Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
https://pace.coe.int

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 1046
15 September 1959

Harmonisation of legislation governing wines and spirits in Europe

Report[1]
Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development
Rapporteur: Mr Jean SOURBET, France

1. 1959 - 11th Session - Second part

A. I. Draft Recommendation submitted by the Committee on Agriculture

The Assembly,

Having noted, with keen appreciation, Resolution (59) 1 of the Committee of Ministers authorising the convening of a committee of governmental experts to prepare a draft European Convention on the production and marketing of vine products and spirits ;

Considering the importance of the production and marketing of these products to the economies of Europe ;

Noting that legislative diversity and administrative complications hamper the expansion of trade;

Believing that the first essays in the harmonisation of European legislation should be concentrated on particular sectors and aim at establishing comparable standards for products whose definitions are essentially similar;

Convinced that close collaboration in the sector of alcoholic drinks can easily and must be attained and that such collaboration would greatly facilitate trade, bring about a rapid improvement in quality and, by putting down fraud, enable the consumption of drinks harmful to health to be avoided;

Believing that all action in this field, owing to its economic, political and social importance, should be planned in agreement with those concerned and that the enterprise shown in various quarters by the trade merits co-ordination and encouragement;

Recalling that the international associations have repeatedly requested the appointment of a particularly representative and qualified personality, to be responsible for liaison between the Governments and those concerned and to give the necessary impetus to the proposed draft Convention, while safeguarding legitimate national interests,

Recommends that the Committee of Ministers appoint, for a period of five years, a leading European personality who could :

guide and inspire the experts in their work of drawing up a Convention to harmonise legislation on alcoholised and fermented drinks;

co-ordinate international action by trade organisations concerned;

make approaches to Member Governments with a view to developing highquality products, putting down fraud such as may endanger the economy of the member countries, and avoiding the use of substances harmful to health.

B. II. Explanatory Memorandum by M. SOURBET

1.

As pointed out in M. Temple's report on the production and marketing of wine products and spirits (Document 896) and in Recommendation 182, adopted by the Consultative Assembly on 16th October 1958, the production and marketing of fermented drinks cover an extensive sector of the European economy and occupy great numbers of the working population, principally in the Mediterranean basin.

Trade in this field is considerably hampered by differences in the laws of our countries, just as the absence of strict definitions and comparable standards tend to encourage fraud or low-quality production.

The need to harmonise legislation is thus seen to be urgent. It seems, moreover, that , in so limited and specific a sector, such harmonisation is possible?without really causing either inconvenience or prejudice to any member country. At least, such is the view which emerges from the debates in the Consultative Assembly and the discussions in the Committee on Agriculture.

The members of that Committee were accordingly most interested to learn that the Committee of Ministers, by Resolution (59) 1 of 24th January last, had decided to convene a group of experts to prepare a draft European Convention laying down the general lines of a common policy for the production and marketing of wine products and spirits, the term « spirits », as was expressly recognised during the deliberations, covering all alcoholised and fermented drinks.

While welcoming that decision, the Committee were disappointed to note that none of their qualified and specialised members was to be given an opportunity of following the proceedings of this committee of governmental experts and that the idea of co-opting a few representatives of the main trade organisations, whose experience would have been of great value, had not been accepted.

That being so, the Committee has reason to fear that the work of the experts, for all their good will and competence, will lack the political drive which seems all the more to be desired inasmuch as the problem before them has serious social implications in most of our countries and affects a section of the population which is very sharp to react and traditionally resistant to changes.

Whenever in the past the Assemblyhas broached subjects with comparable human implications, it has felt it necessary, in order to co-ordinate efforts, resolve friction and make its aims understood, to entrust some distinguished personality with the task of co-ordinating and centralising separate activities.

This approach has been remarkably successful and we can unreservedly welcome the decisions of the Committee of Ministers in this matter. In dealing with refugees and overpopulation and the simplification of frontier formalities, the work of the Special Representative and the Delegate of the Council respectively has been decisive; in both these fields, despite the great difference between them, something efficacious, positive and realistic has been achieved. This is concrete proof that, given the means, any kind of problem can be solved if the lead is taken by a well-informed person of high-standing.

The Committee on Agriculture must be guided by these two examples; they are convincing, and the Assembly can take pride in them. Without insisting, here, on t h e precedent of Brussels and the Treaty of Rome, we sincerely believe that the Committee of Ministers must appoint a leading European personali ty to vitalise the work of the Government experts, supply the necessary political drive and maintain essential contacts with the trade organisations whose work is well-known to the sections of the public concerned. The influence of a distinguished personality could be a determining factor and could lead, in this special, limited sector, to practical achievements such as would perceptibly advance European integration.

The foregoing draft Recommendation has been drawn up in the light of all these facts.

Appendix APPENDIX

France

Wine :

Production (1956) : 50.5 million hectolitres; Value : 203,000 million francs; Export : 3,3 million hectolitres.

Cider :

Production (1956) : 20 million hectolitres; Beer (1957) : 15.5 million hectolitres;

Pure alcohol (1957) : 2.3 million hectolitres. Value of alcoholic drinks exported in 1957 :

56,100 million francs to foreign countries and 14,500 million francs within the franc zone.

(Source : National Yearbook.)

Germany

Beer :

Production (1957) : 39 million hectolitres; Value (1957) : 2,200 million D. M.j Export (1957) : 61.5 million D. M.

Alcohol :

Export (1957) : 4.3 million D. M.

Wine :

Production (1957) : 2.3 million hectolitres; Export (1957) : 34.9 million D. M.

Sekt :

Export (1957) : 386,000 litres.

(Source : National Yearbook.)

Italy

Wine :

Production (1955) : 58.6 million hectolitres. Export (1955) : 1.2 million hectolitres value 11,500 million lire.

Beer :

Production (1955) : 1.8 million hectolitres; Export (1955) : 8,000 hectolitres, value 200 million lire.

Pure alcohol :

Production (1955) : 600,000 hectolitres, value 500 million lire;

Export (1955) : 3,000 hectolitres.

Vermouth :

Export (1955) : 5,500 million lire.

United Kingdom

Beer :

Production (1957) : 2.1 million bulk barrels of 36 gallons (164 litres).

Alcohol :

Production (1957) : 4.2 million proof gallons of 4.5 litres with 49.3 % pure alcohol content.

Total value of alcoholic drinks exported (1957) : 166.5 million dollars.

Netherlands

Beer :

Production (1957) : 2.8 million hectolitres; Value of alcoholic drinks exported : 21 million dollars.

Ireland

Beer :

Home consumption (1954) : 879,897 standard barrels of 1.64 hectolitres.

Alcohols :

Home consumption (1954) : 654,478 proof gallons of 4.5 litres with 49.3 % alcoholic content;

Value of beer output : £12.3 million. Alcoholic drinks exported : Value (1957 : 17.2 million dollars.