



Brussels, 22 January 2020
(OR. en)

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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Delegations

Subject: Origin labelling of honey blends

- *Information from the Portuguese and Slovenian delegations, supported by the Bulgarian, Czech, Cypriot, Estonian, French, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian, Slovakian and Spanish delegations*

Delegations will find in Annex a joint declaration agreed among Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain on origin labelling of honey blends to be presented by the Portuguese and Slovenian delegations under "Any other business" items at the meeting of the Council ("Agriculture and Fisheries") on 27 January 2020.

**Joint declaration of Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain
on origin labelling of honey blends**

1. The beekeeping sector is vital for the European Union and contributes significantly to society, both economically and environmentally by maintaining the ecological balance, biodiversity and by the services bees provide through pollination also to food production and food security. Economically the production of honey and other bee products is very important for farmers and beekeepers. However the sector faces many challenges in economic, health and environmental terms including the origin of honey.
2. The Directive on honey (2001/110/EC) imposes obligation on labelling of country of origin for honey. However in case of blend of honeys harvested from more than one country, the honey might be labelled as appropriate: “blend of EU honeys” or “blend of non-EU honeys” or “blend of EU and non-EU honeys”.
3. Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain believe that such labelling of blends does not provide to consumers comprehensive and reliable information on origin of honey, while acknowledging high sensibility of European consumers to such information. Reports show that imported honey with non-EU origin is cheaper than European honey¹. Even if consumers theoretically have a possibility to choose origin-labelled honey, in reality “an EU/non EU” labelling creates an information bias among consumers. While the growing demands of consumers for more information are a fact, in many cases the price of the product is still the main driver for them. Consequently, consumers who opt for cheaper product receive less information than the ones choosing more expensive ones.

¹ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and Council on the implementation of apiculture programmes (COM(2019) 635 final, 17. 12. 2019 and COM(2016) 776 final, 7. 12. 2016)

4. Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain are of the opinion that the consumers and EU citizens should receive the same quality and reliability of information regardless of the price of the product.
5. Moreover, it is of prime importance that honey and honey blends commercialised within the EU abide by the same labelling standards in order to ensure fair competition. As the Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and Council on the implementation of the measures concerning the apiculture sector of Regulation 1308/2013 (published on December 2016) states, honey imported from third countries is much cheaper than honey produced in the EU. Due to higher production costs EU producers can hardly compete with imported honey.
6. At the same time Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain underline that the EU is committed to high environmental and quality standards for production and that labelling of origin of honey blends would pose for better traceability of products; consequently provide an additional element of quality assessment, which is a key factor also from the food safety point of view. It would as well prevent misleading the consumers and establish fair marketing practises.
7. Therefore Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain call upon the European Commission to consider opening the Directive on honey (2001/110/EC) in order to tackle the problems mentioned, in particular to prescribe for clearer origin labelling of blend of honey.