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Honeybee health and the challenges of the beekeeping

Alternative motion for resolution tabled by the Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its resolution of 25 November 2010 on the situation in the beekeeping sector[1],
- having regard to the Communication of the Commission of 6 December 2010 on honeybee health (COM(2010)0714),
- having regard to the Conclusions of the Council of 17 May 2011 on honeybee health,
- having regard to the Communication of the Commission of 3 May 2011 ‘Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020’ (COM(2011)0244),
- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1234/2007 of 22 October 2007 establishing a common organisation of agricultural markets and on specific provisions for certain agricultural products (Single CMO Regulation)[2], which lays out special provisions for the apiculture sector in the European Union,
- having regard to the EFSA scientific report of 11 August 2008 and the scientific report commissioned and adopted by EFSA on 3 December 2009 on Bee Mortality and Bee Surveillance in Europe,
- having regard to the ruling of the European Court of Justice on case C-442/09[3], concerning the labelling of honey containing genetically modified material,
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market and repealing Council Directives 79/117/EEC and 91/414/EEC[4],
- having regard to Directive 2009/128/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 establishing a framework for Community action to achieve the sustainable use of pesticides[5],
- having regard to its resolution of 8 March 2011 on the ‘EU protein deficit: what solution for a long standing problem?’[6],

- having regard to the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development report 2009, by UNDP, FAO, UNEP, UNESCO, World Bank, WHO, & the Global Environment Facility,
- having regard to the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) Foresight Report of May 2011 ,
http://ec.europa.eu/research/agriculture/scar/pdf/scar_feg_ultimate_version.pdf
- having regard to the precautionary principle outlined in Article 191 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to the polluter pays principle outlined in Directive [2004/35/EC](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004 on environmental liability with regard to the prevention and remedying of environmental damage,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and the opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (A7-0359/2011),
- having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas beekeeping as an economic and social activity plays a crucial role in the sustainable development of rural areas, creates jobs and provides an important ecosystem service via pollination, which contributes to the improvement of biodiversity by maintaining the genetic diversity of plants,

B. whereas beekeeping and biodiversity are mutually dependent; whereas, via pollination, bee colonies provide important environmental, economic and social public goods, thus ensuring food security and maintaining biodiversity, and whereas, by managing their bee colonies, beekeepers perform an environmental service of paramount importance, as well as safeguarding a sustainable production model in rural areas; whereas ‘bee pastures’, diverse foraging grounds and certain crops (rape, sunflowers, etc.) provide bees with the rich nutrition necessary in order to maintain their immune defences and stay healthy,

C. Whereas besides domesticated honeybees, the populations of wild bees (e.g. bumblebees or solitary bees) and other valuable pollinators (e.g. butterflies and hoverflies) are also in steep decline; increased mortality among honeybees and wild pollinators in Europe would, if left unchecked, have a profound negative impact on agriculture, food production and security, biodiversity, environmental sustainability and ecosystems;

D. whereas concerns have been raised that owing to the high cost of establishing a beekeeping enterprise, there are fewer people entering the sector, resulting in a shortfall in the hives needed to pollinate vital agricultural crops,

E. whereas a decrease in the number of bee colonies has been reported in both the EU and other parts of the world; whereas pollinator species, which contribute to agricultural productivity, are in decline; whereas, in the event of a marked intensification of this trend, farmers in the EU, as well as those in other parts of the world, may have to resort to human-assisted pollination, which would entail a twofold increase in expenditure;

F. whereas science and veterinary practice currently provide little in the way of effective prevention or disease control against certain pests and diseases, owing to insufficient research and development of new bee-health medicines in the past decades, which is the result of low interest of big pharmaceutical companies; whereas the limited number of medicines available to fight the Varroa destructor mite are in

many cases no longer effective,

G. whereas the health of individual bees and colonies is affected by numerous lethal and sub-lethal factors, many of them interconnected; whereas the use of pesticides, and changing climatic and environmental conditions, loss of plant biodiversity, changes of land use and agricultural practices including increased monocultures, and the presence of invasive species combine to weaken colonies' immune systems, making them susceptible to opportunistic pathologies;

H. whereas minimal use of veterinary products and active substances is advocated, as is maintaining a healthy colony immune system, but whereas resistance problems exist; whereas active substances and medicines are not metabolised by bees, and European producers rely on clean, residue-free, high-quality honey,

