Honey: application of measures to improve the production and marketing

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PREVIOUS COMMUNITY LEGISLATION: Measures applied in the past In the 1960s there was an aid scheme for the purchase of denatured sugar intended for the winter feeding of bees. The scheme was abolished in 1980 and replaced by another one which granted direct aid to beekeepers' associations for the purchase of such sugar. In the 1980s the aid scheme changed and aid was made available on the basis of the number of hives and with a view to preventing diseases, in particular varroasis. The aid was channelled through beekeepers' associations. The Commission subsequently submitted a report to the Council on the application of the scheme in which it proposed the abolition thereof for reasons of financial and economic efficiency: the structure of the sector was highly diverse, involving a large number of widely dispersed beneficiaries for most of whom agriculture was only a part-time activity. In exchange, the report proposed special measures such as structural measures and research into the diseases affecting bees. Measures currently in force. There are currently several types of measure: 1. Market access: The Common Customs Tariff applicable within the EU is 27% (25% for the GSP), with free access to the Community market for products from ACP countries which have signed the Lomé Convention. Under the GATT Agreement the Common Customs Tariff will gradually fall by 36% (6% per year over 6 years) to reach a final rate of 17.3% in the year 2000. Under Regulation No 519/94 (OJ L 67, 10.3.1994) the quantitative restrictions on honey imports (of which France and Spain were beneficiaries) are abolished and a safeguard clause is introduced to protect producers against serious losses resulting from the importation of competitive products from third countries. Council Directive 74/409/EEC (OJ L 221, 12.8.1974) on the harmonization of the laws of the Member States relating to honey lays down the rules which must be observed by third-country honey producers wishing to market their produce within the Community. The directive is to be revised by the Commission and particular consideration should be given to the marketing rules laid down therein. 2. Structural measures are of two types, general and specific. The Objective 5a measures include the following schemes for beekeepers: (a) Regulation (EEC) No 2328/91 (OJ L 218, 6.8.1991), amended by Regulation (EEC) No 3669/93 (OJ L 328, 31.12.1993), establishes a Community aid scheme for investment in farms for the purpose of implementing material improvement plans. It also establishes aid for mountain and less-favoured areas but it does not cover beekeeping and aid can only be granted in cases where the planting of honey-yielding crops is intended for the feeding of bees. The regulation also provides aid for the vocational training of young farmers and investment aid beneficiaries. (b) Regulation (EEC) No 1360/78 (OJ L 166, 23.6.1978), amended by Regulation (EEC) No 764/93 (OJ L 77, 31.3.1993), establishes a Community aid scheme for the setting-up of producers' associations. In the case of the honey sector the general scheme applies to Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal. The aid is paid during the first five years following the setting-up of an association and amounts to a maximum of 5%, 5%, 4%, 3% and 2% of the value of the produce marketed by the association. There are currently 49 producers' organizations: two in Spain, one in Greece and 46 in Italy. (c) Regulation (EEC) No 866/90 (OJ L 91, 6.4.1990), amended by Regulation (EEC) No 3669/93, establishes a Community scheme of aid for the processing and marketing of agricultural products. The only countries to have taken advantage of this regulation are Greece (ECU 0.5 million in 1992-93) and Italy (ECU 0.8 million in 1992-93). (d) Regulation (EEC) No 2078/92 (OJ L 215, 30.7.1992) establishes a Community aid scheme designed to encourage agricultural production methods which are compatible with environmental protection and the maintenance of the countryside. It may be applied to the beekeeping sector (Article 2b and 2d) and the maximum premium is ECU 250 per hectare, with maximum Community part-financing of 75% in Objective 1 regions and 50% in other regions. 3. Regional measures: Certain specific actions additional to the earlier ones apply to Objective 1 and 5b regions. The operations undertaken on the basis of the programmes for these objectives are extremely varied and their purpose is to bring about agricultural diversification. Beekeeping also falls within the scope of the rural development measures to be adopted under the LEADER Community initiative as part of the rural development

