

Russian Law Takes Fizz Out of French Champagne Supplies

By [Anna Smolchenko for AFP](#)

July 03, 2021



The French are fiercely protective of the term "champagne", and it can only be made in the French region of the same name. **Wikimedia Commons**

Russian elites could soon find themselves without their favorite French bubbles if Moët Hennessy makes good on a threat to halt champagne supplies following a new law signed by President Vladimir Putin.

Moët Hennessy's Russia office warned local partners it was suspending supplies after Russian lawmakers adopted legislation stipulating that the word "champagne" can only be applied to wine produced in Russia, while the world-famous tippable from France's Champagne region should be called "sparkling wine".

Leonid Rafailov, general director of AST, a top liquor distributor which works with a number of brands including Moët Hennessy, said on Saturday his firm had received a letter from the French company notifying it of the suspension.

"I confirm that such a letter exists, and it is justified," Rafailov told AFP.

He said that in accordance with the legislation – signed off on by Putin on Friday – the company would have to undergo new registration procedures, among other requirements.

Sebastien Vilmot, Moet Hennessy managing director in Russia, declined to speak to AFP.

But in a statement released through Rafailov, Vilmot called the suspension a "temporary" measure before a solution could be found.

Moet Hennessy is part of French luxury goods group LVMH and known for such brands as Moet & Chandon, Veuve Clicquot and Dom Perignon.

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A copy of Moet Hennessy's letter was first published on social media on Friday by a representative of a Moscow-based liquor importer and distributor.

Drinks market expert Vadim Drobiz suggested the legislation was open to interpretation but added that Moet Hennessy's share of the Russian market was relatively small and well-heeled clients could find a replacement.

"If there is no Moet, there won't be a state coup and Russian elites will not commit suicide," Drobiz quipped.

But wine consultant Anna Chernyshova questioned the purpose of the amendments.

"My phone has been ringing off the hook," she said. "Me and my clients are thinking what to do next."

Chernyshova, who helps people build wine collections, said she was not sure why the Russian parliament had passed such a law.

"How will they walk back on it?" she told AFP. "So many officials love this champagne."

Social media was abuzz with jokes, with wits making fun of the latest piece of Russian legislation.

"Now it's necessary to ban Scots and Americans from using the word "whisky", joked restaurateur Sergei Mironov.

Popular singer Vasya Oblomov said Russian lawmakers could now adopt similar legislation regulating the use of the name "Mercedes" and even place names.

"I thought it was a joke," wrote Putin's self-exiled critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky. "I was wrong."

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