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Geographical indication to be registered Стралджанска мускатова ракия/Мускатова ракия от Стралджа/Straldjanska Muskatova rakya/ Muskatova rakya from Straldja

Category of the spirit drink Винена дестилатна спиртна напитка / Wine spirit

Description of the spirit drink

— Physical, chemical and/or organoleptic characteristics

'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' is a wine spirit with a sparkling, clear, pale yellow to light amber colour and a pleasant muscat aroma, combining rose and rose-scented geranium, typical of the Muscat Ottonel variety of grape. It is matured in oak barrels for at least six months to one year, which imparts a delicate oaky note to the finish. The best batches of distillates are matured for at least three years in oak barrels. The result is a product that is distinguished by a rich complex of aromas and by a harmonious combination of the varietal muscat aroma with an aroma of figs and discrete vanilla notes with a mild, lingering after-taste which is the hallmark of a special wine spirit.

The minimum alcoholic strength of the drink is 40 % vol. It is produced subject to compliance with the rule that no more than 75 litres of wine may be produced from 100 kg of grapes and that the drink be obtained by distillation at less than 65 % vol.

The Ministry of the Economy has received 16 test reports for different batches of 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit issued by an accredited laboratory (Annex 1); 16 certificates of authenticity issued by the South-East Thrace (Yugoiztochna Trakiyska) Regional Vine and Wine Chamber (RLVK) (Annex 2); and eight organoleptic assessment reports, including two issued by the Central Wine-Tasting Arbitration Committee (TsADK) and six issued by the Regional Wine-Tasting Committee (RDK) of the South-East Thrace RLVK, respectively (Annex 3).

The volatile substance content is key to determining the drink's organoleptic properties. The reports on the physico-chemical analyses of different batches of 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit indicate that its volatile substance content is in the 276-394 g/hl a.a. range. Its aroma is determined by its ester content (28-115 g/hl a.a.) and aldehyde content (3.5-12.1 g/hl a.a.), whilst its taste is determined by its higher alcohol content (190-274 g/hl a.a.).

— Specific characteristics (compared to other spirit drinks of the same category)

'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' is the first aromatic muscat wine spirit to have been made in Bulgaria and produced by means of special distillation of selected wines made from the aromatic grape varieties Muscat Ottonel and Tamyanka.

The resulting distillates are graded. The best ones are matured for at least three years in oak barrels made from *Quercus stranjensis*, an oak that is indigenous to the area. The other distillates are matured in oak barrels for between six months and one year. *Quercus stranjensis* (*Quercus hartwissiana* Stev.) is a deciduous tree that can grow to a height of 25 metres. This is a relict species which has survived since the time before the last Ice Age 1.5 million years ago. In Europe, its distribution is confined to the Strandzha massif. It is often found – growing in clusters or individually – on north-facing slopes and in lower-lying and damp areas, frequently alongside rivers and streams. *Quercus stranjensis* is a protected species and is listed in the Bulgarian Biological Diversity Act. *Quercus stranjensis* possesses unique qualities. Contact with the wood results in the development of a refined taste and an exquisite aroma. The oak barrels have specific properties and a specific structure, being solidly constructed, with staves that are 3-4 cm thick.

'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit is a unique blend created by the coupage of carefully selected distillates that are combined in such a way as to emphasise the characteristic muscat aroma and the delicate oak nuance of the finish.

Geographical area concerned

The geographical area in which 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit is produced is centred on the town of Straldzha and includes the following localities (*zemlishta*):

- Straldzha municipality — two localities (micro-regions): Straldzha and the village of Lozenets;
- Tundzha municipality — four localities (micro-regions): the villages of Tenevo, General Inzovo, Pobeda and Skalitsa;
- Bolyarovo municipality — eight localities (micro-regions): Bolyarovo and the villages of Kraynovo, Malko Sharkovo, Ruzhitsa, Voden, Gorska Polyana, Golyamo Krushevo and Denitsa;
- Elhovo municipality — five localities (micro-regions): the villages of Malomirovo, Izgrev, Malak Manastir, Melnitsi and Golyam Dervent;
- Kameno municipality — one locality (micro-region): the village of Troyanovo;
- Aytos municipality — one locality (micro-region): the village of Topolnitsa.

