



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 9 July 2009

11829/09

AGRI 303

NOTE

from: Slovenian delegation
to: Council

Subject : Protection of endangered bees in the European Union

Delegations will find attached a note submitted by the Slovenian delegation, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council meeting (Agriculture and Fisheries) on 13 July 2009.

Protection of endangered bees in the European Union

The positive effects and influences of bees and their activities on the preservation of biodiversity and on our ecosystem itself are well known. One of the most important roles of honeybees is pollination, helping to maintain efficient agricultural production and consequently to ensure food security. Owing to their nutritional and medical properties honeybee products, such as honey, pollen, propolis, royal jelly and beeswax, are also of major importance to mankind.

In Slovenia, beekeeping is a long tradition still very much alive and represents an important part of our natural and cultural heritage. Beekeeping and agriculture are closely connected in Slovenia. The density of beehives all over Slovenian territory puts Slovenia amongst the European countries with the highest density of honeybees in Europe. Because it acknowledges the great importance of bees and beekeeping, Slovenia is striving to protect and preserve bees both in its territory and throughout the European Union.

Since 2003 there have been reports of what is called the "Colony collapse disorder" syndrome. Losses of as high as 50 % of honeybee colonies have been reported in various European countries. Such a decrease in the bee population could lead to a serious fall in agricultural production. There have been reports of honeybee losses in Slovenia, too, in recent years; some estimate losses observed in the 2007/2008 season at up to 30%. However, the reasons for this situation are not yet known. As indicated by researchers, losses could be due to a combination of several harmful factors.

A decrease in the honeybee population can and will lead to negative effects on biodiversity and to reduced pollination.

In this context, Slovenia welcomes the European Parliament Resolution on the situation in the beekeeping sector, adopted in November 2008, indicating that 76 % of food production depends on bees and up to 84 % of vegetable species cultivated in Europe depend on bees for pollination. We agree with the emphasis in the Resolution, which attaches great importance to beekeeping and its positive effects and draws attention to the very serious difficulties being encountered by the beekeeping sector, throughout the world and more particularly in Europe.

Slovenia is in favour of the European Parliament initiative for immediate and effective action on beekeeping and the health of bees. There is a need, *inter alia*, for further research in the field of bee health, including the influence of climate change, and on the effects of plant protection products on bees. Furthermore, setting up ecological recovery zones to renew the bee population is to be encouraged. Slovenia believes that the Commission should play a key role in these activities. In the light of this, Slovenia invites the Commission to examine appropriate action to protect the European bee population.

Within the Common Agricultural Policy various measures to support beekeeping sector already exist. In the light of this, Slovenia is strongly in favour of also continuing current support policy in the future.

Moreover, Slovenia would like to propose that, in view of the importance of the honeybee for the preservation of the natural environment and for European food security, the Commission examine the possibility of recognising the honeybee as an animal species needing special care and protection.