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spiritsEUROPE Position Paper

EU GI Action Plan 2027

Build, Promote, Protect: Spirits Drinks with Geographical Indications as Strategic European Assets

Preamble

The EU Geographical Indication (GI) system is a cornerstone of European agri-food quality policy, delivering economic value, safeguarding cultural and culinary heritage, and supporting rural and economic development across Member States. The GI system protects the collective reputation and distinctive characteristics of products whose quality, identity, and value are intrinsically linked to a specific geographical origin (i.e. cannot be relocated) and to natural and human factors, including local know-how, traditional practices, and production methods. The EU plays a leading international role in the development, recognition, and enforcement of GI protection, including through bilateral trade agreements globally.

Spirits Geographical Indications ("spirits GIs") form an integral part of this system, with more than 250 protected names embedded in local value chains, regional identities and traditional production methods. They contribute meaningfully to rural economies, employment and Europe's global reputation for high-quality, origin-based products.

The recent reform of the EU GI framework has further strengthened the system by modernising procedures, reinforcing enforcement and clarifying the role of producer groups, while preserving its core architecture. It confirms the continued relevance and resilience of the GI model as a stable and future-proof policy instrument.

Against this backdrop, the forthcoming EU GI Action Plan is an opportunity to build on this strengthened foundation and enhance coherence, visibility and effectiveness. It should:

- i. improve policy coordination across Member States and Commission services,
- ii. reinforce the competitiveness of GI producers,
- iii. ensure robust protection and enforcement within the EU and in international markets,
- iv. support the system's continued dynamism by facilitating the registration of new GIs across Member States and sustain its proven attractiveness, and
- v. recognise and support the unique requirements of spirits GIs, including their ability to communicate and promote their distinctive characteristics in ways that reinforce consumer understanding and appreciation.

To support these objectives, **the sector has developed 10 key policy recommendations** to reinforce the effectiveness, visibility, and long-term value of the system. We look forward to engaging constructively with the European Commission on these proposals and on the continued development of a strong and future-proof EU GI framework for spirits.

BUILD – Strengthen the Foundations of the EU GI System for Spirits Drinks

spiritsEUROPE supports the current legal framework under Regulation 2024/1143 and Regulation 2019/787 which recognise the uniqueness of spirits GI. However, several **implementation challenges across the EU GI system highlight the need for stronger governance and policy coherence**. In practice, differences in administrative interpretation, varying levels of enforcement capacity, and fragmented coordination between national authorities can lead to inconsistencies in the application of GI rules across Member States. This can create legal uncertainty for producers of spirits drinks, uneven market conditions, and delays in decision-making, ultimately weakening the uniform protection that the EU GI system is intended to ensure. Strengthening coordination, transparency, and evidence-based policy alignment at EU level is therefore essential to safeguard consistency, predictability, and the overall credibility of the system.

1. Establish a formal EU GI governance and clear EU COM coordination mechanism

- Create a structured inter-service coordination mechanism on Geographical Indications led by DG AGRI, ensuring DG AGRI retains the central coordinating role given its policy responsibility for the GI system. This mechanism should ensure systematic alignment across Commission services such as DG SANTE, DG ENV, DG GROW, DG TRADE, as well as the EUIPO, while safeguarding the coherence of the GI framework across policy domains.
- It should also introduce a “GI impact check” for all relevant EU initiatives, to assess potential effects on the integrity, functioning and competitiveness of spirits drinks with Geographical Indications at an early stage of policy development.

This safeguard is particularly important to ensure that consumer, sustainability, and other key information is appropriately integrated without undermining the legal protection, unique characteristics market functioning, labelling requirements specific to different GI categories, or traditional specifications of GIs, as also set out in the Spirits Drinks Regulation (EU (2019/787)). In all cases, policy objectives should be pursued in a way that is compatible with the unique needs of GIs, and does not weaken the established GI framework, including considering bespoke rules for GIs and spirits GIs where appropriate.

