

Barcelona, 17 February 2015

To: **European Commissioner**
Health and Food Safety
Vytenis Andriukaitis

Re: alcohol policy

Dear Sr,

The Alcohol Policy Network Europe (www.alcoholpolicynetwork.eu) is a neutral informal platform for exchange and learning on public health oriented alcohol policy making in Europe. The network currently has some 125 members coming from all over the EU; from non-governmental as well as governmental institutions, research agencies and youth organizations. The Secretariat of the platform is in the hands of the Program on Substance Abuse of the Public Health Agency of Catalunya ; the Chair is currently Cees Goos.

At the last Symposium that we organized in Brussels on the 25th of November 2014 we also had an agenda item on desirable elements for a new alcohol strategy in the European Union. It was a lively and good debate and we herewith take the liberty to share with you the main conclusions:

- An EU Alcohol Strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol related harm must be based on the best available scientific evidence, as well as be informed and underpinned by a coherent policy framework. It should address the full spectrum of alcohol problems and the need for whole population-level responses, setting clear targets and objectives to be externally monitored and evaluated, and paying attention to the need to reduce health inequalities across the EU and within Member States.
- Overall, an EU alcohol strategy should address the following areas: Alcohol pricing policies - Marketing of alcoholic beverages - Availability of alcohol - Consumer information and product labelling - Drink driving policies and countermeasures - Health sector responses for early detection, brief interventions and treatment - Strategies that alter the drinking contexts backed up by community-based prevention programmes - Evidence-based public awareness communication and school-based education to help reduce risks and harm from alcohol - Raised awareness of dangers from drinking alcohol

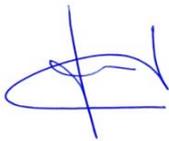
during pregnancy - Protection of family and children - Prevention with special focus on the workplace - Alcohol research, data collection and monitoring programmes.

- There are two main areas that should be given priority in the next European Alcohol Strategy from a research perspective: a) harmonization and standardization of basic concepts, tools and measures; and b) the lack of implementation of interventions and policies that have proven their effectiveness but are far from being widely implemented.
- There is a European need for harmonization and standardization, and in the alcohol field this can be exemplified in some key topics: basic tools like the contents of a standard drink, the screening questionnaires or the drinking risk levels should be harmonized; also, standardization of brief interventions and outpatient and inpatient treatment protocols would contribute to improve health care and reduce variability and inequalities across Europe.
- Next, the lack of implementation of effective policies and interventions should be researched intensively. There is a need to identify the factors that impede the implementation of measures and interventions like marketing bans, minimum price per unit or brief interventions in primary health care. The research should focus on the identification of barriers to implementation and on the analysis of the role played by the different stakeholders in the maintenance of those barriers.
- From a young people's perspective in particular, the EU needs a comprehensive strategy to protect young people from alcohol related harm. Young people are obviously especially interested in covering the topics related to young people and families: in a recent survey conducted by Alcohol Policy Youth Network, participants were asked to prioritise each of the aims of the previous strategy and 84% of respondents said that the aim to reduce the harm suffered by children in families with alcohol problems should have high priority, 81% thought so for the aim to curb under-age drinking and reduce hazardous and harmful drinking among young people; and 79% put high priority on aim of reducing exposure to alcohol during pregnancy and thereby reduce the number of children born with Foetal Alcohol Disorders.
- Another important point to consider is the conflict of interest when it comes to involving the alcohol industry and its partners. Public health must be free from the influence of commercial interests and profit making.

- Young people in the meeting were very much in favour of being involved in the policy making process, as they will be the ones most impacted by its results. Additionally, with ever growing numbers of them engaged in preventing alcohol related harm, it is important to integrate this potential and use their willingness and motivation for helping to implement and execute the strategy.

We would hope that these conclusions may be taken into account in your considerations regarding alcohol as a public health concern. Should there be an opportunity for you to involve us in the development of a new strategy we would be delighted to contribute to our abilities.

With best wishes,



Juan Colom
Secretariat



Cees Goos
Chair

Cc: Ladislav Miko

Director General, Health and Food Safety, European Commission