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EU Court Bars 'Gin' Label for Non-Alcoholic Drinks, Citing 37.5% Alcohol Requirement

Ruling aims to prevent consumer confusion and protect traditional producers as alcohol-free alternatives gain popularity across Europe

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The European Union Court of Justice has ruled that non-alcoholic beverages cannot be marketed or labeled as gin. The decision was issued after a legal dispute in Germany, where an association focused on fair competition challenged the company PB Vi Goods

for selling a product called “Virgin Gin Alkoholfrei,” which translates to “Virgin Gin Alcohol-Free.” The association argued that under EU law, the term “gin” is reserved for a specific alcoholic beverage made by flavoring ethyl alcohol of agricultural origin with juniper berries and must have a minimum alcohol content of 37.5 percent by volume.

The German court referred the case to the EU Court of Justice for clarification. In its ruling, the court stated that EU law clearly prohibits presenting or labeling non-alcoholic drinks as “alcohol-free gin.” The court emphasized that it does not matter if the label includes the words “alcohol-free” or similar qualifiers. The legal definition of gin is tied to its alcoholic content and production method, and these requirements are not met by non-alcoholic alternatives.

The court also addressed arguments about business freedom under the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. It found that this freedom does not override the prohibition on using the term “gin” for non-alcoholic products. The ruling specifies that while companies are free to sell non-alcoholic beverages, they cannot use protected terms like “gin” in their marketing or labeling unless the product meets all legal criteria.

The decision comes at a time when the EU has recently allowed non-alcoholic wine to be labeled as “alcohol-free wine” or “0.0,” and similar rules exist for beer. However, spirits such as gin are subject to stricter regulations regarding their naming and composition. The court explained that this prohibition aims to protect consumers from confusion about what they are purchasing and to ensure fair competition among producers who comply with EU standards for spirits.

According to the judgment, allowing non-alcoholic drinks to be sold as gin could mislead consumers about the nature and ingredients of the product. It could also create unfair competition for traditional gin producers who follow established production methods and meet all regulatory requirements.

The ruling is expected to have an impact across the European Union, affecting how non-alcoholic spirit alternatives are marketed and sold in member states. Producers of alcohol-free beverages will need to find alternative names and branding strategies that do not infringe on protected designations like “gin.” The decision reinforces existing EU

regulations designed to maintain clarity in food and beverage labeling and to protect both consumers and compliant producers from misleading practices.