



PRESS RELEASE

“The important is not to be optimistic or pessimistic but to be determined”

Jean Monnet quoted by H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco

For the third consecutive year, bees made the buzz at the European Parliament during the European Week of Bees and Pollinators and the high-level conference organised by the EP Intergroup on “*Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development*” on Wednesday 2 April 2014 entitled: **“A New Spring for Bees”**. The conference was organised under the patronage of Gaston Franco MEP in the presence H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco, whose Foundation leads an outstanding battle for the protection of biodiversity, and in particular of wild bees.

H.S.H. Prince Albert II opened the session with a genuine ode to the bee: *“Bees are the owners of a past, a present and a future; this future would be endangered if the status quo remains.”*

European Commissioner Tonio Borg in charge of Consumer Health welcomed the international dimension of the conference: *“We are dealing with an issue that has huge implications for each and every one of us – not only in Europe, but all across the world,”* he argued. Dr. Borg stressed the high controversy on the use of pesticides as the number one factor for bee mortality and called for more dialogue with all the stakeholders to find sustainable and long-term solutions. **UNEP’s Executive Director, Mr. Achim Steiner**, put an emphasis on the importance of pollination services and biodiversity as key elements to ensure the transition of our societies to a green economy.

In Europe, it is estimated that 7 billion bees are needed to fulfill the task of pollination correctly; indeed, pollination plays a major role in preserving ecosystems. *“Bees keep on dying and the whole balance of the ecosystem is being threatened,”* declared **Gaston Franco MEP, Vice-Chair of the Intergroup**. He added: *“The European institutions have a duty to inform the public opinion on the current state of bee health and to coordinate actions at the EU level in support of bees and the beekeeping sector.”*

In a video message, **Dacian Ciolos, European Commissioner in charge of Agriculture**, stated that 30% of the budget allocation for direct payments and rural development under the reformed CAP will be used to promote sustainable agricultural practices. In addition, supplementary measures will specifically target the European beekeeping sector: in the next 3 years, over 100 million Euros will be allocated by the EU to finance beekeeping programmes, affirmed the Commissioner. Yet, he recognised that one of the biggest challenges the EU has to face lies in the multiple dimensions of the bee issue: *“The debate on bees encapsulates once again the inter-connection of the environmental, economical and social aspects in agriculture,”* he said.

Mr. Karl Falkenberg, Director General for Environment in the Commission reiterated the engagement of his DG in the combat against biodiversity loss with the Nature 2000 programme. While valuable, he held that these isolated sites need to be connected and that space for bees needs to be found also in areas outside the Natura system. Furthermore, he greeted the EU decision to combat invasive species that may also be responsible for the loss of bee populations and have serious negative impact on EU biodiversity. Mr. Falkenberg highlighted the need for further investments in research to fully understand the multiple causes of bee population loss.

In the first panel debate, **Mr. Jean-Charles Bocquet, Director General of the European Crops Protection Association (ECPA)** called for an end to the demonization of the industry, which instead of being the source of the problem is committed to find and deliver solutions to the problems of diseases, nutrition, habitats etc. The industry believes that *“today we are over-focusing on pesticides and are thus neglecting other factors. We believe in collaboration and dialogue among all relevant stakeholders to find effective solutions,”* he argued. This message was echoed by **Mr. Jean-Marc Petat, Director of the sustainable development department of BASF France**, who stressed that *“the industry intends to act responsibly and contribute to effectively develop responses to improve the health of bee populations.”*

Pathologies and diseases are often also pointed as a cause of bee mortality, as is the lack of effective medicines to treat them, a situation that is aggravated by the use of unsustainable remedies. **Mr. Nicolas Vidal Naquet of the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe** underlined *“the key role that veterinarians play to solve the crisis in the beekeeping sector and in particular its sanitary component.”*

Several beekeepers represented in the panel and the audience expressed concern with the negative consequences of reformed CAP for the beekeeping profession, including its international dimension. **Mr. Philippe Lecompte, President of Réseau Biodiversité pour les Abeilles** argued that the development of apicultural set-aside, which represents a real oasis for biodiversity, should be further encouraged by the CAP. *“Better fed, our bees will be more resistant,”* **Mr. Etienne Bruneau (COPA COGECA)** on his part called for a holistic approach to help the bees and the beekeeping sector in Europe.

It was generally accepted that part of the solution would lie in redoubling efforts in science and education for the beekeepers. A consensus emerged on the necessity of establishing a systemic dialogue with all the stakeholders without which there would be no spring for bees!

Mrs. Astrid Lulling MEP concluded by saying that *“instead of subsidizing the loss due to bee mortality, the EU should fund innovative solutions to increase the number of bees.”*

The European Commission, the EU Reference Laboratory for Honeybee Health and Anses just released on 7 April 2014 the first official set of EU data on honeybee colony mortalities,¹ a comparable study across borders drawn up with the voluntary co-operation of the veterinary services of 17 Member States.

Other panelists included:

Mr. Piet Wit, IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM)

Mr. Oliver Schweiger, STEP

Mrs. Monique Eloit, World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)

Mrs. Mariya Gabriel, MEP

Mr. Gilles Salvat, ANSES

Mrs. Maria Betti, JRC

Dr. Bach Kim Nguyen, University of Liège (Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech)/ BeeOdiversity

Mrs. Anne Gourmelon, OECD

Mr. Samuel Lardeux, ONF

Mr. Martin Dermine, Pan Europe

Mr. Alojz Peterle, MEP

Mrs. Julie Girling, MEP

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/live_animals/bees/docs/bee-report_en.pdf

Mr. Eric Poudelet, DG SANCO
Dr. Adrian Siceanu, University of Bucharest
Dr. Luis Carazo Jimenez, DG AGRI

This meeting was organised by the Secretariat of the European Parliament Intergroup on “*Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development*” run jointly by the European Bureau for Conservation and Development (EBCD) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

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This conference was organised with the kind support of the Foundation Prince Albert II of Monaco, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and GDF Suez.

It took place in the framework of the 3rd European Week of Bees and Pollinators under the patronage of Gaston Franco MEP, in partnership with the Foundation Prince Albert II of Monaco, UNEP, the European Parliament Intergroup on “*Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development*”, the University of Liège (Gembloux Agrio-Bio Tech), Réseau Biodiversité pour les Abeilles and DGF Suez.

