



Bee Week 2018 - High-Level Conference - Event Report

28 June – European Parliament, Brussels

Opening

Since 2012, the ‘European Bee and Pollination Week’ is held every year in the European Parliament in Brussels. This conference has become a must-attend event and brings together all stakeholders in the sector: European Members of Parliament, representatives of the EU institutions, beekeepers, farmers, scientists, veterinarians, manufacturers, NGOs and citizens. Together, they exchange proposals with public authorities to promote a sustainable beekeeping chain capable of ensuring the sustainability of the valuable service of pollination and its consequences: ecosystem services, biodiversity, production and food security.

This year, the 7th edition of the ‘European Bee and Pollination Week’ focused on “How is the agricultural community mobilised to protect Bees”, while hosted by **MEP Michel Dantin**, Chair of the “Apiculture & Bee Health” Working Group of the European Parliament Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development”. Mr. Dantin welcomed the High-Level Conference attendees reminding them that this year’s edition highlighted the very close co-operation between beekeepers and farmers.

While **MEP Pavel Poc**, Chair of the European Parliament Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development”, opened the Conference, he reminded the participants about the biodiversity decline, which our planet is nowadays facing, mainly due to the loss of habitats, climate change, pollution and diseases. Mr. Poc also stressed that this decline affects particularly pollinators; “it is a serious problem considering the services they provide for our ecosystems”. Therefore, Bee Week paves the way, offering a multi-stakeholder meeting to address this development, as it is also of significant meaning to reduce and use the chemicals affecting their survival in a sustainable way.

After this, FAO Expert on bees and pollinators **Riccardo Jannoni** addressed the public, reminding the importance of raising awareness on this issue via the naming of May 20th as World Bee Day. For Mr. Jannoni, “there is a need for increased commitment to this threatened sector, which can also have a positive impact on biodiversity, food production and reducing hunger. The beekeeping activity can offer viable and sustainable alternatives compared to intrusive agriculture transformation. With the major threat being land management, a joint stakeholders’ partnership is crucial, including finding common grounds between beekeepers and farmers, from which they will both benefit from.”

Following the above, EU Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries **Karmenu Vella** addressed the conference participants via video-message. During his intervention, he underlined the importance of pollinators, which serve as indicators of our environment’s quality, but also contribute to the growth of the economy. While many of these wild species are on the verge of extinction, the work that needs to be done would include smarter policies, monitoring and better land management in order to achieve food security, according to Mr. Vella, who also stressed the close relation and interlink among the beekeeping sector and agricultural community.

Representing the European Commission, **Alina Ujupan** delivered a message on behalf of **Mariya Gabriel**, EU Commissioner on Digital Economy and Society. From her point of view, apiculture is a sector with a great potential for technological growth. Such development could help anticipate and react to the decline of population within the hives, by monitoring for instance raw data via wireless connection. “There is a huge potential to make agriculture smart and reduce the pressure on pollinators, which can’t be replaced because of the complex interaction they have with nature“. A current key objective is to create synergies that will help tackle this issue, rendering this sector sustainable at an economic, environment and social scale.

EU Commissioner on Agriculture & Rural Development **Phil Hogan** made a video-intervention as well, mentioning that “apiculture in Europe is an important part of the agricultural sector“, while the decline of pollinators is a serious threat for agriculture. In relation to this, Mr. Hogan pointed out the need to ban neonicotinoids’ use. As funding opportunities have been enhanced, the next steps would be to define strategic objectives and set actions to be taken by the EU. With reference to the future Common Agricultural Policy, Mr. Hogan mentioned that the European Commission proposes to strengthen its assistance towards beekeepers, as “we have come a long way, but still have to step up” our efforts.

Eric Masset, Copa-Cogeca Chair of the Working Party on Dried Fodder, took the floor highlighting that “today the major goal is to facilitate exchanges between farmers and beekeepers, in order to work better together in the future.” As Mr. Masset indicated, farmers need pollination for further development of their cultivation as well as diversification, and beekeepers need the plants to feed their bee colonies. The interaction between the two activities needs to be symbiotic, not conflictive, according to Mr. Masset. This is something which will also help reinforce habitats and biodiversity, while remunerating these good practices could help deploy this way of thinking.

Tobin Robinson from EFSA followed-up to provide the audience with the state of play of the EU Bee Partnership. Last year’s Bee Week Scientific Symposium concluded in an agreement among stakeholders to set up an EU Bee Partnership, a platform run by plenty stakeholders aiming to reinforce society in ensuring that bees can thrive and prosper. The pressures on pollinators are not only related to agriculture, but also diseases, invasive species, loss of habitat and climate change. The main points of the EU Bee Partnership, the mandate of which was just signed by the European Parliament, are the development of an inventory, data harmonisation, development of tools for bee health assessment, provision of advice for decision-makers, creation of a dedicated dissemination strategy and securing EU resources.