I. whereas monocultures are damaging for pollinators because they firstly limit the availability of diverse nectar sources, therefore can limit nectar foraged and therefore colony health, secondly increase vulnerability to crop failures therefore limiting foraging availability, and thirdly increase the use of pesticides due to the build-up of pests in soil and vegetation; these pesticides can also effect non-target species including individual pollinators on a lethal or sub-lethal level, likewise affecting immunity of colonies,

J. whereas effects on bees were non considered in the risk assessment criteria of any of the pesticides currently available on the market, therefore this risk remains un-assessed,

1. Considers that the health of honeybees should be seen as an important bio-indicator for the state of our environment and the sustainability of agricultural practices; considers it important to take urgent measures to protect bee health;

2. Acknowledges the scientific consensus that honeybee colony losses cannot be attributed to one factor, but are due to many factors including:

- parasites, specifically the Varroa destructor mite, and the Nosema ceranae fungus, that serve to weaken the immune system of bees and cultivate viral growth which, if left untreated, can result in colony death within three years;
- a lack of accessible and inexpensive veterinary medicines to combat varroasis and of appropriate treatments authorised and adapted for bees;
- biodiversity loss of any origin with impact on availability and quality of pollen resources;
- lethal effects (mortality due to the acute or chronic toxicity of active substances in pesticides) or sub-lethal effects (effects on the immune system or on behaviour of bees) of active substances; especially pesticides in the neonicotinoid family (Clothianidin, Thiacloprid, Imidacloprid, Thiamethoxam), phenyl pyrazole (Fipronil), pyrethroids and active substances such as Chlorpyrifos and Dimethoate; bees come into contact with these directly or via contaminated water, droplet guttation, nectar and pollen; also genetically modified crops, in particular those producing Bt toxin, affecting honeybees' learning performance, causing sub-lethal effects;
- electromagnetic fields that may disturb the orientation and navigation of honeybees;

3. Notes that, according to the Commission report of 28 May 2010, the overall number of beekeepers in the EU has risen slightly in comparison with 2004; according to the report, this increase is solely attributable to the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU, and that, without the beekeepers from those countries, there would have been a significant decrease in the number of beekeepers in the EU; views this as indicative of the gravity of the situation in the beekeeping sector in the EU and of the need to

grant it assistance and to implement concrete measures to keep beekeepers in beekeeping;

Research and dissemination of scientific knowledge

4. Calls on the Commission to increase the level of support for honeybee-health-related research under the next financial framework (FP8) and to focus the research on technological developments and disease prevention and control, particularly on the impact of environmental factors on the bee colony immune system and their interactions with pathologies, on defining sustainable agricultural practices, on promoting non-chemical alternatives (i.e. preventative agronomic practices such as crop rotation and use of biological control) and on generally further encouraging Integrated Pest Management techniques. Supports breeding programmes which concentrate on disease and pest tolerance, especially with reference to varroasis;

5. Calls on the Commission to promote the setting up of appropriate national surveillance systems in close cooperation with beekeepers' associations and to develop standards at EU level to allow comparison; stresses the need for uniform identification and registration of bee hives at national level, with annual revision and updating; insists that the funding for identification and registration should not come from the existing programmes for the improvement of production and marketing of honey in the European Union (Regulation (EC) No 1221/97);

6. Calls on the European Commission to support a European Network of 'reference hives' to monitor the effect of environmental conditions, beekeeping practices and agricultural practices on bee health

7. Welcomes the establishment of the EU reference laboratory for bee health, which should focus on activities not covered by existing expert networks or national laboratories, and synthesise the integrated knowledge stemming from their research; Stresses the need to support diagnostic laboratories and field tests at a national level; Calls on the Commission to set up a steering committee, together with representatives of the beekeeping sector, which will assist the Commission in establishing the annual work programme of the EU reference laboratory; deplors the fact that the first annual work programme of the EU's reference laboratory was presented without prior consultation of stakeholders;

8. Calls on the Commission to continue supporting scientific research on honeybee health, building on the good examples of COST Action COLOSS and the BeeDoc and STEP initiatives, and to encourage Member States to support scientific research in this area e.g. APENET; stresses nevertheless that relations with beekeepers and beekeeper organisations should be enhanced;

9. Calls on the Commission to rule out overlaps in the use of funds in order to increase their effectiveness in guaranteeing economic and ecological added value for both bee-keepers and farmers; calls on the Commission to encourage Member States to raise their level of funding for research;

10. Calls on the Commission to actively encourage a greater degree of information-sharing among Member States, laboratories, beekeepers, farmers and scientists, on ecotoxicological studies affecting honeybee health so as to make possible informed, independent scientific scrutiny; calls on the Commission to help this process by making available its relevant webpage in all official languages of the Member States concerned;

