

Exploring the “wine paradox”

scritto da Fabio Piccoli | 10 Giugno 2025



Lithuania reveals a curious “wine paradox”: while market dynamics push toward ultra-low prices, a growing segment of consumers is eager to invest in quality wine. This article explores the contradictions of a struggling import market, outdated trade models, and the real voices of wine lovers who are often ahead of the industry itself.

I’m attending the Vyno Dienos fair in Vilnius, Lithuania.

Lithuania, with over 3 million inhabitants, is the most populated of the three Baltic Republics (the others being Latvia and Estonia) and historically the most interesting wine market.

Even though 2024 has been a sharply negative year for Lithuanian wine imports—more than halved in value—Italy has lost less than other countries, dropping from around 40

million euros in 2023 to 38.8 million. **Still, Lithuania is experiencing a worrying downturn in wine imports after a period of promising growth.**

Understanding the reasons is never simple, but I increasingly feel the issue is not price but the offer itself, the distribution models, the so-called wine trade intermediation, which appears increasingly obsolete. **Even in Vilnius, we see what I call the “wine paradox”, a global phenomenon.**

Industry operators, especially buyers in various roles, insist that appealing to markets today means offering low-priced wines. **The organizers of Vyno Dienos even state that commercial wines must cost less than €2 ex-cellar, ideally even €1.**

If that's the case, hardly any producer would be justified in attending a fair like this in a country where people are seemingly willing to spend less on a bottle of wine than on bottled water.

Then, however, you meet importers, sommeliers, and above all, passionate wine lovers crowding the fair's pavilion every year, people not only looking for quality wines but also ready to pay a fair price. **This is confirmed by some Vilnius restaurant wine lists, where prices for many labels are excessively high.**

So the doubt arises: who really drives the demand for ultra-cheap wine? Is it increasingly poor consumers or buyers (or so-called buyers) who seek to squeeze every last cent? **I increasingly believe that consumers are far ahead of those who sell wine to them.**

If we add to this the filters imposed by some importer lobbies, blocking market expansion and keeping out new players, it's easy to see why wine struggles even in markets with great potential like Lithuania. **Protecting a few aging intermediaries while hindering growth seems madness to me.**

Is there a solution to this “wine paradox”? First, we must acknowledge it, instead of protecting an outdated commercial model. **It’s time to rethink the role of intermediaries in wine trade—and open the market.**

Key points

- **Lithuania’s wine import market is shrinking** despite a stable economy.
- **Buyers demand low prices, but consumers seek quality** and are willing to pay.
- **The current commercial model of wine trade is outdated** and restrictive.
- **Importer lobbies block market access** for new players and producers.
- **Recognizing the paradox is the first step** toward meaningful change.