

The apiculture sector plays a vital role in the European Union's economy and agriculture, mainly due to the functions performed by honey bees. These insects pollinate more than 80% of wild and cultivated plants in the world, influencing on the size of the crops and at the same time contributing to maintain the food security in all 28 Member States. Furthermore, honey bees help to keep the proper level of biodiversity of natural ecosystems. It is estimated that pollination of plants by *Apis mellifera* guarantees the EU economy a profit of more than €22 billion annually. Human also uses bees to produce bee products such as honey, royal jelly, propolis, pollen and beeswax, which are used in the chemical, food, medical and pharmaceutical industries. The civilizational and economic transformations that took place in the 20th and 21st centuries caused numerous threats to the apiculture sector. There are many reasons for this situation. One of the most important is the lack of comprehensive and systematic regulation, which allows more effective protection and support of beekeeping through EU funds.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to determine the impact that the EU legislation aimed at supporting and protecting apicultural activity has on the practical aspects of conducting this activity in Poland. This primary objective is divided into two specific objectives.

First of all, it is necessary to establish which provisions of EU and national law enable to determine the legal status of apicultural activity and the legal effects of classifying this professional activity as either agricultural or economic activity. To this end, it will be essential to identify those acts of EU and national law which regulate apicultural activity in Poland, and to determine the degree to which these acts define its legal status as either agricultural or economic activity. Furthermore, it will also be necessary to demonstrate the legal effects of this classification from the perspective of such legal areas as agricultural, economic, commercial, tax and insurance law. Next, it will be vital to present arguments for and against codifying apicultural activity in Poland through a legal act of a uniform and comprehensive character. Should such a regulation prove justified, it would be beneficial to discuss the requirements and conditions that this codification must satisfy in order to ensure its positive impact on the development of apicultural activity in Poland.

Second of all, it is essential to answer the question whether current Polish legislation ensures sufficient protection of apicultural activity and what level of support is afforded to this type of activity by legal instruments provided for in EU law. To this end, it will be necessary to identify the forms of legal protection of the key attribute of apicultural activity, i.e. honey bees, envisaged by Polish and Union law. Next, an answer should be provided to the question of how the provisions of EU law protect apicultural products from threats, related mainly to GMO contamination resulting from bees collecting pollen from genetically modified crops. Another step will be to define the forms of supporting apicultural activity in Poland with the help of EU and national funds. Finally, it will be necessary to formulate proposals *de lege ferenda* regarding the contribution of the potential codification of apicultural activity to improving the protection of and support for Polish apiculture using EU funds. The fulfilment of this objective will serve to verify the hypothesis that the current legal regulation of apiculture in Poland does little to help take advantage of the available funds to support and protect apicultural activity.

The project will be carried out predominantly using the doctrinal research method. The normative acts of EU and Polish law pertaining to the forms of protection of and support for apicultural activity will be studied and interpreted, as well as the legal doctrine and relevant judicial decisions relating to defined problem. The comparative method will be used to conduct analysis of legal systems of chosen EU countries (Spain, Germany and Italy), which is justified in the view of original and complex legal solutions which are adopted in legal systems of these countries in relation to apicultural activity.

Identifying the research gap and the innovative character of the designed study are, however, not the only deciding factors for choosing these issues as the research topic. The choice is further substantiated by the theoretical, socio-economic and rural-environment issues. The lack of specification of the legal status of apicultural activity, both in Polish law and European Union Law causes that it is nearly impossible to provide sufficient protection for the apiculture sector (and bees in particular) in the face of the threats that it is currently facing. The bee population has been rapidly declining in recent years, both in the EU and beyond. Scientific researchers have coined the term 'Colony Collapse Disorder' (CCD) to describe the phenomenon of a drastic loss of honey bee colonies. This situation has a number of different causes, the most important of which include: the effects of intensive farming practices such as the use of pesticides; poor honey bee nutrition; attacks by various viruses and pathogenic bacteria; interspecific competition with invasive species such as the Asian hornet (*Vespa velutina*); genetically modified plants; as well as environmental changes (exposure to electromagnetic radiation, natural habitat fragmentation).

It needs to be stressed that the outlined legal issues have not been discussed in the academic writings yet and part of the employed approaches (especially concerning the legal status of Polish apicultural activity) will have an innovative character. It is so largely due to the topicality of addressed problem