The vineyards from which the raw materials used to produce 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit are obtained are located in the south-eastern part of the Southern (Thracian Lowlands/Trakiyska nizina) wine region, comprising the municipalities of Bolyarovo, Elhovo, Straldzha and Tundzha, and the western part of the Eastern (Black Sea/Chernomorski) wine region, comprising the municipalities of Aytos and Kameno. The geographical area covers the Tundzha-Straldzha sub-region and reaches as far as the northern slopes of the Strandzha and Sakar massifs. The area falls within two climatic zones: the continental zone and the continental-Mediterranean zone, substantially influenced by the Black Sea. The average elevation is 200 m above sea level. In terms of relief, too, the area can be divided into two parts: one flat and one hilly. The plains typically feature depressions which have the effect of retaining water and producing waterlogged soils. Natural drainage is provided by the Rivers Tundzha, Popovska, Mochuritsa and Kalnitsa, and by a large number of gullies which almost dry up in summer. The soils are moderately to lightly leached chernozem-vertisols, alluvial meadow soils, cinnamon-brown forest soils, etc. The climatic and soil conditions in the geographical area where 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit is produced are ideal for the cultivation of vines, in particular those of the Muscat Ottonel and Tamyanka varieties, which provide the basic raw material for this drink.

Method for obtaining the spirit drink

The wine spirit 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' is produced in the geographical area around the town of Straldzha from grapes of the Muscat Ottonel and Tamyanka varieties. The area planted with Muscat Ottonel extends to about 2 404 decares (240.4 ha), with an average yield of 949 kg per decare. The area planted with Tamyanka extends to about 404 decares (40.4 ha), with an average yield of 1 075 kg per decare.

According to information from producers, the grapes are harvested when technically ripe, with a sugar content of at least 16%. Only top-quality grapes are used. The grapes are harvested by hand and placed in plastic buckets or crates. The use of containers with a capacity of more than 15 litres for harvesting is not allowed. The grapes are transported for processing without any packaging in insulated metal containers of suitable design and capacity. When delivered, they are sorted by weight, appearance, variety and sugar content. An average sample is most often collected from each vehicle by hand, and the external appearance, general condition and varietal purity are assessed, and the sugar content is measured using a hydrometer. Processing takes place within 12-24 hours of harvesting. The grapes are removed from the stems and pressed. The grape pulp is cooled and macerated in suitable vessels for up to 48 hours. The temperature is lowered to prevent the onset of alcoholic fermentation, and contact with the solid particles results in extraction of the aromatic substances in the skins of the grapes. This process is conducted with the utmost care so that the must does not become coarse and to ensure that it is enriched with valuable aromatic components. The must is then strained without being over-pressed. Strict compliance is ensured with the rule that no more than 75 litres of wine can be produced from 100 kg of grapes. A pure wine yeast culture is added to the separated must. Primary fermentation takes place in special vessels, usually made of stainless steel and connected to a cold source. The process is controlled and the temperature, sugar content and changes in organoleptic properties are monitored twice a day. Secondary alcoholic fermentation takes place in reinforced concrete tanks. The wine cellars in the area are mainly of the southern French type. After completion of secondary fermentation, the wines are carefully separated from the lees (racking). The human factor plays an important part here. The wine-making technician minimises oxygenation with a view to the shaping and maturing of the wines. No use is made of sulphites (sulphur dioxide), and the process is an extremely delicate one. The rule that is followed in order to obtain high-quality distillate is: 'Distil as soon as fermentation is complete!'

The distillation equipment used to produce 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit are type K5 and DK-1 continuous stills. The equipment is of typical Bulgarian design. Its characteristic features are as follows:

