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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Council

Subject: Joint proposal on supporting the health conditions of bee colonies through the national apiculture programmes
- Information from the Hungarian delegation, supported by the Croatian, French, Greek, Italian and Romanian delegations

Delegations will find in Annex a joint proposal of Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Hungary and Romania on supporting the health conditions of bee colonies through the national apiculture programmes to be presented by the Hungarian delegation under "Any other business" items at the meeting of the Council ("Agriculture and Fisheries") on 19 July 2021.

Joint proposal of Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Hungary and Romania on supporting the health conditions of bee colonies through the national apiculture programmes

Pollination by animals is an essential ecosystem service provided by nature to humans.

80% of cultivated plants need pollination by animals and only 20% of them are able to produce crop through self-pollination or wind pollination. Such plants are rapeseed, sunflower, or beans, for instance, but the yield of these plants can increase by as much as 40% if insects are also involved in pollination.

Without pollinators, it is economically not viable to grow apples, peaches, cherries, almonds, cucumbers, carrots or lucerne (alfalfa). For pumpkins and melons, as well as for some of our fodder plants, which make up almost 10% of the crops grown, insect pollination is a must, i.e. they do not produce crops without insect pollination.

Globally, almost 90% of wild flowering plants depend in part or in whole on pollinators, so the existence of pollinators is a key issue for safeguarding biodiversity.

Mass degradation of wild pollinators, especially bees, has become severe in the world and in Europe in recent years, and not only their numbers but also their diversity have gone down. Experience shows that winter bee mortality has risen from 5-10% to 25-40% and the rate of summer colony collapses has also increased.

One objective of the *European Union's Biodiversity Strategy* is to stop the extinction of pollinators and reverse the decline of their stocks, but the *European Court of Auditors' Special Report for 2020* says that the measures taken so far are inadequate to meet the expectations. The lack of proper pollination causes economic damage to farmers on the one hand and rising food prices for consumers on the other.

The decline of service for the ecosystem by natural pollinators can be offset by the beekeeping sector, with more beekeepers keeping more bees. Reducing risks of honey production and improving its profitability could be real incentives for beekeeping.

However at the present, the profitability of beekeeping suffers not only due to bee mortality, but also by shrinking bee pasture areas as a result of the climate change related extreme weather, regular droughts and frost. The declining trend in the profitability of the beekeeping sector has stabilized showing regular fluctuations.

Honey concessions to third countries in free trade agreements increase import pressure which also contributes to the lower profitability. However, the quality and production conditions of beekeeping products imported from third countries often do not meet European consumers' expectations.

The beekeeping sector is far more important than its economic value. In addition to the direct benefits of pollination, it is essential for maintaining the ecological balance and biodiversity. It is also a main or secondary source of income for more than 600 000 EU citizens.

The significance of the negative processes goes far beyond the actual difficulties of beekeepers: *immediate measures are necessary to boost entrepreneurship for keeping bees in the interest of the entire agri-food industry.*

The above mentioned Member States propose:

In order to make the most of the resources of the National Apiculture Programmes, [the proposing countries] ask the Commission to consider extending Member States' powers to use the available resources more flexibly in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.

In order to reduce the risks to beekeeping and to stabilize profitability, the Commission, when drawing up implementing rules for the CAP regulations, should provide for the possibility of aid based on the number of bee colonies to maintain the good health conditions of the bees.