

## SPIRITSEUROPE POSITION ON ABSINTHE

spiritsEUROPE supports the Commission's draft Regulation amending Annexes II and III to Regulation 110/2008 (D024558/02) and the definition of Absinthe included therein. **Therefore, we urge MEPs to vote against the ENVI motion at the Plenary meeting in March, which attempts to block the Commission proposal.**

### Why?

#### 1. Consumers must not be deceived – they expect certain characteristics and traditions:

It is important to establish a definition of absinthe based on qualitative criteria to prevent consumer deception by maintaining absinthe's traditional recipe and characteristics.

A minimum level of thujone is necessary in absinthe because:

- Its presence confirms that the right plant and variety has been used. Thujone is the only active ingredient in the plant *Artemisia Absinthum L.*<sup>1</sup> used for the production of absinthe, – other *Artemisia* varieties do not have this substance;
- Its presence determines the aromas and flavours of *Artemisia Absinthum L* and its absence (or presence *under* the 5 mg/l limit) goes against the typicality and quality of the product; the 5mg/l limit is considered as an indicator of the qualitative production of the absinthe.

A minimum level of anethole is necessary in absinthe because:

- Anethole is responsible for the typical organoleptic equilibrium of Absinthe as it counteracts the natural astringent of the plant *Artemisia Absinthum L.*;
- It also helps to preserve the tradition dictating how absinthe is consumed – the anethole is responsible for the typical turbid effect when water is added during the traditional consumption process. 0.5 g/l is considered the level below which the quality and the typicality of the absinthe are lost;
- To note: As far back as 1891, reference was made to a minimum level of anethole in absinthe.

#### 2. The Commission proposal represents a fair compromise between different absinthe producers:

- The Commission's draft is supported unanimously by spiritsEUROPE members - 31 national associations representing the industry in 24 EU countries – it was the subject of much debate, and represents a compromise between the various absinthe traditions within Europe.
- On 3 December 2012, Members States adopted the draft by a large majority - 287 in favour, 10 against, with 45 abstentions and 3 not represented - during the Committee on Spirit Drinks meeting<sup>2</sup>.

#### 3. The definition, as proposed by the Commission, poses no health risk:

The proposed levels of thujone (between 5 and 35 mg/l) do not represent any health risk:

- The European Commission's (DG SANCO) *Opinion of the Scientific Committee on Food on Thujone*<sup>3</sup> confirms the safety of the maximum level of thujone proposed and these safe levels are registered in the European Legislation (Regulation (EC) No 1334/2008)<sup>4</sup>.
- If a health risk really existed in relation with the levels of thujone, the authorised maximum level should be challenged, not the minimum level.

The proposed level of anethole (0.5 mg/l) does not represent any health risk either:

- Anethole is not listed in Annex III of Regulation 1334/2008, therefore any natural flavouring source material that contains anethole may be safely added to foods as a flavouring material.
- Other spirit drinks categories, with traditional higher levels of anethole, defined in Regulation (EC) 110/2008, do not represent any health risk: e.g. Pastis, Pastis de Marseille, Anis and Distilled Anis.

#### 4. We need a definition to protect EU-sector interests:

- The establishment of a European definition of absinthe is necessary in order to prevent Switzerland from appropriating the term "Absinthe" through its initiative of registering it as a Swiss Geographic Indication.

#### 5. Not approving the Commission's proposal also undermines 'dry gin' products, and specific Geographic Indications from Poland, Hungary and Lithuania.

<sup>1</sup> "Blue Book" of the Council of Council

<sup>2</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/committees/spirit-drinks/112.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/food/fs/sc/scf/out162\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/food/fs/sc/scf/out162_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Part B of Annex III to Regulation (EC) No 1334/2008