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NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

Subject: Preparedness of phytosanitary measures to protect against plant pests threatening agriculture
- *Exchange of views*

Delegations will find in Annex a Presidency background note for the exchange of views on the above-mentioned subject at the Council ("Agriculture and Fisheries") meeting on 22 and 23 March 2021.

BACKGROUND NOTE ON THE "PREPAREDNESS OF PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES TO PROTECT AGAINST PLANT PESTS THREATENING AGRICULTURE"

1. There is an increasing threat from plant pests linked to global trade, passenger movements and climate change. This may endanger food security, biodiversity and economic prosperity in the EU.
2. EU legislation aims to overcome the threat by preventing new plant pests from entering and spreading within the EU. Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 on protective measures against plant pests ('Plant Health Law'), which became applicable on 14 December 2019, increased the protection against the introduction of new pests via imports from third countries, in particular by strengthening the risk assessment and import controls and by preventing the spread in the EU territory, through early detection and prompt application of control and eradication measures.
3. A number of delegated and implementing acts have been adopted by the Commission to ensure a harmonised implementation of the Plant Health Law by EU Member States. They establish in particular :
 - a. a classification of the pests : Union quarantine pests, protected zone quarantine pests and Union regulated non-quarantine pests, as well as measures to prevent their presence in the respective territories of the Union,
 - b. the list of plants that need a plant passport or a phytosanitary certificate;
 - c. a list of high-risk plants the introduction of which into the EU is prohibited pending a full risk assessment; and
 - d. a list of the priority pests whose environmental, economic and social impact can be devastating. The current list of priority pests includes 20 pests, such as *Xylella fastidiosa*, the Pine Wood Nematode, the Japanese beetle, the Asian long-horned beetle, Citrus greening, and Citrus black spot. For those priority pests Member States must have in place by July 2023 enhanced preparedness measures, including contingency plans, annual surveys, simulation exercises, action plans for their eradication and information campaigns to the public in case they are present in their territory.

4. It is crucial that national plant protection organisations have at their disposal sufficient financial and human resources to enforce the new requirements of the Plant Health Law, and that professional operators have the technical information needed to effectively carry out their tasks and responsibilities.
5. The success of the abovementioned preparedness measures is critical because eradicating the pests once they have entered the EU is a long, difficult and expensive process. Plant protection products may help but their use needs to be reduced in the EU in order to limit their impact on human health and the environment and to address consumers' expectations, in line with the Farm to Fork Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy.
6. The United Nations declared 2020 the International Year of Plant Health, with the aim of raising awareness of the crucial role of plant health in preventing hunger and protecting the environment. Unfortunately COVID-19 made it impossible to reap the full benefits of this initiative. Building on the International Year of Plant Health, which has been extended to June 2021, it is important that we continue to promote outreach campaigns to a broad audience, and to emphasise the crucial role of protection and prevention. All sectors of society, including the general public, farmers, NGOs, media, policymakers, producers and the transport sector, should contribute to keeping plants safe as they contribute to our food security and to a healthy planet.
7. We invite ministers at the **Agriculture and Fisheries Council** meeting on 22 and 23 March 2021 to take part in an exchange of views on the basis of the following questions:
 1. *How can preparedness be improved to protect the EU against plant pests and create synergies within the framework of the European Green Deal and Farm to Fork Strategy (e.g. reinforcing vigilance over import controls and monitoring of EU territory for early detection and eradication of quarantine pests, reducing pesticide use)?*
 2. *Following the establishment of the EU priority pests list, what measures are already in place or are being implemented by your Member State to ensure better preparedness?*
 3. *How can global awareness of plant health continue to be raised beyond the International Year of Plant Health 2020, taking into account that many activities have not taken place as planned due to the COVID-19 pandemic but that the matter should continue to receive international attention?*