strategy. 4. Measures to improve quality: Regulations (EEC) No 2081/92 and 2082/92 (OJ L 208, 24.7.1992) on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs and on certificates of special character for agricultural products and foodstuffs may be applied to beekeeping. In the case of designations of origin and geographical indications, producers must be established in a fixed location or must practise limited transhumance in a certain region. A Community register exists which they can use for registering honey. 5. Specific support measures for beekeeping: Regulations (EEC) No 1601/92 (OJ L 173, 27.6.1992) and 2019/93 (OJ L 184, 27.7.1993) introducing specific measures for the Canary Islands and the smaller Aegean islands provide for aid of, respectively, ECU 20 per hive (up to a maximum of 5000 hives) and ECU 10 per hive (up to a maximum of 50 000 hives) in the territories concerned and depending on whether or not the beekeeper belongs to a beekeepers' group within the meaning of Regulation (EEC) No 1360/78. PREVIOUS EP POSITION: At Parliament's initiative, beekeepers' organizations recognized by the Commission received aid to help them combat varroasis in 1986, 1987 and 1989. In 1991 the Commission submitted to the Council a proposal (COM(91)328 final, OJ C 263, 9.10.1991) with a view to having honey included as one of the products in Annex II of the Treaty which are covered by Regulation (EEC) No 827/1968 establishing a series of mechanisms (application of the Common Customs Tariff, abolition of national quantity restrictions, safeguard clauses, etc.), a proposal which has not yet been accepted by the Council and which was rejected at the time by Parliament (resolution A3-102/92) since it considered the measures derived from the regulation to be inadequate to sustain such a level of production from the environmental point of view. On the other hand, Parliament has twice called for a specific COM for honey to be set up: in 1992 by means of Mr Böge's report on beekeeping in the European Community and the problems and requirements thereof (A3-0154/92, adopted on 15 May 1992) and, more recently, by means of Mrs Lulling's report on the Commission's discussion paper on the situation of European beekeeping (A4-0116 /94, adopted on 20 January 1995). Parliament takes the view that the proposals which the Commission has announced it intends to submit in its discussion paper COM(94)256 (see paragraph 7) are not in themselves sufficient to alleviate the difficult economic situation of beekeeping in the EU. For this reason and in view of the economic and environmental significance of beekeeping in the EU, Parliament has proposed aseries of measures to the Council: a Community pollination grant per hive and per area, an action plan to combat bee diseases, an income compensation grant channelled through producers' organizations, the establishment of Community standards for the marketing of honey (requirement for the label to indicate the botanical and the geographical origin of the honey) to be imposed on imported honeys, and specific hygiene and quality standards. Parliament also wishes to ensure that the agriculture structure policy (mountain compensatory allowance (MCA), training for young beekeepers, cooperatives), is applied appropriately to beekeeping, that measures to promote research and quality in the beekeeping sector are adapted and that a comprehensive statistical study on honey production and the honey market is carried out. In connection with the budgetary negotiations the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development has called on a number of occasions for the creation of a budget heading devoted to special aid for beekeeping. SITUATION IN THE MEMBER STATES The sector has recently had to face high production costs, competition on the international market and losses resulting from bee diseases. The EU is the world's third largest producer of honey (126 000 tonnes) and the world's largest importer (48% of the total market). The EU is deficient in honey, current consumption being 250 000 tonnes and the self-supply rate only 50%. Amongst the Member States the three largest producers are France, Germany and Spain (36 000, 25 000 and 25 000 tonnes respectively. In the EU there are 435 000 beekeepers, of whom only 13 000 are commercial (operating at least 150 hives), and they are concentrated in three Member States (34% in Spain, 23% in France and 23% in Greece). The size of holdings varies from one Member State to another (272 hives per holding in Spain, 257 in Greece and 176 in France). Two-thirds of the honey produced is multifloral and one-third are honeys of various monofloral types. In the case of Germany and Greece the percentages for the production of honey of differentiated botanical origin and their high level consumption levels are interpreted as a positive result of the identification of their botanical origin by consumers.