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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: The serious economic losses suffered by beekeepers in Cyprus due to the prolonged presence of migrant bee-eaters

Delegations will find in Annex a note from the Cyprus delegation, to be presented under "Any other business" at the Council ("Agriculture and Fisheries") at its session on 15-16 December 2014.

The serious economic losses suffered by beekeepers in Cyprus due to the prolonged presence of migrant bee-eaters.

Cyprus is an important stopover place for many migrating bird species because of its ideal position between north and south and mild climate. These birds use the island for nesting or simply for resting and regaining their strength before moving on towards the North in spring and the South in autumn. One of these species – *Merops apiaster* – are known in Cyprus as bee-eaters as they subsist mainly by foraging on bees. In spring they stay on the island for one to two weeks, depending on weather conditions but during their return journey back to tropical Africa in autumn they stop for 30-40 days from mid-August to October. As a result high populations build up during this time.

The bee-eaters feed on bees, wasps and other insects caught in flight. In spring they rarely cause significant problems to beekeeping because their stay is short and other sources of feed such as insects are abundant. In autumn, however, they subsist almost exclusively by feeding on bees thus causing heavy damage to beekeeping and to the environment. They not only destroy a big share of the population of bees, but they also force them to avoid flying outside for long and to remain most of the time inside the beehives. In this way they are badly prepared for the coming winter and, most of the time, beekeepers need to provide them with artificial feed to help them survive. Production costs increase and the yield of honey goes down. The resulting economic losses can be, therefore, quite significant.

A three-year research study by the University of Thessaloniki, commissioned by the Cyprus Department of Agriculture, showed that all available methods for keeping bee-eaters away from apiaries have significant limitations and none of them is effective. The losses caused by the prolonged stay of these birds on the island in autumn were estimated to range between €8 and €16 per beehive. According to the official beekeepers' register, there are about 45.000 beehives in Cyprus. The total economic loss to the industry can thus be estimated to range between €360.000 and €720.000 per annum.

It is to be noted that *Merops apiaster* is a protected bird species under both the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats and the EU Directive 2009/147 EC on the conservation of wild birds. It is also protected under the national legislation of Cyprus (Law 152(1) 2003). As such they cannot be hunted or otherwise threatened. Since no other effective method was found to keep them away from apiaries, this means that beekeepers are called upon to bear the cost of the damages they cause without being able to take any action to protect their interests. Other sectors suffer too (due to reduced pollination activity of the bees) but to a lesser extent.

Unfortunately, the budget of the Cyprus Apiculture Programme is very limited (97.000 Euros per annum) and is badly needed for other important measures to improve the sector. Neither is it possible to use rural development funds to compensate beekeepers for their losses to the detriment of other measures directly related to the development of rural areas. And there is no question of using state aid for this purpose given the country's current economic standing.

In view of the above, Cyprus is calling upon the Commission to examine the possibility of responding to the legitimate demand of Cypriot beekeepers to be compensated for their contribution to meeting the Union's environmental standards.
