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The EU Overhauls protection for wines and agricultural products

European Parliament passes landmark reform on Geographical Indications

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In a significant move for European agriculture and the beverages sector, the European Parliament has recently passed a comprehensive reform of the EU's rules on Geographical Indications (GIs). With an overwhelming majority of 520 votes in favor, the reform aims to bolster the protection of wines, spirit drinks, and agricultural products by strengthening their geographical indications both online and offline. This change is set to bring about a notable transformation in the way GIs are registered, protected, and managed, promising greater clarity and security for producers and consumers alike.

For the uninitiated, GIs are a form of intellectual property protection for products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation due to that origin. Think Champagne from France, Parma ham from Italy, or Scotch whisky from Scotland. The protection of these indications ensures that only products genuinely originating from these regions can bear these prestigious names, safeguarding the authenticity and integrity of traditional products against imitation and misuse.

Under the newly adopted regulations, the protection of GIs extends to the digital realm. This inclusion is crucial in today's globalized market, where the internet plays a pivotal role in commerce. With the implementation of measures like domain name alerts and geo-blocking, the EU Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) is tasked with shutting down or restricting access to domain names that illegally use GIs. This proactive approach is aimed at combating counterfeit products and misleading representations online, providing a stronger shield for genuine products.

Moreover, the reform simplifies the GI registration process, making it more accessible and straightforward for producers. A notable feature is the introduction of a clear stipulation that allows the name of a GI product used as an ingredient in a processed product to be highlighted, provided it contributes significantly to the character of the final product. This ensures transparency and authenticity, allowing consumers to make informed choices based on the quality and origin of the ingredients.

Producers of GIs now have enhanced powers to prevent actions or commercial practices that could harm the reputation or value of their products. This includes tackling devaluing marketing practices and preventing the lowering of prices that undermine the quality perception of GI products. Additionally, for increased consumer transparency, the packaging of all GI products will now mandatorily include the producer's name in the same field of vision as the geographical indication.

The overhaul of the GI protection rules comes at a time when European agriculture and the food sector have been navigating through the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine. According to Paolo De Castro, the reform rapporteur, this regulation marks a significant step forward in supporting quality agrifood chains, enhancing the role of producer groups,

and promoting sustainability and transparency towards consumers. It represents a ray of hope and a testament to the EU's commitment to protecting its rich culinary heritage and ensuring the sustainability of its agrifood sector without the need for public funds.

This reform is not just about legal technicalities; it's about preserving culture, tradition, and the hard work of generations. It's about giving consumers around the world the confidence that when they buy a product with a GI label, they are getting something authentic and of quality. The ripple effects of this reform are set to enhance the reputation of European products on the global stage, boost rural economies, and ensure that the legacy of Europe's unique products is preserved for future generations to enjoy.