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Italy leads 11 E.U. states in asking Brussels to protect geographical indications abroad

The bloc says U.S. trade measures could weaken safeguards for Champagne, Porto, Cava, Tokaj and other protected names

Tuesday, November 24, 2026



Italy and 11 other European Union member states have asked the European Commission for a coordinated strategy to protect geographical indications in foreign markets, arguing that a series of U.S. trade and legislative initiatives could weaken safeguards for some of Europe’s best-known food and drink names.

Francesco Lollobrigida, Italy’s minister for agriculture, food sovereignty and forests, said on Monday, November 23, that defending geographical indications means protecting farmers’ work and the link between products and their places of origin. He said Italy, together with 11 other member states, had asked the EU to act jointly “on all international tables” to defend protected names and to uphold shared intellectual property rules.

According to the information note submitted by Italy to the European Commission, the request was backed by Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain.

The Italian initiative argues that several international developments are putting pressure on the EU's system of geographical indications, known as GIs. These protections are used to reserve names for products tied to a specific origin and production method. In Europe, they cover a wide range of agricultural goods and beverages, including wines and spirits.

The note points in particular to developments in the United States. It says the revision of the Farm Bill and a measure called the Safeguarding American Food and Export Trade Yields Act of 2025 are aimed at classifying geographical indications as "common names" that can be used freely. European officials and producing countries have long opposed that approach, saying it undermines legal protection for names linked to specific regions and traditions.

Lollobrigida said the issue is not only legal but economic. He said products that are central to European supply chains should not be treated as ordinary generic labels. His comments reflect concern in several EU capitals that if names protected in Europe are recognized elsewhere as common terms, producers outside the EU could market competing goods under the same or similar names.

The Italian note also points to what it describes as a broader U.S. strategy through reciprocal trade arrangements. According to the document, Washington has already signed such agreements with Argentina, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia and Taiwan, and is negotiating with other countries including India. Italy and its partners say that approach could interfere with EU trade understandings already in force, such as Mercosur, or with ongoing talks involving Thailand, Malaysia and India.

The dispute has direct implications for the beverage sector because several of the names cited in the debate are tied to wine and beer. If protected names are increasingly treated as generic in third-country markets or online, European producers could face a weaker claim to commercial exclusivity for appellations used on sparkling

wine, fortified wine and other drinks. That could also complicate enforcement against copycat branding outside the EU.

Italy’s concerns extend beyond trade negotiations to the internet. The note says the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, or ICANN, has assigned new generic domain names that include protected product names such as .asiago, .gorgonzola, .champagne, .porto, .budweiser, .cava and .tokaj. Rome and the countries supporting its initiative see that as another area where the EU needs a more unified response.

Those examples cut across both food and beverages, but several are especially sensitive for European wine-producing regions. Names such as Champagne, Porto, Cava and Tokaj are closely tied to geographically defined production zones and long-standing export markets. Any broader acceptance of those terms as generic identifiers could affect how producers defend them in third countries and on digital platforms.

Lollobrigida said the strategy proposed by Italy would combine legal protection, awareness efforts and technical cooperation in non-EU countries. He said the aim would be to strengthen protection for geographical indications while also supporting local production systems and sustainable territorial development.

The request places fresh pressure on the European Commission to decide whether it will respond with a more explicit common line on geographical indications in trade policy, digital governance and international intellectual property disputes. For countries with large wine, cheese and specialty food exports, the issue has become more urgent as market access talks increasingly overlap with fights over naming rights.