

SPI May Sell Stolichnaya Brand

By [Maria Ermakova](#)

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Two pensioners selling their products under a Stolichnaya ad in Moscow. **Vladimir Filonov**

SPI Group, the owner of Stolichnaya vodka, may decide to sell the brand after its partnership with Pernod Ricard ends, said Andrei Skurikhin, a minority investor and a former general director of the Russian company.

"SPI has always had a number of strategic options for Stolichnaya," Skurikhin said today by phone. "A sale is one of the possible options, but is not the only one."

Pernod, the world's second-largest liquor company, agreed today to acquire Vin & Sprit for 5.28 billion euros (\$8.34 billion) to gain the Absolut vodka brand and raise its market share in the United States. The purchase means Pernod's contract to sell Stolichnaya outside of Russia will end once SPI finds a replacement, the French company said today in a statement.

Pernod, maker of Chivas Regal whiskey, held talks with SPI on purchasing Stolichnaya after gaining the rights to sell the brand following the 2005 takeover of Allied Domecq. The

company has said it cannot afford to acquire both Stolichnaya and Vin & Sprit.

Pernod's bid for V&S "was a well-known action" and the purchase is not surprising to SPI, Skurikhin said. He declined to say how long Pernod would have the rights for Stolichnaya or which company might acquire them subsequently.

SPI's chief financial officer Brian Dublin declined to comment, citing a confidentiality agreement with Pernod.

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