from the different regions of Europe and meet at 8 o'clock at “Praterstern” in Vienna, a place close to the conference venue, easy to be reached by metro, local trains or buses.

From Praterstern we will march towards the Congress centre, a colourful march of people from Regions in Europe that declare themselves as GMO-free. They will carry signs with the name of their region (country, city, village), local agricultural symbols and maybe local traditional clothing, typical peasant products or symbols of campaign against GMO (eg banners). The march will be accompanied by tractors and agricultural machines.

At the conference venue there will be a stage for speeches from representatives of GMO-free Regions and from organisations fighting GMO. Multilingual moderation and translation will be organised. A cultural program with cabaret and music will warm our hearts, while organic farmers will supply us with GMO-free food. We will address the delegates to the conference and the European media, that will cover the conference. There will be a media briefing the day before and we will also comment on the results.

Travel arrangements:

Travel arrangements will have to be organised individually by the delegations from the regions and organisations. The organisation in Vienna will provide you with information on cheap accommodations facilities, on how to get to the site and with a set of useful contacts.

Support and organisation:

The Conference is organised by a platform of NGOs, already including Greenpeace, FoE, Attac, Global 2000, farmers associations, Greens and many regional organisations opposing GMO. The platform is supposed to grow quickly and we are approaching the Austrian provinces, that have declared themselves as GMO-free. We are looking for support by the growing number of entrepreneurs offering GMO-free food.

Our organisation office is supposed to start its work soon

At the moment we are contacting the regions for participation in the march and have already had contacts to NGOs in Germany, Hungary, Italy, France, Poland, and others.

What we need from NGOs, regions, individuals all across Europe:

- Please let us know, if and how many people from your region you are expecting to come?
- How you are going to travel?
- Who is the contact person in your organisation/ country/ region?
- Do you propose a cultural contribution and/ or a speech to the program?

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