



## AN INTERVIEW WITH COMMISSIONER PHIL HOGAN AT ORIGO GLOBAL FORUM 2018

***[Question] The growing success of PDO PGI in many European countries both in terms of production, both in terms of the number of products registered, certainly requires a reflection on how the legislation can support a more specific and accurate growth. Is a reform of the Regulation desirable in order to facilitate the uniformity of rules of the three sectors food, wine and spirits geographical indications and the rules on controls in the different countries?***

EU GIs are a global success story, built on our wonderful local and regional traditions of food and drink production. We should consider ways to make the GI scheme more attractive for both producers and consumers: improvements might include more common-sense procedures, shorter delays, and more responsiveness from Member States managing the schemes on the ground.

We are currently taking the first steps towards simplification in the wines and spirit drinks sectors, where legislation is being discussed in the Parliament and Council. Making GIs easier to manage would provide the added benefit of giving more time to our producers to concentrate on what they do best: producing and promoting their world-class food and drink products. As regards controls, uniform rules apply across all Member States and we are increasingly working together to ensure their uniform and efficient enforcement.

***[Question] The European bilateral agreements, while being an important tool in order to ensure access of Community goods on international markets, penalize excessively agri-food products, in particular those that are most well-known in the netting set geographical indications. How European policy can defend more pragmatically agri-food products and wine PDO PGI?***

I certainly agree with your assessment that EU quality policy is an important and powerful instrument to promote our high-value food products, in the EU and in overseas markets. It also has an essential role in EU rural development policy, ensuring higher revenues and helping to maintain traditional production methods and knowledge in rural areas. However, it is inaccurate to say that our GIs “penalise excessively agri-food products” outside Europe. The Commission is constantly defending EU GI interests in the negotiation of bilateral agreements.



Gaining protection for our GIs in new markets is an integral part of EU trade policy. In the last decade alone, our key GIs gained protection in a number of new markets such as South Korea, Colombia, Canada, South Africa, as well as many of our neighbours.

And the coming years will bring further access to important markets like Japan, Vietnam, and Mexico. It is true that in certain cases some of the GIs will have to coexist with practices or uses that had been on these overseas markets for years, even decades in some instances. But the key point is that the Commission managed to have these GIs recognised and protected in countries where this was certainly not a given!

***[Question] The Regulation on promotion has in fact marked a step forward for the knowledge of European geographical indications in international markets. It is possible to think in an increase of allowance allocation and, above all, to simplify the rules and application procedures so that even small businesses can find resources to exit from its restricted scope of market?***

I am very keen to see promotion funding used to expand exports, helping to reach new market segments and new consumers, especially for high quality products like those covered by GIs. This is where the EU has a competitive advantage. Quality schemes are ideal vehicles for promotion campaigns – which must be backed up by good marketing.

Eligible organisations for promotion grants are in principle trade or inter-trade organisations whose members are involved in economic activities linked to the production of relevant products. Suitable organisations need to group producers together and represent the specific sector. EU promotion policy thus enables the participation of the agri-food industry via representative producer organisations.

Representative organisations have to have the operational, as well as financial, capacity to implement promotional campaigns - individual businesses – whether big or small – are not eligible. My advice to small businesses is: join forces with similar producers to create the economic clout needed to take on new markets, and come forward with a promotion plan that has a clear message, well-identified audience and a strategy that will directly benefit GI producers in the target sector.

***[Question] There is actually at a global level a rethink of relations between institutions and major digital players (Facebook, Google, etc.). In this context Europe is engaged in a “renegotiation” affording greater protection to citizens and businesses. In this review will it be possible also to think digital protection of geographical indications on the model already tested in Italy with eBay and Alibaba, through private agreements?***

There is an urgent need to upgrade enforcement of GIs on the internet, to prevent counterfeiting and food fraud, and to stop GI rights being undermined. All Member States



are responding to the challenge, but the technology is developing fast and counterfeiters are finding new ways to trade their goods.

We need to improve awareness of the need for strengthening online checks, among both public authorities and producer organisations, and ensure better links between them. The Commission has developed an online administrative assistance system targeting food fraud that enables Member States to report, exchange information, and request action. The EU Observatory in Alicante has developed the intellectual property "Enforcement Database" that links police, customs and inspection services with intellectual property right holders: we need to ensure holders of GIs can tap into this resource.

Online platforms, working under the growing body of e commerce rules, can only remove fraudulent content if they are aware of it. We must continue and enhance our efforts in the area of detecting and preventing internet fraud, especially working with private platforms to "notify and take down" counterfeits, similar to the Italian example you mention.

***[Question] The geographical indications also represent a cultural heritage and protect Europe's biodiversity. It is possible to think about new tasks for geographical indications in key environmental through direct support to firms that require amendments of specifications for the introduction of more sustainable practices? Assuming either an ad hoc economic contribution or a simplification of the bureaucracy?***

I strongly believe that good food, sustainably produce, means good business. And global consumer patterns support this claim. Informed consumers are not only interested in buying traditionally produced products, they also pay more and more attention to the way these products are produced. That is why environmental criteria contributing for example to biodiversity and clean water, and sustainability criteria such as animal welfare may also be integrated in a GI production specification. Producer groups are the ones who prepare and amend the product specifications, and can include in them additional environmental and sustainability requirements – this can only enhance their product's reputation. In this way they could also increase sales, as such additional requirements speak to certain groups of consumers. Respecting higher environmental standards is already rewarded by support for green and agri-environmental commitments that apply in many areas famous for their traditional products. It is my job to ensure these strands – environmental measures; quality production; GI schemes – can be put together in a coherent way, so that regions and Member States can create further opportunities for farmers of quality products to prosper.