(2003/C 110 E/200)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3189/02

by Adriana Poli Bortone (UEN) to the Commission

(7 November 2002)

Subject: New olive oil labelling rules


Article 4 of Regulation No 1019/2002 (2) not only says that the designation of origin of the oil is optional but also that only extra virgin olive oil or oil benefiting from a protected designation of origin or a protected geographical indication may bear a designation of origin on the labelling.

The lack of any general requirement to indicate the origin of oil amounts to misleading consumers who are buying oil from different countries than the language on the label and, above all, the brand name would reasonably lead them to assume.

Moreover, the possibility of blending oils of different origins and the associated option of indicating a fictitious ‘main origin’ on the label creates even greater confusion in the marketing standards for olive oil.

As this regulation will enter into force on 1 November 2002 and is intended, on the one hand, to simplify the relevant legislation and, on the other, to provide the consumer with greater protection by not only ensuring that consumers are not misled by labels but also guaranteeing the quality of the final product, does the Commission not think it would be advisable to propose an amendment to the regulation to make it compulsory to indicate the origin of the oil on the label and thus give consumers absolute certainty?

(1) OJL 155, 14.6.2002, p. 27.
(2) OJL 109, 6.5.2000, p. 29.

Answer given by Mr Fischler on behalf of the Commission

(9 December 2002)


Article 4 on designation of origin on labelling applies from 1 November 2002. It continues the arrangement introduced by Regulation (EC) No 2815/98 (1) whereby a designation of origin may optionally be shown on the labelling of extra virgin and virgin oils if at least 75% of the oil has that origin. It prohibits designation of origin for other categories and allows a regional origin to be indicated only in the case of protected designation of origin (PDO) and protected geographical indication (PGI) oils.

To make compulsory the indication of origin that up to now has been optional presupposes an efficient Community-wide tracing and control system for verifying origin that does not hinder movement of oils inside and outside the Community. Such a system covering all olive oil that is traded is at present unrealisable.

The existing optional arrangement reverses the burden of proof by obliging a person who wishes to label the origin of certain oils to hold documentation meeting Community and national requirements. This is more easily achievable in some cases (e.g. mills disposing only of their own production) than in others (e.g. bottlers/canners of various olive oils).
On oil sales in Italy, the figures for the last marketing year (2001/02) should be noted. Given domestic olive oil production of 562,000 tonnes, domestic consumption of 735,000 tonnes and exports of 280,000 tonnes, Italian traders had to import 440,000 tonnes to meet demand on the internal and external markets. Of this 400,000 tonnes came from Spain. The other 40,000 tonnes came from Tunisia and had to meet the quality requirements set in the Community rules.

Under Regulation (EC) No 2815/98 and from 1 November 2002 Article 4 of Regulation (EC) No 1019/2002 'Made in Italy' may appear on the label only if the oil comes 75% to 100% from olives harvested in Italy. If it comes less than 100% from Italian olives this must be explicitly stated.

The Commission firmly believes that the arrangement in force for indicating origin on labelling is the only way of guaranteeing to the consumer the quality of the olive oil supplied by the producer.


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WRITTEN QUESTION E-3198/02
by Stavros Xarchakos (PPE-DE) to the Commission
(8 November 2002)

Subject: Problems in Belgium in communicating in a language other than Flemish

According to complaints which have also been reported in the Belgian press, French-speaking Belgian nationals as well as other EU nationals who have contact with the authorities of the Flemish region of the country do not receive essential official documents in any language other than Flemish. The same applies to legal proceedings before the courts of the same region (e.g. Antwerp and elsewhere) in which the accused — according to the same complaints — are required to speak Flemish and only Flemish.

There have also been angry protests against the fact that in the Flemish region of Belgium, account information and official notices are exclusively in Flemish, despite Belgium being a country with more than one official language and hosting thousands of foreign nationals who work for the numerous international organisations and embassies based there.

Is this practice employed by the Flemish authorities consistent with Community law? Does it infringe the right of citizens who are either nationals of that country or have lived for long periods in Belgium to communicate in a language with which they are familiar? How could the Commission intervene to facilitate communication by non-Flemish speaking Belgian nationals and EU nationals who do not know Flemish but live in areas in which Flemish is the official language? What are the Commission’s views on the difficulties of communication encountered particularly by anyone taking a case to the judicial authorities in the Flemish region of Belgium?

Answer given by Ms Reding on behalf of the Commission
(12 December 2002)

The Commission does not have the authority to express an opinion on the language regime in the Member States. This area is the exclusive responsibility of the Member States.