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Italy and 16 E.U. states urge Brussels to defend geographical indications abroad

The appeal says U.S. trade policy and new internet domains could weaken protections for names like Champagne, Prosecco and Gorgonzola

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Italy and 16 other European Union member states have asked the European Commission for a common strategy to defend geographical indications in third-country markets, arguing that recent U.S. initiatives and digital domain decisions could weaken one of Europe’s main systems for protecting food and drink names tied to origin.

In a statement issued on Monday, November 23, Italian Agriculture Minister Francesco Lollobrigida said the group wants coordinated EU action to protect designations of origin in international forums and trade talks. He said defending geographical indications means protecting farmers’ work and the link between products and their territories.

According to the Italian Agriculture Ministry, the information note submitted by Italy was backed by Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain. The document warns that several international developments could undermine the geographical indication system, known in Europe as GI protection.

Geographical indications are legal protections for names associated with a specific place and production method. In the wine and spirits business, they include appellations whose value depends heavily on the recognized link between a product and its origin. If those names are treated as generic terms abroad, producers can face weaker price premiums, less commercial differentiation and more legal uncertainty in export markets.

The Italian ministry said one of the main concerns is the United States, where the revision of the Farm Bill and the Safeguarding American Food and Export Trade Yields Act of 2025 aim to classify geographical indications as “common names” that can be used freely. Italy and the other member states argue that such an approach would erode existing international protections for European names and could complicate trade relations where the EU has already negotiated recognition of protected products.

The ministry also pointed to Washington’s reciprocal trade agreements with 10 countries — Argentina, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia and Taiwan — as evidence that the U.S. position is already being reflected in external trade policy. It said similar talks are under way with other

countries, including India, creating a risk of conflict with agreements the EU already has in force, such as Mercosur, or is still negotiating with Thailand, Malaysia and India.

Another concern raised by the Italian-led initiative involves the digital sphere. The ministry said the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, or ICANN, has assigned new generic internet domains that include names linked to European denominations, among them .asiago, .gorgonzola, .champagne, .porto, .budweiser, .cava and .tokaj. European governments fear that domain use without strong safeguards could add another path for commercial misuse or consumer confusion.

Lollobrigida said Italy's proposal calls on the EU to adopt a broader strategy that combines legal protection, awareness campaigns and technical cooperation in third countries. The ministry said the idea is not only to defend European names in court or in trade talks, but also to support clearer rules and recognition systems abroad that can coexist with local production and regional development.

The push comes as the EU continues to pursue GI protection through bilateral agreements. On November 21, the EU and Indonesia signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement and an Investment Protection Agreement after concluding negotiations in September 2025, according to Fondazione Qualivita and Origin Italia. The agreement is intended to deepen trade ties, reduce barriers and strengthen intellectual property protections.

For geographical indications, the Indonesia deal provides protection for 221 EU names in Indonesia and 72 Indonesian names in the EU, according to Qualivita. Italy accounts for 38 of the European names covered, second only to France. The largest Italian category in the agreement is wine, with 20 protected denominations, followed by nine cheeses, five meat products, two fruit and vegetable products, one vinegar and one spirit drink.

The wine names listed include Asti, Barbaresco, Barolo, Brunello di Montalcino, Chianti, Conegliano Valdobbiadene-Prosecco, Franciacorta, Marsala, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, Prosecco, Soave and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano. The spirits category includes Grappa. For the drinks sector, that list shows how central GI protection is to European exports: many of the products most exposed to imitation in foreign markets are wines

and spirits whose market position depends on a protected place name.

Qualivita said the intellectual property chapter of the EU-Indonesia pact includes provisions against improper commercial use, imitation and evocation of protected names, as well as practices that could mislead consumers about a product’s origin. The agreement also foresees administrative and judicial measures against unlawful uses and leaves room to expand the list of protected denominations in the future.

Some Italian products, including Gorgonzola, Grana Padano and Parmigiano Reggiano, already had protection in Indonesia through direct registration, and the new agreement is expected to reinforce that coverage. More broadly, supporters of GI protection in Europe see such bilateral deals as a practical counterweight to efforts in other markets to turn protected names into generic terms.

The EU-Indonesia agreements still need to complete internal approval procedures. On the European side, that includes approval by the European Parliament. According to the European Commission, provisional application could begin in the first months of 2027 if the required procedures are completed.

The Italian-led appeal to Brussels suggests that member states want the EU to move beyond case-by-case negotiations and build a more unified response across trade policy, intellectual property enforcement and online governance. For producers of wines, beers and spirits that rely on denomination-based branding, the outcome could shape how securely those names are defended as exports expand into markets where protection rules remain uneven.