

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

Date: April 14, 2022

Report Number: E42022-0032

Report Name: European Commission Proposes Revision of Geographical Indications Legislation

Country: European Union

Post: Brussels USEU

Report Category: Agriculture in the News

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Report Highlights:

In March 2022, the European Commission published a legislative proposal to revise geographical indications (GIs) legislation. The new measures integrate specific sustainability criteria and aim to achieve a higher level of protection for GIs.

General Information:

THIS REPORT CONTAINS ASSESSMENTS OF COMMODITY AND TRADE ISSUES MADE BY USDA STAFF AND NOT NECESSARILY STATEMENTS OF OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

On March 31, 2022, the European Commission (EC) published its [legislative proposal](#) to revise geographical indications (GIs) legislation for wine, spirit drinks, and agricultural products. The new measures aim to increase the uptake of GIs, achieve a higher level of protection, especially online, and increase the sustainability of the EU's food system by integrating specific sustainability criteria.

Reacting to the publication of the proposal, EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Janusz Wojciechowski said: *“Geographical indications represent the wealth and diversity of our European culinary heritage. By proposing today, a strengthening and further harmonization of our legal framework, we want to boost the production of traditional quality products. This will benefit rural economies across the Union and contribute to preserving local traditions and natural resources. It will further protect the global reputation of EU agri-food products.”*

The proposal is a revision of the current framework and does not change the core protection granted to GI products. The Commission proposes changes that aim to strengthen and improve the existing system of GIs with a simplified registration procedure for both EU and non-EU applicants. The proposal includes measures to increase GI protections on online sales platforms and prevent bad faith registrations and use of GIs in the domain name system.

Transfer of Competences to the European Union Intellectual Property Office

The proposal also introduces a new role for the European Union Intellectual Property Office ([EUIPO](#))¹. EUIPO will provide technical support in the review phase to help speed up the procedure. The Commission notes that they have been cooperating with EUIPO on geographical indications for the last four years, during which time EUIPO contributed to around 1,300 GI application assessments. Member States will remain in charge of enforcement at the national level and the Commission will remain responsible for the registration, amendment, and cancellation of all GI registrations.

This transfer of powers to EUIPO was met with criticism by stakeholders, members of the European Parliament (MEPs), and some Member States. For [COPA-COGECA](#), the umbrella organization representing EU farmers and cooperatives, shifting competencies to an agency specializing in intellectual property rights and without the necessary knowledge of the specificities of the agricultural sector puts the whole policy at risk. Members of the Agriculture Committee in the European Parliament also expressed concerns, noting that EUIPO does not have the agricultural knowledge to assess such issues. A group of 15 Member States also [stated](#) that “the final evaluation of the GIs by European Commission must be maintained in the DG AGRI, by agri-food policy experts, and must have an agronomic-technical component and a juridical component, keeping *status quo* and without outsourcing to other Agencies or Offices.”

Voluntary Sustainability Criteria

¹ The European Union Intellectual Property Office is an agency of the European Union. It is responsible for managing the EU trademark and the registered Community design. It also works with the intellectual property offices of the EU Member States and international partners to offer a similar registration experience for trademarks and designs across Europe and the world.

The revision of the GI legislation is part of the [EU's Farm to Fork Strategy](#) and as such, the Commission wants to use GIs to make the EU food system more sustainable.

The proposal therefore includes the option for producer groups to voluntarily apply a sustainability standard that is higher than what is mandated by EU or national law and exceeds good practices in social, environmental, or economic undertakings. According to the Commission, this will better protect natural resources, rural economies, local plant varieties and animal breeds, conserve the landscape of the production area, and improve animal welfare. This effort could also appeal consumers who want to lower their impact on the environment.

The inclusion of sustainability requirements on a voluntary basis was well received by stakeholders. However, some Member States [noted](#) that training must be provided to GI producer associations regarding the benefits of including sustainability criteria in GIs specifications.

Next Steps

The legislative proposal is now with the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union for amendments. Once each institution has amended the text, they will meet with the European Commission in the trilogue format to find compromises and adopt a final version of the text. This process usually takes between 12 to 18 months.

Attachments:

No Attachments.