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France’s highest administrative court upholds mandatory collective label for Graves wines

The ruling leaves the charter-based identifier in place for bottles from the 2026 harvest after judges rejected UMVIN’s challenge

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France’s Council of State, the country’s highest administrative court, ruled on Tuesday, November 17, that wines from the Graves appellation can be required to carry a collective identifier on their labels, rejecting a challenge brought by the Union des

maisons et marques de vin, or UMVIN.

The dispute centered on changes approved by the French government in 2025 to the product specifications for the Graves and Graves Supérieures controlled appellations in Bordeaux. UMVIN had asked the court to cancel the ministerial orders that approved those specifications, or at least to strike down the provision requiring bottles to display a collective identifier that complies with a charter drawn up by the Graves winegrowers' union.

The Council of State said that, because a March 3, 2025 order had later been repealed and replaced by a September 19, 2025 order covering the Graves appellation, the case should be treated as a challenge to the later order. It then rejected UMVIN's claims.

According to the decision, the Graves specification states that, starting with the 2026 harvest, wine labels must include the collective identifier described in the charter in force and made available to all operators. The court said that, by approving that language, the ministers gave the charter's content the status of a binding rule within the appellation specification itself. The identifier includes, among other elements, a logo bearing the word "Graves" in capital letters, with the wording "Vin de Bordeaux" or "Grand vin de Bordeaux" below it, depending on the wine concerned.

UMVIN had argued that the process leading to the rule was flawed on several grounds. The group said the notice opening the national opposition procedure was defective because it did not spell out that the proposed changes included a mandatory collective identifier on bottle labels. The Council of State disagreed. It said the notice published in the French Official Journal on January 17, 2024 properly stated the purpose of the procedure, which was to amend the specifications for the Graves and Graves Supérieures appellations, and set the closing date for opposition. The court said the law did not require the notice to list that specific labeling change.

The wine trade group also challenged the makeup of the relevant national committee within the National Institute of Origin and Quality, known as INAO, when it approved the draft specifications on November 28, 2024. UMVIN argued that producers were more numerous than merchants in the vote. The court rejected that claim as well, saying that while the rules require balanced representation across sectors in the committee's

overall composition, that requirement does not change the voting rules for members once the quorum has been met.

Another procedural argument focused on the inquiry commission appointed by the INAO committee to examine the proposed amendments. UMVIN said the commission no longer reflected the required diversity of trades and sectors after a member representing the trade sector stopped serving in June 2024 and was not replaced. The Council of State said that change occurred shortly before the commission issued its report, did not affect the report's content, and in any event could not have influenced the final decision or deprived interested parties of a procedural safeguard.

The ruling also addressed the relationship between the French measures and European Union procedures. One part of the 2025 reforms involved the disappearance of the Graves Supérieures appellation, subject to approval by the European Commission. UMVIN argued that the September 19, 2025 order was unlawful because it approved changes tied to that removal before the Commission had acted. The Council of State rejected that argument, saying EU rules did not require the Commission's decision to come before the national approval order. It noted that the French order itself said it would apply only from the date on which the Commission approved the request to cancel the appellation.

UMVIN further said a second national opposition procedure should have been held before the September 2025 order was adopted. The court said no new procedure was required because the proposed elimination of Graves Supérieures had already been submitted to a national opposition process before the March 2025 order.

The case was closely watched in the French wine sector because it tested how far an appellation can go in imposing collective presentation rules through its official specification. While the dispute arose in Graves, the ruling could have broader implications for wineries, cooperatives and merchants in other appellations if they consider similar common identifiers or branding tools. It also gives more clarity on the room French appellation bodies have to defend collective labeling requirements within the existing regulatory framework.

For producers in Graves, the immediate effect is that the mandatory identifier remains in place for wines from the 2026 harvest. That means the rule will affect bottles from that vintage as they move into the market afterward, including sales in 2027. For merchants and brand owners, the decision removes a major legal challenge to the requirement and confirms that the approved charter-based identifier can remain part of the appellation’s labeling rules.