

Brussels, Belgium 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2014

## Is the EU drinking its future away?

**Public health community calls on the European Institutions to take action on Europe's problem with alcohol**

Today over 300 representatives from Health Ministries, the European Institutions, public health experts and concerned stakeholders have gathered in Brussels to call on the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and his team to take actions to prevent and reduce the burden of alcohol on European societies.

The European Union has the highest rate of alcohol consumption in the world (10.2 litres of pure alcohol per person) and alcohol was responsible for 1 in 7 male deaths and 1 in 13 female deaths in the group aged 15–64 years, meaning that 120,000 people died prematurely in 2013.<sup>1</sup>

Alcohol is the third main contributory factor to Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), it is a cause of some 60 different types of disease, including many cancers, liver disease, cardiovascular diseases, gastrointestinal conditions. There is a clear causal link between alcohol and cancer – 10% cancers in men and 3% of total cancers in women are directly attributable to alcohol.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond its health consequences, the harmful use of alcohol inflicts significant social and economic losses. In total, the societal costs of alcohol in the EU for 2010 were an estimated €155.8 billion.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation (2013) *Status report on alcohol and health in 35 European countries*

<sup>2</sup> British Medical Journal (2011) *Alcohol attributable burden of incidence of cancer in eighth European countries based on results from prospective cohort study*. To find out more visit [www.alcoholandcancer.eu](http://www.alcoholandcancer.eu)

<sup>3</sup> Rehm, J. et al (2012) *Interventions for alcohol dependence in Europe: A missed opportunity to improve public health*



*'The problems of alcohol-related harm can be seen throughout European societies. A comprehensive approach to dealing with these harms could save many thousands of lives and constitutes an investment into the sustainability of our health systems.'* said Mariann Skar from the European Alcohol Policy Alliance, organisers of the 6<sup>th</sup> European Alcohol Policy Conference.

### Investing in alcohol-prevention

The European Union Alcohol Strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol related harm was designed for the period 2006-2012. The conference will highlight that the absence of an up-to-date EU Alcohol Strategy based on the latest evidence and in line with societal changes (for example, the move of alcohol advertising from traditional to new media) poses a real threat to reducing alcohol related harm in Europe.

The two day conference will highlight the broad spectrum of harm caused by alcohol to individual health, others around them and to society as a whole. The 6<sup>th</sup> European Alcohol Policy conference will also serve as platform to launch the European Alcohol Policy Alliance's recommendations document for future EU Alcohol Strategy and a Call for action for such a strategy.

The conference is touching on some of the most contentious areas in terms of regulating alcohol:

- Why should alcoholic beverages be exempted from the obligation to list their ingredients, unlike all other food and drink products?
- What impact could international treaties such as TTIP have on the ability of Member States to implement effective alcohol policies?
- Should the price of alcoholic beverages be adjusted to deal with their harms, such as a minimum unit price or taxation?
- How should the online marketing of alcohol be regulated effectively?

These and many other issues of how best to reduce harm done by alcohol will be discussed over the coming two days in Brussels.

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## NOTES TO EDITORS:

### FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

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The European Alcohol Policy Alliance (Eurocare) is an alliance of non-governmental and public health organisations with 57 member organisations across 25 European countries advocating prevention and reduction of alcohol related harm in Europe. Member organisations are involved in advocacy and research, as well as in the provision of information and training on alcohol issues and the service for people whose lives are affected by alcohol problems.

This is sixth in a series of European Alcohol Policy Conferences (Warsaw 2004, Helsinki 2006, Barcelona 2008, Brussels 2010, and Stockholm 2012). Slovenia will be the host for the 2016 7EAPC. For more information: [www.6eapc.eu](http://www.6eapc.eu)

### Facts and figures about alcohol

- Alcohol is the 3<sup>rd</sup> top risk factor in Europe for ill health and NCDs such as cancer and cardiovascular disease<sup>4</sup>
- Alcohol is a toxic substance in terms of its direct and indirect effects on a wide range of body organs and a cause of some 60 diseases
- 12 million people in the EU are dependent on alcohol<sup>5</sup>
- Around 9 million children in the EU are living with one parent addicted to alcohol<sup>6</sup>
- 1 of 4 road fatalities in EU are due to alcohol; in 2010 nearly 31,000 Europeans were killed on the roads of which 25% were related to alcohol<sup>7</sup>
- Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can lead to birth defects and developmental disorders. It may cause the unborn child physical, behavioural and learning disabilities
- The social cost attributable to alcohol is 155,8 billion Euro yearly (was third is now first bullet point)<sup>8</sup>
- Alcohol is the leading risk for ill-health and premature death for the core of the working age population (25-59 year) (was first is now second bullet point)<sup>9</sup>
- Alcohol is responsible 1 in 7 male deaths and 1 in 13 female deaths in the group aged 15–64 years, resulting in approximately 120 000 premature deaths<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> World Health Organisation (2014) *Global status report on alcohol and health*

<sup>5</sup> Rhem J, Shield D (2012) *Interventions for alcohol dependence in Europe: a missed opportunity to improve public health*

<sup>6</sup> Anderson P, Baumberg (2006) *Alcohol in Europe: a public health perspective*

<sup>7</sup> European Transport Safety Council (2011) 5<sup>th</sup> Road Safety PIN Report

<sup>8</sup> Rehm, J. et al (2012) *Interventions for alcohol dependence in Europe: A missed opportunity to improve public health*

<sup>9</sup> Scientific Opinion of the Science Group of the European Alcohol and Health Forum (2011) *Alcohol, Work and Productivity*

<sup>10</sup> WHO (2013) *Status report on alcohol and health in 35 European countries*