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Russian Invasion Prompts EU Wine Worries

War understandably overshadows the news this week, but there is also Burgundy, Tinder and Patagonia to think about.

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© TASS | Russia's invasion of Ukraine is likely to impact on a lot of European wine producers.

Most wine-related news headlines this week have covered French billionaire François Pinault (through his Artemis holding company) buying a stake in Champagne house Jacquesson or, also in the land of bubbles, the news that US actor Leonardo di Caprio has bought into Damery-based Champagne Telmont.

Meanwhile, export headlines from pretty much any wine region you care to mention are posting impressive gains at the moment, in some cases (Burgundy, for instance) overtaking pre-pandemic numbers.

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But here are some of the headlines you might have missed this week

Ukraine conflict prompts EU concerns for wine exports

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has prompted French president Emmanuel Macron, numerous wine and agricultural organizations, and senior figures in EU countries to voice concerns over the future of exports to the Russian Federation. Speaking at the International Agricultural Salon being held in Paris this weekend, the French premier told attendees the war would have consequences for French agribusiness and for many countries.

"The President [...] warned the wine sector there would be lasting impacts for its export markets," said Alexandre Abellan on wine news site Vitisphere.com.

"War has returned to Europe. A war conducted unilaterally by president Putin [...] There is no doubt there will be consequences for our major export sectors," said the French Premier, highlighting the wine and cereal sectors in particular.

Others feared a backlash from the Kremlin as a result of projected international sanctions on Russia. The governing body of the Italian Agricultural Confederation (Confagricoltura) said Italian wine and pasta exports could suffer in a tit-for-tat trade war.

"Italy, as well as other EU countries, is still facing a ban on fruit and vegetables and pork products initiated in 2014 by the Russian Federation as a reaction to the measures taken by the EU following Russia's annexation of Crimea," said regional Italian news daily, Il Friuli on Thursday.

Italian business newspaper Il Sole 24 Ore concurred, saying counter-sanctions would "certainly impact the sector", adding there would be "issues linked to the expected collapse of the rouble as well as the uptick in energy costs". The report added that the Italian Wine Union (Unione Italiana Vini, or UIV) had reported "long truck queues at the Latvian-Russia border" and "large quantities of goods not collected at customs".

Along with Georgia, Italy is one of the top wine exporters to Russia, with wine exports to the country worth a reported €332 million (US\$375 million). According to reports, main exports include [Prosecco](#), [Lambrusco](#) and [Asti Spumante](#), as well as range of classic DOP/DOC wines from [Tuscany](#), [Sicily](#), [Piedmont](#) and the [Veneto](#).

Italy is also a major wine supplier to Ukraine which, in the first nine months of 2021 saw demand increase by 20 percent for bottled wine and 78 percent for sparkling wine.

In Spain too (the third largest exporter of wines to Russia), the wine sector is also trying to project the effects of a likely trade war.

"Those heading up the main agricultural and food sectors, such as [olive] oil and wine, aired their concerns should the conflict continue to grow or should Russia impose new sanctions," said

regional Spanish wine news outlet Vinos de [Castilla La Mancha](#) (Vinos CLM) Media, which also reminded readers of the 2014 embargo on fruit and vegetables.

Others, such as Julio Suárez, who, in 2019, began importing Spanish ham, cheese and [Codorníu](#) wines into Ukraine after seeing shops there full of Italian produce, is coming to terms with the likely end of his project, despite weathering the conflicts running up to the invasion and the effects of the pandemic.

"If Russia stays we will have to drop the enterprise," he told Spanish broadsheet El Mundo on Friday.

In all, Spanish wine exports to Russia are worth around €110 million, or US\$120 million (2020 figures).

The Vinos CLM report added that the wine sector in Spain's central Castilla La Mancha region would be most affected by potential Russian sanctions. However, Francisco Martínez Arroyo (Minister of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development) added that although worth an estimated €10 million (US\$11 million) to the local economy, the Russian market was "relatively small" for the region.

Further impacts highlighted by the reports include increased energy costs as well as effects on fertiliser supply, both of which are major Russian exports. Indeed, most mainstream media news reports in Europe have focused on the potential rise in energy and fuel costs posed by the ramifications of the conflict.

Australian wineries call out the townies

Wineries in South Australia's [Limestone Coast](#) are looking to local cities to fill gaps in the seasonal workforce usually brought in for the harvest period. According to local newspaper The Border Watch, wineries are struggling to find harvest staff and pickers due to Australia's closed borders (a result of the country's Covid-19 pandemic response).

Initial reports say the 2022 harvest is shaping up well, although in recent years protracted labor shortages due to the pandemic have seen producers adopt less usual solutions to fill the gaps in harvest. Some smaller outfits in [New Zealand](#), for instance, have even drafted in family and friends for the grape picking season.

Labor shortages, however, have been protracted and go both beyond the harvest period and have affected other fruit and vegetable production.

