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Italy Says the Decline in Wine Exports Is Easing

Trade officials urged producers to move faster into Mercosur, India and Australia, citing wars, tariffs and shifting consumer tastes

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Italian wine exports are showing early signs of stabilization after a difficult start to 2026, according to Matteo Zoppas, president of the Italian Trade Agency, who said the pace of decline has eased even as producers still face a volatile global market.

Speaking by video link on Saturday at the third day of Benvenuto Brunello in Montalcino, Tuscany, Zoppas said the year opened with “strong difficulties” for Italian wine abroad, but that more recent indicators point to an improvement. He said the drop in exports has narrowed, though he cautioned against reading too much into the numbers at a time of wars, tariffs and changing consumer habits.

Zoppas did not provide detailed export figures in the remarks reported by ANSA, but he said the recent shift reflects the work of wine companies trying to defend their positions while looking for new outlets. In that environment, he said, promotion by the Italian Trade Agency, trade fairs and producer consortia can play an important role.

His main message was that Italy needs to move faster to diversify where it sells wine. He pointed to Mercosur, India and Australia as markets where new opportunities may be opening and said Italian exporters should act before competitors establish stronger positions there.

That push comes as the Italian government increases resources for wine exports, Zoppas said. He described a strategy aimed not only at broadening market access but also at reaching the people who make purchasing decisions, including importers, retail and hospitality buyers, and sommeliers. He said communication should also become less technical and more immediate, with a stronger focus on the pleasure and simplicity of drinking wine.

The remarks highlight how Italian officials and producers are adjusting to a more fragmented export landscape. For years, major wine exporters have relied heavily on a relatively narrow group of mature markets. A broader geographic strategy could help reduce exposure to tariff disputes, weaker demand in established destinations or shifts in consumer preferences. It could also reshape competition in the wider drinks business if Italian wine producers devote more sales and marketing resources to fast-growing markets where distributors, restaurants and retailers are also deciding how much space to give to beer, spirits and other imported beverages.

Mercosur, India and Australia each present different opportunities and obstacles. Mercosur offers access to a large South American consumer base, though trade conditions and competition from regional producers remain important factors. India is

often seen as a long-term growth market because of its size and rising middle class, but it has also been difficult for foreign alcohol suppliers because of regulation, taxes and complex state-level rules. Australia is a developed wine market with established local production, which means Italian exporters would be competing in a sophisticated environment where brand positioning and importer relationships matter.

Zoppas’s comments suggest that Italian authorities see diversification as both a commercial need and a defensive move. If export declines are moderating, that may give producers more room to invest in new markets rather than focusing only on protecting sales in traditional ones. At the same time, his warning about competitors underlines that market openings do not stay open for long, especially in wine, where distribution networks, restaurant placements and brand recognition can take years to build.

The emphasis on simpler messaging is also notable at a time when wine producers in many countries are trying to respond to shifts in drinking habits. In several markets, consumers have shown interest in moderation, convenience and products that are easier to understand. By calling for less technical communication, Zoppas signaled that part of the export effort may depend not only on where Italian wine is sold, but on how it is presented to trade buyers and consumers.

Benvenuto Brunello, the event where Zoppas spoke, is one of Italy’s best-known wine gatherings and is closely watched by producers, buyers and sector groups. His appearance there placed export strategy at the center of a meeting usually associated with one of the country’s most recognized premium wine regions, underscoring how concerns about international demand now extend well beyond any single denomination or price segment.