Resolution on the situation in the beekeeping sector

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Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 23 November 2010 the European Parliament adopted a resolution tabled on behalf of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development on the situation in the beekeeping sector. It welcomes the Commission report on the implementation of Articles 105 et seq. of Council Regulation (EC) No 1234/2007 on measures improving the general conditions for the production and marketing of apiculture products (COM (2010)0267), but notes that the current programmes come to an end in 2013 and is concerned about the **numerous challenges and problems still faced by the European apiculture sector**.

These include marketing issues, price volatility, recruiting young beekeepers to the sector, the ageing profile of beekeepers in the EU, decreasing numbers of colonies and the general difficulties emerging from multifactoral bee mortality. Members recall that bee **mortality is an increasing problem** in many regions owing to a synergy of factors, including bee diseases, bees' weakened immunity to pathogens and parasites, climate and, to some extent, land use change, with periods when there is a lack of food and foraging for bees, and also owing to the progressive eradication of melliferous plant species and the use of plant protection products and unsustainable farming techniques. With 76% of food production and 84% of plant species dependent on pollination by bees, Parliament calls on the Commission to do more to aid the beekeeping sector in the common agricultural policy (CAP) after 2013, by reviewing legislation, boosting funding and stepping up investment in research.

Members call on the Commission to consider, in the framework of the legislative proposal on agricultural quality policy, **changing the rules on origin labelling of honey** in order to avoid misleading information to consumers, especially in case of a blend of honeys originating from EU and non-EU countries. They stress the need to improve sanitary conditions for the product by harmonising border controls, especially for third-country imports, since low-quality honey imports, adulteration and honey substitutes distort the market and exert constant pressure on prices and the final quality of the product on the EU's internal market. Members take the view that the name of any processed product containing honey as an ingredient or any graphic or other visual element on the label or on the packaging of that processed product should be allowed to make reference to honey in the name of the product only if at least 50% of the sugar content originates from honey.

On bee disease, Parliament recognises that the development of innovative treatments against Varroa mites, implicated in considerable annual losses in certain regions, is of high importance. There is a need to make effective veterinary treatments against Varroamites and all kinds of related diseases more widely available throughout Europe, and Parliament asks the Commission to **introduce common guidelines regarding veterinary treatment in the sector**, for which cooperation with beekeepers' organisations is vital.

The Commission is asked to do the following:

- adapt the scope and financing of European veterinary policy to take account of the specific nature of bees and beekeeping with a view to ensuring more effective bee-disease control and availability of effective and standardised veterinary medicine throughout the Union, in collaboration with beekeepers‘ organisations;

- improve coordination of the various research programmes carried out in Member States with a view to establishing an action plan for tackling bee mortality, and this should include mainstreaming sustainable, pollinator-friendly farming practices by avoiding monocultures without rotation;
- implement the recommendations of the abovementioned scientific report adopted by EFSA on 3 December 2009, notably funding ‘specific studies that build on the existing work in progress to improve the knowledge and understanding of factors that affect bee health’;
- ensure that data on the effects on the environment and specific species of plant protection products (such as coated seeds), genetically modified crops and the spread of toxins via pollen are made public and that any new initiatives are based on sound science and statistical evidence;
- launch a study on those matters and to present its results in a reasonable timeframe.

With respect to the future, Parliament calls on the Commission to ensure that existing support for the apiculture sector and the future of this policy is maintained and strengthened in the CAP after 2013. It welcomes the Commission's decision of July 2010 to increase the budget for beekeeping programmes, and calls for financial support for education, information campaigns and training of new and professional apiarists, with a particular focus on encouraging new apiarists to gain a foothold in the sector, including the possibility of exchanges of experience with those in other countries.

Members call on the Commission to study, in agreement with Member States, the opportunities for the establishment of an EU veterinary guidance plan on bee health with a view to ensuring access to veterinary medicine where necessary, which would be financed under the European veterinary policy.

They take the view that, owing to the possible influence of plant protection products on colony development in addition to the effects on adult bees, plant protection product effects on the whole hive should be considered as well. It recalls in this respect that the Commission stated in plenary, at the time of the adoption of Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009, that when revising the data requirements for active substances and plant protection products, the Commission would pay particular attention to follow-up examinations and to study protocols, making possible risk assessment which takes into account the direct and indirect exposure of bees to these products, in particular through nectar, pollen and water, which can contain traces of pesticides originating from water collected by bees.

Lastly, Parliament calls on the Commission to coordinate national monitoring programmes for labelling requirements and risk mitigation measures which should be included in plant protection product authorisation, as well as exposure monitoring programmes for plant protection products.