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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Stepping up EU efforts to reduce the threat to honeybees and other
pollinators
*- Information from the Slovenian delegation, supported by the Luxembourg
and Polish delegations*

Delegations will find in Annex an information note from the Slovenian delegation, supported by the Luxembourg and Polish delegations, on the above mentioned subject to be raised under "Any other business" at the session of the Council ("Agriculture and Fisheries") on 18 June 2018.

Stepping up EU efforts to reduce the threat to honeybees and other pollinators**I. First celebration of the World Bee Day in Slovenia**

The General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) on 20 December 2017 unanimously adopted on the initiative of the Republic of Slovenia a resolution by means of which it declared 20 May World Bee Day. On this day, the global public will be warned every year of the importance of the preservation of bees and other pollinators, people will be reminded of the importance of bees for the entire human race and they will be invited to take part in concrete activities for their preservation. Bees and other pollinators have incredible value from the economic, social, and environmental perspectives. Bees are some of the most important pollinators that provide food and food security, sustainable agriculture, biodiversity, and significantly contribute to the mitigation of climate change and the conservation of the environment. Therefore, in the long term, the protection of honey bees and other pollinators contributes to reducing poverty, famine, and to conserving a healthy and diverse environment.

At the first celebration of the World Bee Day in Slovenia, On 19 May 2018 in Brdo pri Kranju, the Slovene Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food in technical cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, organised a Ministerial Conference on the role of bees and other pollinators for sustainable agriculture and food security. Ministers and other high officials from 18 countries on all the world's continents and from international organisations discussed the role of bees and other pollinators in ensuring food security, combating famine, and providing ecosystem services for agriculture and preserving the environment. At the end of the conference, an international political declaration on specific measures and efforts at an international level concerning the protection of bees and the development of bee-keeping was adopted (Annex). One of the key findings of the International Ministerial Conference was that international cooperation can protect and promote the development of bees and other pollinators and their habitats, thus contributing to sustainable agriculture, food security, the development of the countryside, and a healthier environment for future generations.

II. Programme of Measures for Reducing the Endangerment of Bees and Other Pollinators

Scientific studies have proven that in recent years bees and other insect pollinators have been increasingly endangered. In many European countries, a dramatic decline in pollinator diversity has been noticed. According to the European Red List, 9.2% of almost 2 000 bee species are threatened with extinction. Among bumblebees - the best studied group of wild bees - no less than 23.6% of species are at risk of extinction, while 45.6% of them have a declining population.

In May 2018, the Ministry of agriculture, forestry and food of Republic of Slovenia adopted the national Programme of Measures for Reducing the Endangerment of Bees and Other Pollinators with the goal of establishing and maintaining honeybee populations with suitable numbers and maintaining the suitable number and diversity of wild pollinator populations. In order to maintain the diversity of honeybees and other pollinators, the Programme defines the protection of natural habitats, the planting of indigenous nectar-bearing plants on public surfaces, raising the awareness concerning nectar-bearing plants and their significance for bees and other pollinators, increasing funds for national bee-keeping programmes, introducing special schemes in the event of losing bee colonies, and enhancing cooperation in researching and monitoring honeybees and wild pollinators.

III. Actions to protect the bees and other pollinators on EU level

The European Union and its Member States are active in the field of conserving honeybees and other pollinators¹. In 2016, the initiative for the formation of the Coalition of the Willing was signed by 20 countries at the initiative of the Ministry of the Economic Affairs of the Netherlands. Within the Coalition, measures for the protection of pollinators and their habitats are taken, experience in developing and implementing national strategies concerning pollinators is exchanged, efforts are made for various interest groups to cooperate, studies are carried out on the conservation of pollinators, and mutual cooperation is established.

¹ In 2009, the United Kingdom adopted the Healthy Bees Plan, a national action plan, and in 2015, Ireland adopted the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan, Belgium adopted the Federal Bee Plan for the 2017–2019 period, and in 2017 France adopted the National Action Plan for Bees and Wild Pollinators. In 2018, the Netherlands adopted the Bed & Breakfast for Bees strategy for the protection of pollinators. In Germany and Spain, a national plan for the protection of pollinators is currently being drafted.

On 1 December 2017 the European Commission published a Roadmap for the EU Pollinators Initiative responding to calls to address the decline of pollinators at EU level. In order to gather broad views on the problem, a number of consultation activities took place this year. The online public consultation garnered high interest with more than 66 000 responses. The inputs from a wide range of stakeholders, including Member States, NGOs, educational and research institutions, agri-food sector and bee-keepers provided invaluable contribution to the development of the initiative. The Commission published the Communication on the EU Pollinators Initiative on 1 June 2018. Because insects are at the heart of our ecosystems and their loss constitutes a crisis for agriculture and the health of the environment across the EU, the key objective of this initiative is to stop the decline of pollinators and thereby safeguard pollination services that they provide.

IV. Joining forces to protect honeybees and wild pollinators

Slovenia wishes to enhance the discussion at the level of the European Union, as it believes that through international cooperation a significant step towards reducing the endangerment of bees and other pollinators can be made.

The joint forces to reduce the endangerment of honeybees and wild pollinators at the European level could focus on the following priority measures:

- 1. Protecting, restoring and connecting honeybees and other pollinator habitats in agricultural landscapes to ensure resources for them all year round;**
- 2. Raising the awareness concerning harmful substances (pesticides), promoting Integrated Pest Management through the Common Agriculture Policy and strengthening the risk assessment of pesticides on honeybees and other pollinators;**
- 3. Promoting investments in research on the status and trends of honeybees and other pollinators, the causes and consequences of their decline;**
- 4. Enhancing mutual EU cooperation in research in the field of bee-keeping and promoting knowledge transfer and good practice between countries and bee-keepers, and**
- 5. Establishing EU-wide monitoring schemes for different pollinator species and groups of pollinators.**