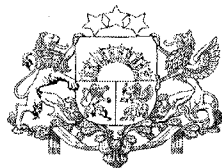


**LATVIJAS REPUBLIKAS
VESELĪBAS MINISTRIJA**



**MINISTRY OF HEALTH
OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA**

Brīvības iela 72, Rīga, LV-1011

72 Brivibas Str., Riga, LV-1011, Latvia

08. 05. 2015 Nr. 01-19/1787

Dr. Vytenis P. Andriukaitis
Commissioner for Health and Food Safety
European Commission

Dear Commissioner!

On 20 April, 2015 the ministers for health from EU, EFTA and candidate country Turkey together with EC and WHO during Informal Meeting of Health Ministers (hereinafter – the Meeting) in Riga discussed possible future of political framework of the EU alcohol policy. The aim was to determine necessity to develop a policy framework to address alcohol harm reduction in the EU its possible format and to discuss EU's role in fostering a supportive environment for the effective use of evidence- based and cost -effective tools to reduce the harmful use of alcohol.

Statistics are harsh and well known. In spite of the evidence and tools available, like WHO Global Strategy to reduce harmful use of Alcohol, The European action plan to reduce the harmful use of alcohol 2012–2020, EU citizens drink twice the world's average and therefore alcohol is the third leading risk factor for premature mortality and illness in EU. Social costs attributable to alcohol were 155.8 billion Euros in 2010; however this is only the tip of the iceberg. It is known, that total costs due alcohol varies between countries and can be even 2 to 3 per cent of GDP depending on drinking habits. 70-80% of health care costs are spent to treat non-communicable diseases, where 4 main risk factors, which kill people, are well identified. Those are - nutrition, physical inactivity and two addictive substances - tobacco, where EU has taken serious steps to fight against, and alcohol, which is treated in a different manner for unknown reasons. These circumstances do not promote competitiveness and sustainable development of the region and the European Union.

During the discussions in the Meeting none of the countries noted that there would be no need for the policy framework for alcohol. On the contrary- majority of delegations expressed clear support to the new EU Alcohol strategy with specific objectives and results to be achieved.

Support to the new strategy was also expressed by the Director of the **World Health Organization's** Regional Office for Europe- Dr. Zsuzsanna Jakab. Importance on data and information exchange, as well as the resources allocated for the development of evidence, were among the most reported issues, which were addressed through the previous EU Alcohol Strategy and should be continued in the new strategy. Majority of delegations stressed the importance of support from the EU particularly regarding issues like marketing, including advertising, cross-border sales, labelling, taxation a.o. Ministers once more acknowledged that taking into account the existing evidence and available tools, countries have already taken number initiatives but those strike against lack of a common position from EU, where equivalent provisions of the Common Market conditions are very important to work effectively on alcohol harm reduction. Therefore many delegations also stressed the need to take active negotiations between DG SANTE and other DGs to apply a Health in all policies approach to clearly identify, how other sectors, not only health sector can take responsibility and action to reduce harm done by alcohol. Since countries worldwide have approved WHO Global Strategy to reduce harmful use of alcohol, delegations noted in particular the need to apply the same areas for action for the new EU Alcohol strategy

Referring to the Meeting and opinions expressed there, I call you to raise a strong voice for the new, comprehensive EU Alcohol Strategy, based on 10 areas for national action, covered by WHO Global strategy to reduce harmful use of alcohol (leadership, awareness and commitment; health services' response; community action; drink-driving policies and countermeasures; availability of alcohol; marketing of alcoholic beverages; pricing policies; reducing the negative consequences of drinking and alcohol intoxication; reducing the public health impact of illicit alcohol and informally produced alcohol; monitoring and surveillance). It was clearly stated that the new EU Alcohol Strategy, based on evident and cost-effective measures, will help to save lives and resources and will help to approximate the goals set out in the Strategy Europe 2020. The added value of the new EU Alcohol Strategy was clearly identified by delegations during the Meeting, therefore I believe, that the European Commission will take into account the voice expressed by the Member States.

Yours sincerely,
Minister



Dr. G. Belēvičs