11. Calls for support for training programmes for beekeepers on disease prevention and control, as well as for farmers and foresters on botanical knowledge, use of pesticides, the impact of pesticides and actively encourage non-chemical agronomic practices and biological control

12. Calls on the authorities and representative organisations in the Member States to support the dissemination of appropriate scientific and technical knowledge about bee health among beekeepers; underlines the fact that a permanent dialogue is needed between beekeepers, farmers and the relevant

authorities;

13. Stresses the need to ensure adequate training for veterinarians, as well as the possibility for beekeepers to consult veterinarians and the involvement of apiculture specialists in national veterinary authorities;

Veterinary products

14. Asks the Commission to introduce common guidelines regarding veterinary treatment in the sector, with special reference to Varroa mites; calls for guidelines to be introduced for the use of molecules and/or formulations with a base of organic acids and essential oils and other substances authorised for biological pest control; asks the Commission to take into consideration the high cost of veterinary treatment currently borne by beekeepers by comparison with health costs in other livestock sectors,

15. Points out that special attention must be paid to the use of pesticides of the neonicotinoid family that could cause digestive, hormonal and neuronal disruption; Calls on the Commission to comply with the precautionary principle and to impose an EU-wide ban on the use of neonicotinoid pesticides until independent scientific studies prove that there is no chronic exposure to toxins for honeybees and no danger to the environment and public health originating from their use;

16. Calls on the Commission to work out more flexible rules for the authorisation and availability of veterinary products for honeybees, including medicines of natural origin and others that do not have health effects on insects; welcomes the Commission's proposal on the revision of the veterinary medicinal product directive, but notes that the current limited availability of such products should not be used as a basis for the registration/marketing of antibiotics to treat other opportunistic pathologies in honeybee colonies, given their impacts on the quality of bee products and resistance;

17. Welcomes the Commission's intention to introduce maximum residue levels for the use of medicinal products through the 'cascade' procedure in order to eliminate the current legal uncertainty, which hinders the treatment of sick bees;

18. Calls for a timetable to be established leading in the long term to the definitive withdrawal from the market of neurotoxic pesticides and of products for agricultural use containing these substances and of products for agricultural use containing these substances, if the risk to bees arising from their use cannot be excluded;

19. Calls on the Commission to look into the possibility of extending cover under the European Union Veterinary Fund to bee diseases when the fund is next revised;

20. Welcomes the Commission's intention to propose a comprehensive Animal Health Law; calls on the Commission to adjust the scope and financing of European veterinary policy to take account of the specific characteristics of bees and beekeeping so that bee diseases can be combated more effectively via adequate availability of effective medicines in all Member States and financing of bee health in the framework of the European veterinary policy; calls on the Commission to focus its efforts on combating and controlling varroasis in the EU;

Effects of intensive agriculture on bees

21. Emphasises that the EU recently adopted new, stricter rules on the authorisation of plant protection products (pesticides) and their sustainable use, in order to ensure that they are safe for human beings and the environment; notes that these rules include additional, strict criteria relating to bee safety; calls on the Commission to keep Parliament informed about the successful implementation of the new rules;

22. Invites the Commission to improve risk assessment methodology for pesticides to encompass colony health and population development and to ensure full public access to the findings and methodology of ecotoxicological studies included in the authorisation dossiers;

23. Strongly supports prudent EU legislation and thorough scientific risk assessments as regards genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and pesticides; Calls on the Commission to promote further independent scientific research on the long-term effects of genetically modified crops, especially the spread of Bt toxins via pollen on honeybees and wild pollinators in general, on synergies between different pesticides, and on synergies between exposure to pesticides and pathologies; calls for a moratorium on the cultivation of GM crops until independent peer-reviewed studies show there are no negative effects on honeybees' health;

24. Calls on the Commission to consider chronic, larval and sub-lethal toxicity, and substance-pathogen and substance-substance synergies in the risk assessment of pesticides; calls on the Commission to pay special attention to specific pesticides, such as those of the family of the neonicotinoide family (Clothianidin, Thiacloprid, Imidacloprid, Thiamethoxam), phenyl-pyrazoles (Fipronil) and pyrethroids, or active substances such as Chlorpyrifos or Dimethoat, as these active substances in pesticides have a proven adverse effect on bee and colony health; application methods such as seed coating should also be considered;

