

# POLLINIS

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A NONPROFIT AND INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATION THAT CAMPAIGNS FOR SUSTAINABLE FARMING IN EUROPE. POLLINIS FIGHTS AGAINST THE SYSTEMATIC USE OF PESTICIDES, FOR THE PROTECTION OF POLLINATORS AND PROMOTES ALTERNATIVE AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES. WE ARE SUPPORTED EXCLUSIVELY BY DONATIONS FROM PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS.

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## STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLE ON THE NEED FOR EU RULES TO PROTECT THE SUBSPECIES AND ECOTYPES OF HONEY BEES INDIGENOUS TO THE TERRITORY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION.

### WHEREAS

The honey bee species *Apis mellifera* appeared on the European continent a million years ago, and resulted in several subspecies, fruits of millennia of natural evolution and adaptation to the climate, flora and geographical constraints of the regions that *Apis mellifera* colonised,

Each of these subspecies has acquired its own, hereditary characteristics distinguishing it from the others, between which there is nevertheless always sexual compatibility,

They were formed without any influence by humans, since they began to exploit bees by putting them in hives only around 5,000 years ago,

In each of these subspecies indigenous to the territory of the Union, ecotypes can be distinguished, all of which have been formed in the same way,

### WHEREAS

The diversity of these bees constitutes a natural heritage of great value worthy of being preserved,

It is also in the interest of humankind to safeguard them, because each subspecies is, in its natural range, a better pollinator of wild flora and crops than any other,

It is also in the interest of beekeepers to raise bees belonging to the native subspecies of their region, since their colonies are more likely to survive and thrive there,

The scientific community recognises precisely the genetic factor as one of the explanations for the globally catastrophic situation of beekeeping in the European Union, in particular the weakness and abnormal mortalities of colonies observed over the last fifteen years,

## **WHEREAS**

This precious heritage has been seriously threatened since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the uncontrolled imports and exchanges of non-native bees, which lead to high rates of hybridisation of indigenous populations in some member states, and thus a dilution of their genetics likely to lead to their disappearance,

In order to stop this genetic pollution, local initiatives of conservation zones have been developed over the last fifty years, but are often precarious insofar as the national public authorities do not generally support them in legal terms, either by introducing the possibility of creating beekeeping reserves, by regulating imports and introductions of bees according to genetic criteria, or by developing regulations for the use of local bees,

Several third European states already legally protect their native honey bee(s) by delimiting areas reserved for its/their breeding,

Several member states have also put in place laws and regulations aimed at ensuring the genetic conservation of subspecies or even ecotypes of *Apis mellifera* on a local or national scale, but these systems are insufficient to ensure good protection at the community level,

The problem of the conservation of honey bee subspecies indigenous to the territory of the Union must be regulated at its level,

## **WHEREAS**

The Union is party to the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (1982), Article 11 of which states that the signatories undertake "to strictly control the introduction of non-native species",

The Union is party to the Rio de Janeiro Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), including: Article 8.a. which states that its signatories undertake to establish "a system of protected areas or areas where special measures must be taken to conserve biological diversity"; Article 2 which defines biological diversity as "variability of living organisms from all sources" including "species and species diversity"; and Article 8.h. which states that its signatories undertake to prevent the introduction and control or eradication of "alien species that threaten ecosystems, habitats or species",

The European Commission has, in a communication of 4 February 1998 to the European Council and Parliament on the Union strategy in favour of biological diversity, requested the Union to "take measures to preserve the genetic resources of wild and domesticated species and prevent the processes of genetic erosion" (II.3.),

The Commission states in the communication: "The presence or introduction of alien species or subspecies may cause imbalances and changes in ecosystems. This phenomenon can have potentially irreversible consequences, through hybridisation (...), on the indigenous elements of biological diversity. In applying the precautionary principle, the Community should take measures to prevent exotic species from having harmful effects on ecosystems, priority species and the habitats on which they depend, and to focus on controlling, managing or eliminating where possible, the risks that these species represent." II.4.),

Furthermore, the Commission states in the communication: "Economic and social incentives, such as subsidies, taxes and duties, can have a significant impact on biodiversity. In some cases, they can be used to modify or maintain patterns of production and consumption that affect biodiversity. (...) In parallel with the definition and introduction of incentives, consideration should be given to removing those that have a negative impact on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity." II.8. and II.9.),

