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Italy’s industry minister urges the EU to defend protected wine names from U.S. challenges

Adolfo Urso said U.S. initiatives could erode legal safeguards for Brunello di Montalcino and other European appellations

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Italy’s industry minister called on the European Union on Saturday, November 21, to take a firm stand to protect geographical indications, warning that moves in the United States could weaken legal safeguards for some of Europe’s best-known regional food

and wine names.

Adolfo Urso, Italy’s minister for enterprises and Made in Italy, made the appeal in a video message sent to the 35th edition of Benvenuto Brunello, an event under way in Montalcino, near Siena, according to ANSA.

Urso said Europe should defend geographical indications that the EU has already recognized in trade agreements with Mercosur, Mexico, Japan and Vietnam. Those protections cover products whose names are legally tied to a specific place and production method, a system that is especially important for wines such as Brunello di Montalcino and other appellation-based products.

“We need a firm position from Europe to protect geographical indications,” Urso said, according to ANSA.

He said those products face new threats and argued that some initiatives by the U.S. administration risk turning Europe’s most valuable protected names into common terms. Urso said that could hurt both producers and consumers, while imitation products and “Italian sounding” goods continue to expand. He did not detail in the message which U.S. initiatives he was referring to.

The issue matters beyond a legal dispute over naming rules. If protected European names are treated more broadly as generic terms in major export markets, that could reduce the commercial value and exclusivity of wine appellations and other drink labels that rely on origin-based branding. For beverage producers, especially in the wine sector, that would pose a potential risk to pricing power, market identity and consumer trust.

Urso linked the defense of origin-based products to the Italian government’s broader industrial strategy. In his message, he said those productions reflect the goals of the government’s Made in Italy 2030 white paper, which aims to strengthen sectors associated with Italian quality and identity.

He also pointed to the performance of Brunello on international markets. Urso said the denomination has held up abroad even as French exports of wines and spirits have declined. He presented that as evidence that reputation and quality can still support demand in a weaker market environment.

“A denomination that grows when the market retreats is proof that quality and reputation pay,” Urso said, according to ANSA.

His remarks placed the wine sector at the center of a wider debate in Europe over how aggressively the bloc should defend protected names in trade policy and in disputes with trading partners. Geographical indications have long been a key EU priority, particularly in negotiations involving food and drink products with high export value.

For Italy, the issue is especially sensitive because many of its flagship exports depend on protected regional identities. In the wine business, names tied to place are not only a marketing tool but also a legal category that helps distinguish authentic products from copies. Producers have argued for years that weaker enforcement abroad can open the door to look-alike labels and products that benefit from the reputation of Italian regions without meeting the same standards.

Urso said the Italian government and his ministry, known as Mimit, are continuing their efforts against counterfeiting and in support of investment and international expansion by companies. He cited several policy tools, including Italy’s framework law on Made in Italy, the Transition 5.0 plan and the New Sabatini program, which supports business investment.

His comments came at a moment when European producers are watching trade and intellectual property policy closely, especially in markets where generic use of traditional European names has long been contested. Italian officials and producer groups have repeatedly said the spread of imitation goods damages the value built by authentic producers and can confuse buyers about origin and quality.

The intervention in Montalcino also carried symbolic weight. Brunello di Montalcino is one of Italy’s most recognized wine denominations and one of the country’s most visible examples of how protected origin names can support exports, tourism and local

investment. By choosing that setting, Urso underscored the link between trade policy, brand protection and the economic role of premium wine regions.

ANSA reported that the minister’s message framed the defense of geographical indications as part of a broader effort to protect Italian production against counterfeiting and imitation at a time when competition in global food and beverage markets remains intense.