

Spirit drinks: definition, description, presentation, labelling and the protection of geographical indications

2005/0028(COD) - 19/06/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted the resolution drafted by Horst **SCHNELHARDT** (EPP-ED, D), and made some amendments to the Commission's proposal. The amendments were the result of a compromise between Parliament and Council, and the compromise was supported in plenary. The resolution was adopted by 522 votes for, 148 against and 15 abstentions. The key issues were the definition of vodka and whiskey names.

Vodka: MEPs settled on a definition of vodka that would allow the drink to be produced from any agricultural material, such as grapes, rice or any other agricultural product provided that they are appropriately labelled. The Environment Committee's position had suggested that traditional vodka only be made from grain, potatoes or sugar beet molasses. (Please see the summary of 30/01/2007.) Vodkas made from other raw materials would have had to clearly indicate what they were made from, with a large label on the bottle (2/3 of the size of the word 'Vodka' on the label. The approach adopted in plenary states that traditional vodka may only be made from grain or potatoes (not molasses), and other raw materials may only be used if they are clearly indicated on the label. Vodkas made from other agricultural raw materials will have to carry the wording 'produced from.' The size of this label, however, would not be specified. Some MEPs from traditional vodka-producing Member States (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden) would have preferred to allow the term 'vodka' only to be applied to spirits made from grain, potatoes and molasses, but their amendments failed to garner enough support among MEPs.

Whiskey: the plenary agreed with the decision of the Environment Committee on this issue. The House voted for existing geographical names to remain valid. These may be supplemented by additional descriptions provided they are regulated at national or regional level or are included in the technical specifications, such as "single malt" and/or "Highland" for Scotch whisky. Applications for geographical designations must be justified by the Member State of origin. Certain MEPs had argued for equal treatment for vodka and whisky, stating that it was unacceptable that vodka was an open trademark whereas there are a number of restrictions for other registered trademarks such as whisky, champagne and cognac. However, this was rejected on the grounds that, in the case of vodka, the raw material used does not affect the quality of the product.

Spirit drinks: the Commission's proposal had originally suggested establishing three categories of spirit drinks, which the Environment Committee rejected, arguing for a single category of 'spirit drinks'. This single category was maintained in the compromise with the Council.

Flavourings: the plenary agreed with the Environment Committee and felt that flavourings should be banned for some spirits (such as rum, whisky, cereals-based spirits and wine, brandy) except for the addition of caramel as a colouring substance. Other spirits might contain additions of alcohol (only of agricultural origin), of colouring substances, sweeteners and flavourings.

Comitology: the regulatory procedure with scrutiny will apply to certain aspects of the Regulation, such as the amendment of the Annexes, the establishment of a Community symbol for geographical indications

for the spirit drinks sector, and to resolve specific practical problems, such as by making it obligatory, in certain cases, to state the place of manufacture on the labelling to avoid misleading the consumer and to maintain and develop Community reference methods for the analysis of spirit drinks.

Entry into force: although the Environment Committee had argued for a two-year transitional period, Parliament decided that the legislation will apply three months after the entry into force of the regulation. To facilitate the transition from the rules provided for in Regulation (EEC) No 1576/89, the production of spirit drinks under that Regulation will be permitted during the first year of application of the Regulation. The marketing of existing stocks is also be foreseen until their exhaustion.