The Court of Justice of the European Union, in its decision *Criminal Procedure c/ Ditlev Bluhme* of 3 December 1998 in Case C-67/97 concerning the black bee of the Danish island of Læsø, held to be in conformity with Community law national measures for the genetic preservation of indigenous populations of honey bees with distinctive characteristics, recognising that these measures contribute to maintaining biodiversity by ensuring the subsistence of the population concerned, *a fortiori* when their genes are recessive,

In its Resolution on bee health and the challenges of the beekeeping sector of 15 November 2011 (2011/2108 (INI)), the European Parliament requested the Commission to provide funds to support the projects and actions of conservation of subspecies and ecotypes of *Apis mellifera* native to each region) (43), and called for exploring the possibility of creating a programme or regulation under the Life+ financial instrument that would allow the establishment of a pan-European project to rebuild wild populations of these species (point 50),

Regulation (EU) N° 1143 of 22 October 2014 on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species defines these species as any living specimen of a lower-ranking species, subspecies or taxon of animal (...) introduced outside its natural range (...) and any hybrid or variety or breed likely to survive and subsequently reproduce (...) and whose introduction or spread has been shown to pose a threat to biodiversity and associated ecosystem services, or to have adverse effects on biodiversity and those services"(Article 3),

The said regulation states that the threats to biodiversity and associated ecosystem services come in different forms, "including serious impacts on native species and the structure and functioning of ecosystems by (...) replacing native species over a large part of their range and by genetic modifications through hybridisation" (point 3),

Article 4 of that regulation provides that 'invasive alien species of concern to the Union' - that is to say, inter alia aliens to the entire territory of the Union - should be listed by it and, in particular, the import, transport, marketing and introduction into the environment should be prohibited, but in the first version of this list, published by the Commission on 13 July 2016 (implementing regulation N° 2016/1141), the only insect is the Asian hornet,

Article 11 of that regulation, however, provides for the possibility for the Commission to require "by means of implementing acts" the implementation of measures for "enhanced regional cooperation", at the request and justification of member states, when a species indigenous to the Union is nevertheless harmful in their territory,

The Agriculture Committee of the European Parliament is preparing a draft resolution *Prospects and challenges for the EU apiculture sector (2017/2115 (INI))*, whose form it will adopt on 22 November 2017, including, potentially, a number of amendments calling on the Union to take measures to conserve its native honey bees: "Whereas the long-term health and sustainability of the apiculture sector in Europe rests on ensuring the long-term health and sustainability of local honey bee ecotypes, given their diversity and adaptation to local environments" (am. 191) "underlines the extraordinary genetic heritage, diversity and capacity for adaptation of local, endemic honeybee populations, each tailored over generations to the particularities of their local environment, and insists upon the need to protect this vital genetic patrimony" (am. 350); "underlines the importance of genetic diversity in honeybee sub-species and the need to protect local ecotypes in order to facilitate resistance to invasive species and diseases and thus ensure the long-term sustainability of European honeybee populations (am. 365) "considers that the various ecotypes of the native honey bee of northern and western Europe, adapted to their different local environments over generations and over millennia, constitute an invaluable genetic resource indispensable for food production for present and future generations which must be safeguarded as a matter of priority" (am. 376); "Insists that all efforts at EU, Member State, regional and local level to support the apiculture sector necessarily require parallel efforts to protect local honey bee populations " (am. 386); "Recalls the legal duty of Member States within the original natural range of *Apis mellifera mellifera* to preserve or establish protection areas for their native honey bees, in accordance with the 1992 UN Convention on Biological Diversity" (am. 389) ; "calls on the European Commission and Member States to put in place measures to increase legal protection and financial support for local honey bee ecotypes and populations throughout the European Union, including by way of legally protected locally endemic honeybee conservation areas" (am. 392) .

**→ IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ALL CITIZENS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION THAT THE DECISION-MAKING BODIES OF THE UNION DEFINITELY LAY DOWN RULES WHICH**

**GUARANTEE THE SAFEGUARDING OF SUB-SPECIES OF HONEY BEES NATIVE TO THE TERRITORY OF THE UNION, IN ORDER TO PROTECT DEPENDENT HERITAGE, ECOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL INTERESTS.**

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