Resolution on the European Union and the United States of America wine agreement

2005/2618(RSP) - 29/09/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the EU-US wine agreement. The report points out that this first agreement between the EU and the United States, which has been concluded after decades of fruitless negotiations, has only minimal scope and does not deal satisfactorily with all the issues relevant to the bilateral trade in wine. The unrestricted mutual recognition of oenological processes has negative consequences for the European wine industry. In addition, the wrongful use of the geographical indications of origin of the European Union by third countries violates intellectual property rights and causes economic harm to the legitimate holders of those indications on account of loss of market share. False indications often provide stiff competition for genuine ones. The United States does not respect the protection of wines with a designation of origin, and regards them merely as semi-generic products on its domestic markets.

Parliament noted that this bilateral agreement is necessary if it helps to secure exports to the United States, which constitutes the principal market for European wine makers, to restore a climate of trust and to ensure the smooth flow of trade. It hoped that the next phase of the negotiations would result in a satisfactory outcome for traditional production methods, family-based wine making and the quality of our wines. The agreement constitutes merely an initial, though insufficient and inadequate, step towards international recognition of the European Union's protected traditional designations.

Parliament criticised the Commission for having agreed to a bilateral deal with the US without informing Parliament in sufficient time for it to be able to express its views. It deplored the fact that this agreement will substantially weaken the EUs position in the agriculture negotiations within the WTO, as it undermines the territorial and quality-oriented approach prevailing in a large part of the wine sector. Parliament called for the following:

-the Commission must step up the dialogue with the US and other partners within the WTO in order to establish a register of internationally recognised geographical indications as a priority in its multilateral agricultural negotiations, to create a joint committee on wine issues and to clarify wine-making practices, certification and the use of traditional names with a view to a second phase of negotiations;

-the Commission needs to speed up the start of the next phase of negotiationsl with a view to recognition of the seventeen designations of origin listed in the agreement, so that all European designations of origin for wine are duly protected by the United States authorities on their own market;

-a final compromise within, at the latest, the two years indicated in the bilateral agreement, with a view to putting a stop, once and for all, to the illegal use in the United States of Community designations protected by Community legislation;

-the establishment of a positive list of oenological practices permitted in trade with third countries, within the framework of the OIV and with the aim of making evaluations prior to future new authorisations;

-the negotiation at international level of a binding definition of wine that would halt the development of certain oenological practices, in order to protect the efforts made to maintain quality in the EU, to avoid Community producers being subjected to unfair competition and to prevent market imbalances.

Finally, Parliament considered that it would be useful to have a legal opinion on the compatibility of this bilateral agreement with Community law.