"We have seen this difficulty for the last two years and there have been challenges to get workers from pruners right through to pickers," said [Patrick of Coonawarra](#) director and winemaker Luke Tocaciu.

"We will try and entice some workers from the cities as well and when it gets really busy we are going to try and get some farmers to come and work the tractors for us when they have finished harvesting themselves," he added.

Another wine Tinder on the cards

It was only a matter of time, really. Warm on the heels of Wines of Argentina's MeetMalbec (which we covered back in [June last year](#)), comes Tchin, a dating app being developed by two [Bordeaux](#) students that will not only help you find a partner but also add a third party into the mix: a bottle of wine.

The two students – Alicia Dumas and Marie-Julie Jegot – recently took home first prize for Tchin (the French equivalent of "cheers") at the Tomorrow Wine innovation competition organised by wine closure company Vinventions at the Wine Paris & Vinexpo Paris salon on 16 February. Like most dating apps, users complete and upload their profile but, in an enological twist, must further specify whether they are a winegrower, enologist, historian or epicurean as well as listing their favorite four wine regions and favorite wine color.

The classic swipe to the right in order to initiate a match is confirmed with a "tchin", presumably along with the sound of two wine glasses making contact. The app then pairs your date with three suggested wines (insert Hannibal Lecter joke here) from the combination of the two profiles.

Tchin also lists the locations where these wines can be found (bar, wine shop or restaurant).

The prize has landed the pair – both MBA students in Wine and Spirits Marketing and Communication at Bordeaux's EFAP marketing school – will use their €10,000 (US\$11,000) prize money to trademark their app. They will also join Bordeaux mogul [Bernard Magrez's incubator](#) programme for start-up projects in the Bordeaux region. According to French wine news website Vitisphere.com, the pair hope to launch Tchin within the year.

Argentinian winemakers defend Patagonia name

If you thought Champagne had its work cut-out defending (perhaps even over-zealously) its name against those who would use it to sell all manner of products – not always wine related (see the [Champanillo bars story](#)) – spare a thought for the winemakers of [Patagonia](#), now contemplating moves to protect their geographical name.

According to local daily newspaper Rio Negro, the Chamber of Exporting Wineries of Patagonia is launching an international bid to claim the Patagonia title as their own. Saying the region's producers are "being threatened commercially", the chamber is reportedly focussing on the likes of the well-known Patagonia clothing brand and major Chilean wine producer: [Concha y Toro](#).

"For a long time we have been working tirelessly to prevent various companies, including two large global companies such as Viña Concha y Toro SA of Chile and Patagonia Inc. of the United States from registering and using the Patagonia brand in wines in different markets, appropriating the work of the region's producers," said the chamber.

Pointing out that Patagonia's Geographical Indicator was established in 2002, the Chamber added that this "conferred on the region's producers a right to exclusive use [of the name]".

"[No] private person (whether Argentinian or foreign) can legitimately appropriate a concept that only corresponds to the products of a region and is part of the cultural and geographical heritage of our country and from which use third parties could benefit by reaping the commercial gains from the prestige associated with products of the region," said chamber president Rubén Patrìtti.

Patrìtti is reportedly in talks with the country's Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Agriculture and the national wine body (the Instituto Nacional del Vino, or INV). Patrìtti has already received support for the move from the country's wine business organisation COVIAR. According to Rio Negro, the local producers are preparing to do battle in the European courts and at the OECD (the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development).

No-spray zones cause consternation in Burgundy

Winegrowers in Burgundy are up in arms over legislation coming into force this year, establishing no-spray zones for phytosanitary products within 10 to 20 meters (10-22 yards) of residential buildings. The interdiction is nationwide and, while national wine publication *La Revue du Vin de France* said the ruling had "been giving nightmares to French viticulturists for the last two years", Burgundy, whose villages are often surrounded by vines and whose climate is more temperate than most, will potentially be the hardest hit.

"Our most beautiful vineyards abut the villages," Thiébauld Huber, of the Burgundy Winegrowers' Confederation (CAVB), told the publication. "Given the enormous economic value of our vineyards, losses could be very high. A no-spray zone of ten meters around dwellings is 1000 hectares (2500 acres) lost."

The ruling comes into force in the middle of the year and, as *Vitisphere.com* pointed out back in January, remains contentious. For many, not least in organic and biodynamic circles, the potential impacts of the legislation clearly throw up questions around just how much viticulture is dependent on potent phytosanitary products, some of which are known or suspected carcinogens.

On the other hand, some winegrowers have suggested that the state should pay compensation for loss of land and income as a result of the "Zones de Non-Traitement" (or ZNTs), and that encroaching urbanisation should not bring with it additional penalties for viticulture such as no-spray zones.

While organic applications and the like will likely not be affected by the ruling, to further complicate matters, the new legislation will be interpreted and applied at a regional (not a national) level.

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