Dr. Bach Kim Nguyen from the University of Gembloux gave the second presentation of the morning session reporting the key concerns and recommendations raised during the scientific symposium and workshops. The central message of his intervention was the need for collaboration between farmers and beekeepers, but also with the scientists and the politicians. The farmers are willing to change but they need the tools and knowledge to do it in an economically safe way. Tomorrow’s agriculture aims to be multi-disciplinary, in order to fight these pressures. As a result, the scientific models need to also include socio-economic aspects to be more realistic. A key reminder for Dr. Nguyen was that apiculture is a part of agriculture, and these should not be strictly separated. “We need to give the tools to the agricultural world to motivate them.” Furthermore, as there is no specific procedure for someone to become a beekeeper, the suggestion would be to create a European school of beekeeping for professionals, as it would also help with the standardisation of methods.

First Panel

European strategy for bees – What EU policy for bees and pollination?

The first panel, chaired by **MEP Michel Dantin**, included:

- **Jens Schaps, Director for Common Market Organisations for agricultural products, DG AGRI, European Commission**
- **Stefan Leiner, Head of Biodiversity Unit, DG Environment, European Commission**
- **Luc Bas, IUCN European Regional Office Director, International Union for the Conservation of Nature**

In the context of the first panel of the High-Level Conference, the presentation of **Jens Schaps** described the actions for the beekeeping sector in the future CAP, covering the time-frame 2021-2027. Within this, there are support programs in place to improve the general condition for beekeepers, such as the National Apiculture Programmes, the voluntary implementation of which is up to each member state. According to Mr. Schaps, the objectives and priorities of the next CAP are to foster a smart and resilient agricultural sector, bolster environmental care and climate action, strengthen the socio-economic fabric of rural areas and enhance knowledge basis, subsidiarity and performance, alongside synergies with other policies. What is of significant meaning for Mr. Schaps is that the future needs more policy coherence, and efficient synergies.

Following that, **Stefan Leiner** presented the expectations from the EU Pollinators Initiative. The first point made was to remember that this topic stands within the biodiversity loss and needs to be addressed as such. Pollinator decline was a topic of the first IPBES report, which attested of the severe impacts it has, as well as the key issues related to it, for instance human wellbeing and food security. Mr. Leiner informed the audience that while a lot has been already done in the EU, policy coherence needs to be further strengthened. In particular this is the case with the agricultural policy where key synergies lie. “We need to mobilize the farming community to be part of these initiatives”, highlighted Mr. Leiner, who moved on to present the main aspects of the initiative in regards to agriculture; monitoring pollinators and developing a pollinator indicator, measures for pollinator habitats and integrated pest management, enhancing dialogue and cooperation between agriculture, apiculture, local authorities, administration and scientists.

The last panellist was **Luc Bas**, presenting the need to act for wild pollinators. For Mr. Bas, the focus is mainly on honey bees but it is important to remember the importance of wild pollinators, too. Even though the agreements to protect nature have increased, the biodiversity decline is still present. The pressure on bees does not only induce a decline in their number, but also a productivity loss. The pollinator indicator is related to the health of the ecosystem, and should be used to guide the future CAP. According to Mr. Bas, the IPBES recent report on land degradation underlines the need for farmers to understand this devastation, and the general impacts brought by land degradation, while over 27 years 75% of insects’ biomass has disappeared.

While closing the first panel session of the day, **MEP Michel Dantin** addressed a final message with reference to the European Parliament initiative report on the perspective and challenges in the apiculture sector. Regarding the products from the hives, a lot of imitations are commercialized and have a negative impact on the beekeepers’ economy. As a directive was set up for honey, this needs to be extended to all hives’ products too. Also, the need to sensitize people about the positive effects of these products’ consumption plays a significant role in safeguarding the economy. Therefore, the therapeutic benefits of these products need to be attested, while all these actions need to be economically safe; otherwise they will not be efficiently implemented.

This panel session was followed by a fruitful interaction with the audience. During this, it was stressed that the main change, that needs to be quickly implemented, is the use of pollinators as indicators of ecosystem health. According to the audience, the EU needs to regulate the distribution of hives' products to avoid unfair competition and maintain the beekeeping economy. The farmers need sustainable alternatives to change their practices, and the main point is open communication with them. Policies should not only focus on the protection of pollinators, but also on other elements that induce a greater pressure on pollinators. Moreover, the use of European funds to remunerate ecosystem services was another suggestion brought by the audience.

Second panel

Honey production, mobilising all stakeholders from the field to the spoon

The second panel, chaired by **Tobin Robinson**, included:

- **Nataša Lilek, Slovenian Beekeepers Association – Honey consumption and promotion schemes**
- **Alain Maquet, Joint Research Center, European Commission – Consumers' trends of honey consumption and Honey adulteration**
- **Amélie Mandel, Bees Biodiversity Network – The tool box for farmers to help protect bees**

Nataša Lilek presented Slovenian beekeeping culture within a nation of beekeepers with long and rich history. The highlights of Slovenian efforts are mostly targeting education of the younger generations, general public and promoting api-tourism to increase awareness about pollinators. Slovenia promotes consumption of local bee-derived products through several projects, like Traditional Slovenian breakfast, beekeeping clubs at schools, beekeeping media day and others, according to Ms. Lilek. As a result, the number of beekeepers in last few years has increased, alongside the number of children participating in beekeeping clubs, age structure of beekeepers decreased and consumption of honey is high (1.4 kg per person). Slovenia also successfully put forward the initiation to the United Nations about proclaiming May 20th as World Bee Day. Therefore, Ms. Lilek concluded that communications function and promotional projects play an important role in ensuring beekeepers' (local) economy, and in raising concern on the conservation of bees and other pollinators.