Type K5 still. This consists of a distillation (fractionating) column with 13 single-cap contact devices, two dephlegmators, a condenser, a cooler, a bubble cap for the distillate, a horizontal wine heater and a level regulator. After the water is fed into the system of dephlegmators, condenser and cooler, the column is heated by feeding in steam, after which the wine to be distilled enters after passing through the pre-heater to the upper part of the distillation column. Rising from the bottom up, the water vapours come into contact with the wines in a countercurrent and are enriched with ethyl alcohol and volatile substances. The water-and-alcohol vapours from the upper part of the distillation column reach the dephlegmators and condenser, where their alcohol content is increased to 62–65% vol. The wine distillate obtained after cooling trickles out via the bubble cap, where its alcohol content and the temperature are continuously monitored by means of an alcoholmeter. The de-alcoholised residue leaves the column via the level regulator and passes through the wine pre-heater where the wine to be distilled is heated to 60-70 °C. The desired alcohol content of the wine distillate is ensured by regulating the flow of cooling water into the dephlegmators. The system's normal operating mode is maintained by regulating the flow of wine to be distilled, the quantity of steam fed into the column and the flow of water into the dephlegmators. The system has a capacity of 1 000 litres of wine per hour.

The DK1 distillation column is a continuous-action still which works on the rectification principle. It consists of a fractionating unit, a concentration unit, two dephlegmators, a condenser, a cooler, a bubble cap for the distillate, a wine pre-heater in the lower part of the fractionating unit, and a level regulator. The fractionating unit contains plates, on each of which continuous mass transfer takes place between the liquid phase and the vapour phase. The alcohol vapours exit the column and enter the dephlegmators; some of the phlegm returns to the column and the remainder cools in the condenser and cooler. There is thus continuous evaporation and concentration of the alcohol-containing liquid, i.e. separation and concentration of the alcohol.

The alcohol content is zero at the bottom of the fractionating column and increases towards the top. Rising from the bottom up, the water vapours come into contact with the wine in a countercurrent and are enriched with ethyl alcohol and volatile substances. They then enter the concentration unit, where the alcoholic strength is increased. The water-and-alcohol vapours from the top of the distillation column enter the dephlegmators, and some of them return to the column and the remainder pass into the condenser and cooler. The wine distillate obtained after cooling trickles out via the bubble cap, where its alcohol content and the temperature are continuously monitored by means of an alcoholmeter. The de-alcoholised residue leaves the column via the level regulator and passes through the wine pre-heater where the wine to be distilled is heated. The system has a capacity of 3 750 litres of wine per hour.

Distillation is performed until an alcohol content of 65% vol. is reached. Many years of experience by generations of specialists have shown this to be the alcoholic strength at which the capture of aromatic substances from the wines is maximised and a harmonious, rich and balanced taste is achieved. High-quality distillates offer the possibility of further development of the organoleptic properties during maturing and ageing in oak barrels. Only *Quercus stranjensis*, which enriches the taste of 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' and gives it its characteristic and unique appearance, is used.

Quercus stranjensis (*Quercus hartwissiana* Stev.) is a deciduous tree that can grow to a height of 25 metres. It is a relict species which has survived since the time before the last Ice Age 1.5 million years ago. In Europe, its distribution is confined to the Strandzha massif. It is often found – growing in clusters or individually – on north-facing slopes and in lower-lying and damp areas, frequently alongside rivers and streams.

Local coopers have passed on their skills in working this unique material from generation to generation. This tree, which is said to have its 'roots in stone', has a porous structure, but the pores are very small. Prolonged contact with the distillates used to make 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit results not only in the evaporation of alcohol but also in the extraction of valuable components from the wood. This enriches the colour, aroma and taste of the distillates, which undergo exceptional, specific and fine transformations. 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit is matured in oak barrels with a capacity of up to 1 000 litres for at least six months to one year, and, in the case of the best-quality and unique distillates that possess obvious ageing potential, for about three years or more. Finally, after the blending (coupage) of suitable distillates, a clear liquid is obtained which has a pale yellow to light amber colour, a clean muscat aroma with discrete notes of rose, rose-scented geranium and figs, the finish having a delicate oaky nuance, containing discrete vanilla notes with a mild taste and lingering after-taste. The finished drink is poured into stylish bottles of typical contemporary design which are recognised the world over and are easily distinguished by consumers.

The drink does not have to be bottled within the boundaries of the geographical area.