PROMOTE – Unlocking the Economic and Cultural Value of Spirits GIs

2. Strengthen the competitiveness, innovation and development of GIs through inclusive EU support

- Guarantee clear access for all GI sectors, including spirits, to EU funding and innovation instruments;
- Support initiatives which provide access for spirits GIs to obtain assistance with sustainability, digitalisation and innovation, such as peer-to-peer physical or online fora;
- Facilitate EU-level cooperation platforms to assist GI producers, in particular SMEs, with competitiveness;
- Conduct an EU-wide assessment of untapped GI potential and provide technical assistance to SMEs and under-represented Member States to support GI application development.

3. Enhance digital consumer access to GI heritage and product information for GI spirits

- In keeping with the Council Conclusions of 19 March, promote the development and uptake of digital tools that improve consumer access to clear, reliable and engaging information on Geographical Indications, including origin, traditional production methods, and associated

cultural and historical heritage. This approach supports greater transparency, strengthens consumer trust, and enhances the visibility of EU quality schemes in a modernised information environment.

- Encourage the voluntary use of digital solutions, such as QR codes or equivalent technologies, to enrich consumer understanding of GI spirits at point of sale and beyond, while avoiding any additional mandatory labelling obligations.
- Support initiatives at EU and national level that enhance the visibility, recognition and appreciation of the specificities and quality attributes of GI spirits across the Union. Digital channels should be seen as a key future-oriented vector to communicate Europe's GI heritage in a way that is accessible, consistent and market-relevant, reinforcing both consumer engagement and the overall competitiveness of the system.
- Enhanced digital access to GI information would also strengthen the functioning of the Internal Market by improving transparency, comparability, and consumer trust across Member States, thereby supporting smoother cross-border trade. At the same time, it would facilitate international market access by reinforcing traceability, authenticity, and storytelling around EU GI products, contributing to stronger competitiveness in global markets.

4. Build a positive narrative on EU spirits GI as cultural and economic assets

- Introduce a positive EU narrative on the cultural and territorial value of spirits GIs, in close cooperation with stakeholders. This may, for example, take the form of an annual EU-level campaign (GI Awards) or engagement week. In addition to reaching EU consumers, it is important that this initiative also directly addresses policymakers both in Brussels and across Member States with a view to increasing understanding of the economic value, cultural heritage, and role in the rural economy of GIs. It should also address the importance of maintaining a robust legal framework to protect them both within the EU and internationally. To this end, policymakers should be encouraged to see EU GI sectors as 'European Champions', and particularly the GI spirits sector as a key strategic asset.
- Reflect this narrative in EU promotion and communication activities, in line with responsible consumption objectives.
- Create a dedicated webpage on the European Commission's tourism webpage related to tourism experiences proposed by producers of geographical indications, including visits of distilleries producing spirits GIs.
- The forthcoming GI Action Plan should also recognise the role of GI-related tourism in supporting rural development, local employment and the visibility of origin products. In this context, the recent wine CMO reform, which introduced public support for investments linked to wine tourism, offers a useful precedent. The Commission should explore similar support for distillery tourism and tourism experiences linked to spirits GIs.

5. Strengthen EU leadership in international promotion of the GI system

- Build strategic alliances with like-minded partners, such as the UK, to promote and defend the GI system globally. Seek tangible opportunities to address this, for example keeping it on the standing agenda at relevant bilateral summits.
- Potential cooperation might include intelligence sharing, enforcement cooperation, harmonised engagement on global standards development, joint promotion activities, and/or coordination in respect of protections requested in FTA negotiations.
- Reinforce EU technical assistance to third countries developing GI frameworks, building on previous successful initiatives under the AfriPI and IP key projects.
- Ensure that sufficient funds are allocated to guarantee the continuity of DG AGRI's High-Level Missions to third countries and its participation in international trade fairs. These are vital for promoting EU spirits GIs in third countries.