During his speech, **Alain Maquet** mentioned that honey is a high-risk product in terms of fraud, considering that the import price is smaller than the export price. Regarding this, there is a control plan to evaluate the fraud rates following the addition of exogenous sugars. What is now important for Mr. Maquet is to increase the production of honey without neglecting quality. This is why it is meaningful to have access to a European database for honey, which is reliable, representative and accessible. To achieve these goals, there is of course an obvious need for financial and technical support, as Mr. Maquet concluded.

Representing Bees Biodiversity Network, **Amélie Mandel** gave the last presentation of the second panel, reminding that the stakes are different between wild pollinators and domestic bees. As a result, the creation of a guide regarding pollinators' protection is necessary for farmers. While a label was also developed, in order to help farmers choose floral blends that will provide a better source of nectar and pollen for the pollinators, the solutions exist, from Ms. Mandel's point of view. "They now need to be spread in the farming community". All in all, working at a territorial scale is interesting to take into account the wild species and the specificities of this ecosystem; understanding the territory allows better-oriented answers related to reasons behind their decline, and avoids a plethora of negative impacts.

Third panel

New technologies, digitalisation and big data to help protect bees

The third and last panel of the Bee Week High-Level Conference was chaired by **MEP Marijana Petir**, including:

- **Antoni Vicens I Vicens, Balearic Islands representation to the EU – Good practices for the conservation of bees in the Balearic Islands, case study with a mobile app and a website (Vespapp)**
- **Dr Bach Kim Nguyen, University of Gembloux – Start-up BeeOmonitoring**
- **Joseph Cazier, Ph.D, Director of the Center for Analytics Research and Education, Appalachian State University, Chief Analytics Officer – HiveTracks**

Opening the discussions, **MEP Marijana Petir** stressed the importance of new technologies to promote bee health, and support key opportunities that digitalisation brings. Looking at the future, it will be possible to act faster with better accuracy thanks to these good practices allowed by digitalisation, according to Ms. Petir.

Antoni Vicens I vicens took the floor presenting how an application could contribute in helping pollinators. As the Asian wasp, an invasive alien species, hunts local pollinators' species, including the endemic ones, it poses a threat. Responding to that, an application showcased how raising public awareness and collecting data from public authorities can assist in a better response to this situation. Through "Vespapp", whenever a citizen encounters an Asian wasp or a nest, they can upload pictures on the app, answer a few basic questions and enter their location. This allows then for a specialist to confirm or refute the observation, it gives a map of the evolution of the distribution of this species and allows reducing the expansion by removing nests. Last but not least, there is also a website "polinib" to help people discover the Belearic Islands' pollinators and raise awareness among citizens.

Following this, **Bach Kim Nguyen** presented the BeeOmonitoring start-up which aims at improving the environment. This start-up includes many stakeholders, as "everyone can find an interest in pollinators' conservation". The concept of sustainable nature is important to preserve the environment, for Dr. Nguyen, who stressed that using bees as indicators is key for the environment's state, as it allows monitoring the pollution, which may as well affect humans. This is something that can also interest private enterprises, while it serves in showing the importance of this indicator even for human's health. The main message delivered by Dr. Nguyen is that all involved actors must collaborate, as beekeepers can't act on the decline causes by themselves.

Last but not least, **Joseph Cazier** presented the concepts of HiveTracks, that help prevent bees' decline thanks to big data and analytics. To achieve this, a large amount of data is needed in order to access the most sophisticated algorithms. These will provide a decision-guidance tool to help everyday beekeepers. The quantity, quality and relevance of the data can help taking smarter decisions. The treatments, human observations and managements actions of the hive must be taken into account to standardize the data. Another tool is automatic data collection by sensors that are able to deliver smart and genius hives. Smart hives report data about the components inside the hive, while genius hives are a combination of smart hives' standardized data that can be analysed with machine learning, identification and verification of Best Management Practices and software. These sensors could all in all play a meaningful role in preventing decline within the hives.

Thanking all organizers, speakers and participants for their warm approach to another edition of the 'European Bee and Pollination Week', **MEP Michel Dantin** closed the High-Level Conference and the by mentioning the significant evolution and impact of ideas through all these editions. As awareness

on this topic has been successfully raised within a few years, it is now urgent to integrate this in European policies, such as the future CAP. The continuation of these efforts was therefore underlined by Mr. Dantin, who summed up the main message of Bee Week in maintaining the great co-operative work among all stakeholders involved!