Link with the geographical environment or origin

– Details of the geographical area or origin relevant to the link

'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' is a wine spirit which is traditional, specific and typical of the geographical area in which it is made. The area around Straldzha is known to have been a centre of Thracian culture. A Thracian settlement was uncovered at Zaichi Vrah. There are Thracian tombs nearby. Archaeological finds in the region from the Thracian era, namely amphorae, jugs and coins depicting customs connected with the cultivation of vines and the making of wine, indicate that such activities have been well-developed in these parts since ancient times.

The production of distillates began later. Over time, the distillation process and the apparatus used were improved and became more widespread. At the beginning of the 20th century, vine cultivation and the making of wines and wine spirits evolved from a traditional craft into a major industry.

The production of 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' may be considered to have begun in 1964. At that time, the wine cellar was established in Straldzha, and the cooperatives in the nearby villages already had sufficient plantations of the aromatic Muscat Ottonel and Tamyanka varieties. We enclose photographs from that period (Annex 4).

'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' was approved as a special wine spirit by industry standard No 1874609-82 in 1982, which authorised bottling only in 0.7 litre bottles; industry standard No 1874609-85 was issued in 1985 and bottling in 0.5 litre bottles began (Annex 5). The artistic design (bottle, label and cap) took place in various stages, but the bottle, which is an important marketing feature of the drink, is distinctive and recognisable by consumers. Information on the quantities of 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit produced and marketed indicates that 720 056 litres of this drink were produced and marketed during the 2007-12 period.

The changes that established a democratic system in Bulgaria resulted in the full restitution of agricultural land. Vineyard plantings of the Muscat Ottonel and Tamyanka varieties have been regenerated in the geographical area where 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit is produced. 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit is being offered for sale on new markets outside Bulgaria. A distinctive design of bottle was created that has not changed over the years and is recognisable to consumers. A start is being made on taking part in large-scale advertising campaigns, presentations and tasting sessions organised through large retail chains and participation in international trade fairs, exhibitions and competitions. 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit is a spirit drink that has received numerous awards. Over the years, 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit has been awarded eight gold and seven silver medals and two certificates of distinction at the Vinaria International Exhibition in Plovdiv. The drink's indisputable qualities were also recognised in the prestigious INTERNATIONAL SPIRIT CHALLENGE 2011 competition, where it won a bronze medal.

In 2012, 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit was ranked amongst the top three in the world after scoring 89 points and winning a silver medal in the prestigious International Review of Spirits competition organised by the Beverage Tasting Institute (BTI) in the USA. It has also received a Best Buy medal, which is awarded to products that offer consumers excellent added value at an affordable price. The assessment of 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit ends with a very telling word, which has also been worked into the advertising campaign for the drink, namely 'stylish'.

'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit has received numerous international awards:

- honorary silver medal, International Wine & Spirit Competition 2010, UK;
- honorary silver medal, Los Angeles International Wine and Spirit Competition 2010, USA;
- silver medal and Best in Class award, International Wine & Spirit Competition 2008, UK;
- gold medal, MUNDUS vini 2006, Germany;
- certificate of honour, Wine & Spirit International Design Awards 2005.

(Annex 6), (Annex 7) and (Annex 8).

'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit has an active presence on the internet. It has its own website (<http://straldjanska.com>), where consumers and fans can find

news, information, advice on how to drink it, restaurants, details of bars and shops and anything of interest about 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit, for instance the organisation of an annual golf tournament for true connoisseurs of the drink.

– Specific characteristics of the spirit drink attributable to the geographical area

The geographical area where 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' is produced provides suitable climatic and soil conditions for the cultivation of vines of the Muscat Ottonel and Tamyanka varieties. Wines are produced from these varieties, 75 litres of wine being obtained from 100 kg of grapes. Distillation takes place at less than 65 % vol. in type K5 and type DK1 continuous stills of typical Bulgarian design and method of operation. The combination of the varietal characteristics of the wines, as derived from the geographical area, with the distillation method results in the production of distillates that are distinguished by a rich complex of aromas combining the varietal aroma of muscat (rose and rose-scented geranium) with an aroma of figs.

The geographical area where the drink is produced includes parts of the Strandzha Massif, the source of the wood used to make the barrels in which the distillates for 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit are matured. Contact with the wood of *Quercus stranjensis* results in refined changes in colour, aroma and taste. A clear liquid is obtained which has a sparkling pale yellow to light amber colour, a clean muscat aroma with discrete notes of rose, rose-scented geranium and figs, the finish having a delicate oaky nuance, containing discrete vanilla notes with a mild, lingering after-taste.