25. Calls on the Commission, on the basis of reliable and effective tests under real conditions, with harmonised protocols, to consider chronic larval and sub-lethal toxicity in the risk assessment of pesticides, as laid down in Regulation 1107/2009 EC on the placing on the market of plant protection products, which has been in application since 14 June 2011; calls on the Commission also to strengthen research on potential substance-pathogen and substance-substance interactions; notes that all application methods should also be considered;

Recalls the new provisions of Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 to assess active substances in, and plant protection products as such, not only with regard to their acute effects, but also with regard to their chronic effects on colony survival and development, taking into account effects on honeybee larvae and honeybee behaviour; however, points out

(a) that the data requirements, which need to be amended accordingly to do so, will only be applicable at the earliest at the end of 2013,

(b) adequate testing protocols still need to be developed in the meantime, and

(c) that the new provisions will only be applied to the approval of new substances or the renewal of existing approvals as well as to the authorisation of new plant protection products or their renewal, so that existing approvals/authorisations will not be assessed in an appropriate manner for many years to come, unless specifically reviewed;

26. Stresses the importance of sustainable farming and calls on the Member States to transpose and fully implement, as soon as possible, Directive 2009/128/EC on the sustainable use of pesticides, and particularly Article 14 thereof, which highlights that it will be mandatory for all farmers to apply integrated pest management from 2014, starting with all farmers applying crop rotation and active encouragement of non chemical alternatives to pesticides, paying particular attention to those pesticides that may have an adverse effect on bees and colony health;

Production and food safety aspects, protection of origin

27. Calls on the Commission to constantly monitor the animal health situation in source countries, to apply

the strictest animal health requirements and to put in place an appropriate monitoring system for the propagation material coming from third countries, in order to avoid introducing exotic bee diseases/parasites such as *Aethina tumida* beetles and *Tropilaelaps* mites into the EU; calls on the Commission and Member States, in cooperation with beekeeping organisations, to increase transparency regarding the frequency, percentage, characteristics and, above all, the results of the security checks performed at border control posts;

28. Calls for a provisional threshold limit (Reference Point for Action) of 10 ppb to be set for veterinary products authorised in the European Union, in view of the different analytical methods that are applied in the various Member States;

29. Calls on the Commission to include No Action Levels (NALs) or Reference Points for Action (RPAs) or Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) in honey and other apicultural products for substances that cannot be authorised for the European beekeeping sector, as well as to harmonise veterinary border controls and controls on the internal market since, in the case of honey, low-quality imports, adulteration and substitutes distort the market and exert constant pressure on prices and the final quality of the product on the EU's internal market, and there must be a level playing field for products/producers from the EU and from third countries; notes that the MRLs must take into account residues from good veterinary practice;

30. Calls on the Commission to put in place or modify the annexes to Directive 2001/110/EC (Honey Directive) in order to improve the standards of EU production by establishing clear legal definitions for all apicultural products, including honey varieties, and defining the important parameters of the quality of honey, such as proline and saccharase content, low level of HMF or humidity, and adulteration (such as the glycerine content, sugar isotope ratio (C13/C14), pollen spectrum and aroma and sugar content of honey), as well as implementing the ruling of the European Court of Justice on case C-442/09^[7], concerning the labelling of honey containing genetically modified material; calls for support for research into effective methods of detecting adulteration of honey; calls on the Commission to ensure that monitoring of the natural properties of honey which applies to European products also applies to products from third countries;

31. Considers that honey producers should be protected from GMO contamination, and should not bear the costs of contamination which was not their fault; namely costs of analysis checking for contamination and loss of revenue due to lost sales should be compensated by the industry producing the GMO, in line with the polluter pays principle;

32. Calls on the Commission to harmonise rules on labelling with the provisions of the Regulation on Agricultural Quality Schemes and to introduce obligatory labelling with the country of origin for imported and EU-produced apicultural products or, in the case of mixtures of products with different origins, obligatory labelling with every country of origin;

33. In the spirit of the EU's new quality policy, calls on beekeepers, their representative organisations and commercial companies to make better use of the EU origin labelling schemes (PDO and PGI) for hive products, which could contribute to the affordability of apicultural activity, and calls on the Commission, in close cooperation with beekeeping associations, to propose quality denominations and promote the direct sale of beekeeping products on local markets;

34. Calls for action to boost consumption of European honey and apiculture products, including by promoting honeys with characteristics specific to certain varieties and geographical areas;

