

Revamping the regulation on spirit drinks

In December 2016, the European Commission proposed to replace the current Spirit Drinks Regulation with a new one. The Parliament is expected to vote during the February II plenary on the ENVI committee's report on the proposal and on a mandate for interinstitutional trilogue negotiations.

Background

Spirit drinks are alcoholic beverages with a minimum alcoholic strength of 15 % volume. Over the past decade, exports of European spirits have [doubled](#). Amounting to €10.2 billion a year, spirit drinks make up one of the EU's most important agri-food export sectors. The [Spirit Drinks Regulation \(EC\) No 110/2008](#) defines categories of spirit drinks – such as whisky/whiskey, fruit spirit, liqueur, pastis and vodka. The regulation also protects geographical indications (GIs) of spirit drinks, listing registered GIs in its Annex III.

European Commission proposal

The principal objective of the [proposal](#) is to align current legislation in this area with the provisions of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), empowering the Commission to adopt delegated and implementing acts under Articles 290 and 291 TFEU. In addition, the proposal would replace the existing procedures for the protection of geographical indications of spirit drinks with new ones, modelled on the recently updated procedures for quality schemes applied to agricultural products and foodstuffs.

Annex III of the current Spirit Drinks Regulation, listing the geographical indications of spirit drinks, is proposed to be deleted. Instead, the Commission would adopt implementing acts establishing and maintaining an electronic register of recognised geographical indications.

European Parliament position

Parliament's Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) adopted its [report](#) on 24 January 2018 by 54 votes in favour, 1 against. The report includes a total of 190 amendments to the Commission proposal.

In its report, the committee considers it important, among other things, that the prerogatives Parliament already had under the legislation currently in force be maintained in the alignment process. Instead of implementing acts, the Commission should use delegated acts, for example when registering new protected names. The committee supports replacing Annex III of the Spirit Drinks Regulation with an electronic register, similar to those established for protected geographical indications for wine and foodstuffs. The committee considers that the Parliament must be involved in any changes made to the register.

The committee also wants to reinstate the possibility to allow the translation of a geographical indication, when this is a legal requirement of the importing country. Furthermore, the committee adopted a compromise amendment proposing EU maximum sweetening limits for different categories of spirit drinks.

The February II plenary is expected to vote on the report's amendments and on a mandate for trilogue negotiations.

First-reading report: [2016/0392\(COD\)](#); Committee responsible: ENVI; Rapporteur: Pilar Ayuso (EPP, Spain). See also our ['EU Legislation in Progress'](#) briefing on the proposal.

