

MEP

European Parliamentary Labour Party

Brussels, 24 July 2015

**Dear European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker,
Dear European Commission First Vice-President Frans Timmermans,**

We address you as a group of concerned Members of European Parliament. We are alarmed by the lack of an effective or ambitious EU policy on alcohol and by the recent collective resignations of public health organisations from the EU Alcohol and Health Forum.

Harm from alcohol is a 'BIG THING' and deserves priority attention from your Commission.

Alcohol ranks as one of the leading causes of death and disability, killing more people worldwide than HIV/AIDS, violence and tuberculosis combined. Between 1990 and 2010, harmful drinking rose from eighth to fifth leading cause of death and disability worldwide. Europe is the heaviest drinking region in the world (twice the world average). On average we drink around 10 litres of pure alcohol per capita each year, equivalent to over 100 bottles of wine.

According to a recent study by the OECD (2015) the rise in risky drinking behaviour merits urgent policy attention as it is associated with higher rates of traffic accidents and violence, as well as increased risk of acute and chronic health conditions. The social cost of alcohol use in the EU is estimated at €155.8 billion per year. Harmful drinking is on the rise among young people and women in many countries, partly due to alcohol becoming more available, more affordable and more aggressively advertised.

The European Parliament in its Resolution of 29 April 2015 demands a comprehensive and focused EU Alcohol Strategy. This desire is also echoed by Member States, please see:

1. Call by the EU Health Council "to present a new framework for the EU's alcohol policy" (19 June 2015).
2. Discussion on the need for a new policy framework for reducing alcohol-related harm (Informal Meeting of the Ministers for Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs on 21 April 2015).

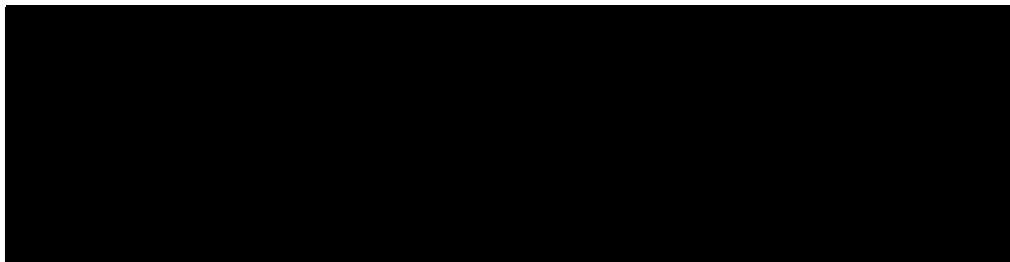
3. Call for an alcohol strategy: “*Member States call on the European Commission for a new and comprehensive strategy to tackle harmful use of alcohol and alcohol related harm*” (Committee of National Alcohol Policy Action (CNAPA) scoping paper December 2014).
4. Letters sent by Health Ministers to the Commissioner for Health and Food Safety.
5. The forthcoming draft Council Conclusions on the EU Strategy on the reduction of alcohol-related harm.

Harmful consumption of alcohol is a barrier to a healthy and productive society. The causes and effects of alcohol use are multi-sectoral. A consistent and comprehensive alcohol policy should therefore be led by DG Health, but will demand policy action in the areas of agriculture, trade, internal market and social affairs. The alcohol challenge can only be addressed within a framework of coordinated actions, which must also address the link between alcohol and poverty, inequality, mental health, violence and anti-social behaviour and the impacts on children and families.

We object to the European Commission’s decision to continue hosting the European Alcohol and Health Forum now that the public health and civil society stakeholders have left. The Forum would know more properly be re-named the ‘Alcohol Industry Forum’. We have serious reservations as to whether the Forum has been an effective use of public funds and has been abused as a means of persuading the Commission to shelve necessary policy proposals. We call for the Forum to be cancelled or suspended until concrete policy action on alcohol is proposed.

We would welcome an opportunity to meet you to further discuss the way forward on this important European societal and health issue.

Yours sincerely,

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Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Vytenis Andriukaitis