6. Ensure systematic inclusion and expansion of GI protection in EU trade agreements

- Ensure the comprehensive inclusion of EU Geographical Indications in all trade agreements, supported by robust enforcement provisions and mechanisms allowing for the progressive expansion of protected names over time.
- Pursue the recognition of GIs in key export markets where adequate protection has not yet been achieved, or, where full GI systems are not in place, seek equivalent protection through existing frameworks for products of distinctive origin, ensuring effective and meaningful protection of EU GI names in international trade.
- Beyond the negotiation of new trade agreements, equal attention should be given to the effective implementation of commitments already undertaken by third countries under existing trade agreements, including through dedicated monitoring mechanisms, regular bilateral reviews, and the use of available dispute settlement tools where third-country compliance falls short of agreed obligations. Where appropriate, GI operators should be able to be more actively and directly involved in the discussions with third countries.

7. Safeguard the reputation and integrity of the GI system through the recognition of third-country GIs

- Recognition of third-country GIs should be conditional upon the existence of full, effective and enforceable reciprocity, whereby the applicant country ensures an equivalent level of recognition, protection and enforcement for EU GIs within its jurisdiction.
- The Commission should carefully assess the genuine link between the product and its geographical origin, ensuring that recognition is granted only where this connection is well established, historically rooted, and supported by local producers and consistent with EU labelling requirements to maintain a level field of competition.
- The Commission should encourage third-country authorities seeking GI protection in the EU to participate in international frameworks for GI protection, such as the Geneva Act of the Lisbon Agreement on Appellations of Origin and Geographical Indications, as a means of promoting consistent standards and international cooperation.

8. Mitigate the impact of trade retaliation on GIs

Around 250 registered spirit GIs account for approximately two-thirds of EU spirits exports outside the EU and enjoy a strong international reputation. As a result, they have frequently been targeted by retaliatory measures imposed in the context of wider political and trade disputes. Unlike other products, GIs are intrinsically linked to their place of origin and cannot relocate production or diversify sourcing in response to such measures. This leaves GI producers disproportionately exposed to trade tensions unrelated to their sector. The EU should therefore consider establishing mechanisms to support affected GI sectors, including compensation schemes, market support measures, or other forms of targeted assistance.

9. Strengthen enforcement capacity against GI infringements within the EU

Complaints to Member State enforcement authorities about the sale of counterfeit GIs are not addressed in a consistent manner across Member States. A greater understanding of the protection afforded to GIs, and the sharing of best practice between Member States, could support a more consistent approach, especially for SMEs which may have less resource for litigation and therefore rely more heavily on administrative complaints to enforcement authorities to resolve infringements.

- DG AGRI could play a role in co-ordinating training for authorities, including the judiciary, throughout the EU with the assistance of GI rightsholders and other stakeholders. For example, specialised training on GI infringements for customs authorities could be developed in cooperation with DG TAXUD and OLAF.
- Enhance cooperation and information-sharing between Member State authorities and GI rights holders, particularly in cross-border cases involving counterfeit products. DG AGRI, together with other stakeholders such as the EUIPO, could promote greater use of existing tools and intelligence-sharing platforms, including the IP Enforcement Portal.
- Provide targeted support and resources to relevant trade bodies to strengthen the protection and enforcement of GIs in key export destinations and emerging markets.
- Raise awareness of GI rights among intellectual property offices to reduce the number of registered trademarks and future trademark applications that need to be challenged and assessed because they breach GI protection. This would reduce unnecessary conflicts and the administrative burden associated with opposition and cancellation proceedings.

10. Reinforce international enforcement cooperation against GI infringements

- Strengthen operational cooperation with enforcement authorities in key third countries to combat the counterfeiting of spirits GIs through structured arrangements for information sharing, training, and capacity-building. For example, DG AGRI and DG TAXUD could provide targeted training to relevant authorities shortly after the entry into force of free trade agreements to support effective implementation and enforcement.
- The protection of GIs in the international digital environment should be reinforced, particularly regarding domain names. The Commission should pursue and intensify its dialogue with ICANN with a view to integrating GIs into the UDRP complaint procedures applicable to generic top-level domains (gTLDs such as .com, .org, .net), to provide an accessible and harmonised mechanism to address abusive domain name registrations that infringe GI rights.