European Union or national/regional provisions

National legislation does not contain any additional specific provisions concerning the wine spirit 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya'. The production and marketing of 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit are subject to the general requirements applicable to the 'Wine spirits' category laid down in the Wine and Spirit Drinks Act (ZVSN), as published in State Gazette No 45/2012 and in force from 16 September 2012, which sets out:

- a definition of 'Traditional Bulgarian spirit drinks', including grape rakia (grozdova rakya);
- the national procedure for approving spirit drinks with a geographical indication.

A wine spirit being a grape rakia with the geographical indication 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' was approved pursuant to Order No T-RD-27-24 of the Minister for the Economy and Energy of 27 November 2013 (Annex 9), which was published on the Ministry of the Economy's website at: <http://www.mi.government.bg/bg/library/zapowed-za-utvarjdvane-na-vinena-destilatna-spirtna-napitka-grozdova-rakiya-s-geografsko-ukazanie-s-72-c28-m361-2.html>;

- Specific rules on the marketing of wine spirits

Any wine spirit produced in Bulgaria may be placed on the market only if accompanied by a batch test report issued by an accredited laboratory and a copy of a certificate of authenticity issued by a Regional Vine and Wine Chamber (RLVK). The RLVK is a professional organisation of producers, processors and traders of wine-sector products and spirit drinks which are legal persons having a registered office and territorial jurisdiction. The RLVKs determine the composition of the regional wine-tasting committees (RDKs) and issue certificates of authenticity for wine spirits, including those

with a geographical indication. The regional wine-tasting committee attached to an RLVK draws up an organoleptic assessment of the batch of wine spirit, stating that, on the basis of its organoleptic and physico-chemical properties, it corresponds to the wine spirits category and may be bottled and placed on the market. The regional wine-tasting committees include technical experts who produce wines and spirit drinks in the region concerned and are also actively involved in monitoring their quality before they are placed on the market.

Wine spirit with the geographical indication 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' is subject to organoleptic assessment by the regional wine-tasting committee operating under the South-East Thrace (Yugoiztochna trakiyska) Regional Vine and Wine Chamber, having its registered office and head office in Sliven.

The Ministry of the Economy has received 16 certificates of authenticity in respect of 'Straldjanska Muscatova rakya' wine spirit (Annex 2).

Applicant

— Държава членка, трета страна или юрMember State, third country or legal/natural person

Република България, Министерство на икономиката / Republic of Bulgaria, Ministry of the Economy

— Full address (street number and name, town/city and postal code, country):

гр. София 1052, ул. "Славянска" № 8, Република България / ul. Slavyanska 8, 1052 Sofia, Bulgaria

— Legal status (in the case of legal persons):

Supplement to the geographical indication

Specific labelling rules

In accordance with the Wine and Spirit Drinks Act, when labelling spirit drinks produced in Bulgaria and intended for the Bulgarian market, the following details must be provided in Bulgarian:

1. the commercial name of the spirit drink;
2. its nominal volume;
3. the 'e' mark, certifying that the quantity of the drink corresponds exactly to that indicated on the label;
4. the actual alcoholic strength of the drink;
5. the number and/or date of the batch, preceded by the letter 'L';
6. the number of the technical specification of the drink;
7. the name (business name) and registered office of the producer;
8. the name (business name) and registered office of the bottling company, if the drink has been bottled or decanted into containers with a capacity of up to 60 litres;
9. the number of the producer's registration certificate;

The following optional information may be included when labelling a spirit drink:

1. name of the geographical area in which the drink was produced;
2. name of the fruit or fruits or name of the raw material from which the drink was produced;
4. recommended use of the drink;
5. medals and awards received;
6. maturing and ageing methods used;
7. method of production;
8. number of distillations;
9. information on the history of the drink and the producer;
10. information about persons involved in the marketing of the drink.

A geographical indication may be added after the commercial name of a spirit drink if the production phase, from the harvesting of the raw materials to when the spirit drink acquires its specific or final characteristics and properties, takes place in the specified geographical area.