

WRITTEN QUESTION P-0871/04  
by José Pacheco Pereira (PPE-DE)  
to the Commission

Subject: Distortion of competition in the wine sector

On 23 February 2004 the Commission approved new rules on the labelling of wine in the European Union, which will enable third countries to use, within the Community, traditional descriptions for wine such as 'tawny', 'vintage', 'ruby' etc and to export such wines to the EU.

The following facts should be borne in mind:

- the port wine-producing area has always used the descriptions 'tawny', 'vintage' and 'ruby';
- Madeira wine-producers have also always used the descriptions 'canteiro', 'frasqueira' and 'reserva velha';
- both these wines have consolidated their quality and international image using these expressions;
- the new labelling rules will 'trivialise' the use of these expressions to the detriment of port and Madeira wine producers and their products, which in effect constitutes a distortion of competition;
- in the context of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations, the European Union has always upheld the need to adopt a balanced agreement, particularly important for non-tariff issues;
- these non-tariff measures include the protection of designations of origin, trademarks, etc.;
- the WTO negotiations have been suspended since the collapse of the Cancun Round last September;
- in this context the European Union must not or should not make any concessions outside the negotiating context of the WTO.

Can the Commission say:

1. what induced it to adopt new rules on wine labelling outside the WTO negotiating framework;
2. what it considers the European Union has gained by this unusual and unexpected concession;
3. what its assessment is of the consequences of this decision for Community producers - in particular those in the port and Madeira wine producing areas?