Biodiversity conservation measures and CAP reform

35. Recalls the European Parliament's resolution of 8 March 2011 on "the EU protein deficit: what

solution for a long-standing problem"[8], especially point AF stating 'whereas, besides cereal and maize cultivation for feed and energy production, the use of extended crop rotation systems, on-farm mixed cropping and grass-clover mixtures, which can have major environmental and agronomic benefits, should be encouraged, since the growing of leguminous crops as part of a rotation system can prevent diseases, regenerate the soil, have a beneficial effect on the population of pollinators and protect the climate' and notes the importance of keeping crop rotation as a key element of the so-called green component of the CAP towards 2020;

36. Calls on the Member States to put sustainable agricultural practices at the heart of the CAP, by supporting as from 2014 to apply a simple package of agronomic practices (including crop rotation, permanent pasture, cover crops, ecological focus areas) and to strengthen and, in the spirit of the new EU Biodiversity Strategy, develop agri-environmental measures specific to the beekeeping sector, encouraging farmers to engage in these in order to support "bee-friendly" grasslands on field margins, and to employ high-diversity rotation with leguminous crops and use non-chemical alternatives;

37. Calls for a food resource strategy for bees to be drawn up with the aim of promoting available, local , diversified, adapted and high-quality food supply for bees through improved management of farmland and non-farmland, for example by incorporating bee nutrition issues into the green and blue belt infrastructure by developing apicultural set-aside areas, flowering hedges, melliferous intercropping and grass verges and by developing expertise amongst farmers in combining agriculture with biodiversity;

38. Stresses the need for consultation with beekeepers by European and national authorities during the drawing up of apiculture programmes and of related legislation, in order to ensure the effectiveness of these programmes and their timely implementation; calls on the Commission to provide significantly more financial resources, by stepping up the current support for apiculture in the CAP after 2013 and guaranteeing the continued existence and improvement of the existing support programmes(Regulation (EC) No 1221/97) for the beekeeping sector, and to encourage the development of joint projects, and on the Member States to provide technical assistance for the beekeeping sector; calls on the Commission to ensure that the system of co-financing is compatible with the establishment of direct aid under the first pillar of the CAP (optional implementation of the current Article 68 of the CAP) by those states that consider it necessary; stresses also the need to encourage young beekeepers to enter the sector; calls on the Commission to provide a safety net or a common insurance system for apiculture in order to mitigate the impact of crisis situations on beekeepers;

39. Calls on the Commission to clarify, in the forthcoming reform of the CAP, the support measures and aid to be assigned to the European beekeeping sector, taking account of the environmental and social public goods that honeybee colonies provide via pollination and of the environmental service performed by beekeepers in managing their bee colonies; Urges the Commission, within the framework of the EU's new biodiversity strategy, to make financial resources available for apiculture as a priority and/or at a higher rate in all projects and actions submitted under the CAP dealing exclusively with subspecies and eco-types of *Apis mellifera* native to each region;

40. Calls on the Commission to consider the possibility of creating a special scheme for assistance to beekeepers within the framework of the direct aid scheme, for example through bee colony payments, which will help safeguard the beekeeping sector in the EU, keep beekeepers in beekeeping, encourage young people to become beekeepers and ensure bees continue to act as pollinators;

41. Calls on the Commission to promote sustainable agricultural practices in all parts of the CAP, to encourage all farmers to employ simple agronomic practices in line with Directive 2009/128/EC, and to strengthen agri-environmental measures specific to the beekeeping sector, in the spirit of the new EU Biodiversity Strategy; calls on the Member States to lay down agri-environmental measures geared to apiculture in their rural development programmes and to take a holistic approach to farming and using

biological control where possible;

42. Reaffirms that the Commission considers honeybees to be a domesticated species, and therefore a livestock sector, which facilitates better health, welfare and protection⁶ measures^[9] and makes for better information on conserving wild pollinators; calls, therefore, for a bee health protection strategy to be established and for the beekeeping sector to be incorporated into agricultural legislation and veterinary legislation taking account of its specific character, particularly with regard to compensation for beekeepers' losses in their bee population;

43. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

[\[1\]](#) Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0440.

[\[2\]](#) OJ L 299, 16.11.2007, p. 1-149.

[\[3\]](#) OJ C 24, 30.1.2010, p. 28.

[\[4\]](#) OJ L 309, 24.11.2009, p. 1.

[\[5\]](#) OJ L 309, 24.11.2009, p. 71.

[\[6\]](#) Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0084.

[\[7\]](#) OJ C 24, 30.1.2010, p. 28.

[\[8\]](#) Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0084

[\[9\]](#) Through initiatives such as the Animal Health Strategy for the EU (2007-2013), which helps provide a single and clear regulatory framework for animal health, improves coordination and the efficient use of resources by relevant European agencies, and emphasises the importance of maintaining and improving diagnostic capability.

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