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Member of the European Parliament

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ARES(2015)

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Member of the European Parliament

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your letter of 24 July 2015 addressed to President Juncker and First Vice-President Timmermans, concerning the European Alcohol and Health Forum and suggesting a meeting to discuss the way forward on how to tackle alcohol-related harm in the EU. President Juncker and First Vice-President Timmermans have asked me to reply to you on their behalf.

I fully share your concerns on the negative impacts of harmful and hazardous alcohol consumption, and I believe there is much to be gained from EU co-operation to address this important issue.

Let me assure you that I have taken full note of the the European Parliament's Resolution of April calling for a new alcohol strategy, as well as discussions by Health Ministers on this, and the calls for reinforced EU action to address alcohol related harm, which your letter refers to.

We all, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Member States, need to work together to reduce alcohol-related harm and address the reasons that lead to alcohol misuse. We need to look beyond the big headlines and find the reasons which lead to abuse of alcohol. Sometimes these are just in front of us – as information for consumers on what we drink; sometimes it is the desperate conditions that lead some people into abusing alcohol; sometimes it is the very easy access to the bottle, which slowly grows into alcohol dependency.

The Commission is supporting national authorities in many areas and encourages Member States to take a comprehensive look at the issue – losses due to alcohol, resources spent in curing chronic diseases that can be reduced by early action, by prevention and cooperation between fiscal and health authorities. With a forward looking approach, with a vision of Healthy EU in 2025 – we, together, can do a lot.



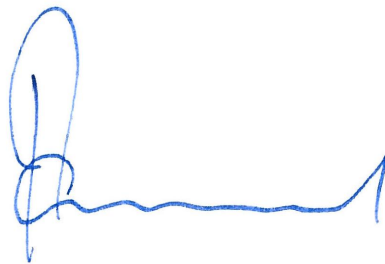
In the meantime, I intend to continue on-going action, such as supporting the Joint Action to reduce alcohol-related harm and the Action Plan on binge drinking, within the context of the 2006-2012 Strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol related harm. I take this opportunity to inform you that the 2015 work plan of the EU Health Programme was reinforced with EUR 1,7 million for alcohol related projects, so as to strengthen EU action and co-operation in this area.

As regards the Alcohol and Health Forum, on 31 July I wrote to the NGOs who used to be part of the Forum, proposing that the Forum meets in two separate formations, health organisations only and industry only, separately. This was a key request by such organisations. The reply which I have recently received from the NGOs in question indicates that this proposal does not meet their expectations. In this context, I am currently reflecting on the best way of ensuring that co-operation on tackling alcohol-related harm continues in one form or another.

I trust that these elements confirm my commitment to support action to reduce alcohol related harm.

I would welcome an opportunity to meet you and discuss the future of EU policy to tackle alcohol related harm. I suggest that our offices arrange for a convenient time for such meeting.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'P' followed by a long, wavy horizontal line that ends in a small upward flick.