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From: Presidency

To: Delegations

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Subject: Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL amending Regulations (EU) No 1308/2013 establishing a common organisation of the markets in agricultural products, (EU) No 1151/2012 on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs, (EU) No 251/2014 on the definition, description, presentation, labelling and the protection of geographical indications of aromatised wine products, (EU) No 228/2013 laying down specific measures for agriculture in the outermost regions of the Union and (EU) No 229/2013 laying down specific measures for agriculture in favour of the smaller Aegean islands
- Information from the Presidency

1. On 1 June 2018, the Commission published three legislative proposals for the future CAP. Within the proposal on the CMO Regulation, several changes related to wine sector provisions were put forward. Among these, the proposal on wine varieties seems to be the most controversial. The Commission proposes to open the possibility to Member States and the wine sector to use:

- varieties belonging to the species *Vitis labrusca*;

- varieties Noah, Othello, Isabelle, Jacquez, Clinton and Herbemont, which were forbidden years ago for reasons that some consider no longer to be valid;
- inter-species hybrid varieties of *Vitis vinifera* with other *Vitis* species in protected designations of origin (PDOs), as is already the case for protected geographical indications (PGIs).

The Commission justifies the introduction of such possibilities with economic and environmental considerations. In fact, hybrid varieties and varieties belonging to *Vitis labrusca* tend to be better adapted to climate change which means in practice that they survive better in harsh weather conditions such as drought and high temperatures. In most cases they also present characteristics of better disease resistance, including to common grape diseases and pests such as downy mildew, powdery mildew, botrytis and phylloxera. This feature has direct influence on the quantity of pesticides used, which can be significantly reduced having therefore a positive impact on environment and farmers' profit margins.

2. The wine related provisions and, more specifically, the questions on wine varieties were first discussed at the Working Party on Agricultural Products in September 2018. During their oral interventions as well as in written comments, delegations showed rather strong opposition to this proposal, quoting potential health and phytosanitary risks coming from the introduction of these varieties. This subject was further debated at the SCA meeting in November 2018, when the Austrian Presidency proposed three questions to assess more precisely the level of support for each of the three sub-issues in the Commission's proposal. The discussion showed a clear difference of opinion between the main wine-producing countries, who would strongly oppose the proposal, and the rest of the Member States, who would be either flexible or keen to accept it. Delegations willing to support the proposal indicated environmental considerations as their main reason as well as lack of any scientific proof of potential health risks mentioned in the past. Moreover, some highlighted the fact that the Commission's proposal did not require the Member States to authorise such varieties but only gave them the option to do so which, in their opinion, should be open. The arguments quoted by countries opposing the proposal include mainly the risk of lowering the quality standards for European wine.

3. At the wine seminar organised by the Austrian Presidency in December 2018 several speakers presented scientific and historic facts to demonstrate the advantages and disadvantages of introducing these varieties.

On one hand, a point was made that these varieties could be beneficial for both producers and consumers, by significantly limiting the quantity of pesticides used and therefore, having a positive impact on environment and profit margins of the farmers.

On the other hand, it was underlined that opening of these wine grape varieties belonging to *Vitis labrusca* and of the six forbidden varieties would decrease the quality of the wine products and therefore, could affect the reputation of European wines gained with huge efforts and important financial resources. The wines produced from these varieties do not respond to European and world consumers' expectations for quality and competitiveness.

Finally the presentation on disease-resistant vines and the vineyards of the future underlined the role of further research and innovation in the sector and the need to find new genetic resistant varieties with a view to counteracting some of the negative aspects linked to the use of pesticides. With current technological advances and specialised knowledge, there is a large potential for research in viticulture and creation of new sustainable varieties which would adapt to agronomic conditions and which could be properly selected with wine tasting quality criteria.

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Against this background, at the Council on 28 January, Ministers are invited to take part in an exchange of views on the basis of the following questions:

*Q1: Considering the arguments included in the presentations that took place at the wine seminar and in the documents distributed subsequently, would you be ready to accept opening the market to wine grape varieties belonging to *Vitis labrusca* and to the six forbidden varieties? Or would you prefer maintaining the status quo as regards these grape varieties?*

*Q2: In the light of the previous question, do you agree that a wine variety stemming from crosses between *Vitis vinifera* and other species of the genus *Vitis* could be authorised in PDO wines?*
