

Report

Report

The 2016 APN Symposium took place the day before the EUROCARE-organized 7th European Alcohol Policy Conference. For this meeting APN was fortunate to be hosted at the Slovenian National Council.

a) The meeting started with short reports and discussion of **alcohol policy developments in selected countries and internationally.**

- Slovenia, the host country, has a very interesting recent history regarding alcohol policy making. Supported by a number of proactive NGO's, the government regularly addresses the need to reduce alcohol consumption. As a matter of fact the trend for alcohol consumption has gone down since 2006/2007. A less positive trend is the recent increase in young people who have started alcohol consumption before the age of 13. The numbers of hospitalizations of adolescents due to acute alcohol intoxication also show an upward trend. It is estimated that every day 10 persons are admitted to hospitals and at least 950 people die every year due to alcohol related causes. Relevant legislation includes the Act on Restricting the Use of Alcohol (2003), which prohibits amongst other things the sale of alcohol from vending machines and the sale or offer of alcohol at sports events; and the Act Regulating the Sanitary Suitability of Food and Goods and Substances which Come into Contact with Food (2000, 2002), which contains a complete ban on advertising of alcoholic beverages containing more than 15% alcohol by volume. In April 2014 increases in excise duties for alcoholic beverages have been enacted; however there is still no excise duty for wine, and in 2016 increased quantities of wine and beer for own use have been introduced (without the support of the MoH). Stricter legislation and enactment of drink driving measures have led to a decrease in the percentage of drink-driving offences and alcohol related traffic fatalities. Further action is directed at the workplace, at pregnancy and in general at raising awareness (through for example National alcohol policy conferences).

- The Scottish Government's Alcohol Strategy includes 40 actions at different levels (of which the work on minimum prices is only one). An important part of creating the willingness to do something substantial was the 'scary' graph showing the almost incredible rate in alcohol-related liver disease from the early 90s to the 200s, in contrast to the European neighbours. The research done on the problem shows also that alcohol is a significant contributor to health inequalities: people in deprived areas are 8 times more likely to die or be admitted to hospital due to alcohol than those in the most affluent communities. Since the start of the work by Alcohol Focus Scotland some progress has been made: there has been a reduction in off-trade alcohol sales, waiting times for alcohol treatment has been reduced, and since 2003 alcohol related harm was reduced by 35% for men and 29% for women.

- Another interesting report was presented by a colleague from Spain who reported on the work of a working group (GTOH) within the Spanish Society of Epidemiology (SEE) so as to achieve more awareness and readiness for public health oriented action and legislation on alcohol. In comparison

Report

with tobacco, or traffic safety very little or no progress at all has been made in the alcohol field in Spain. To some extent this is likely to be due to the confusion in the population, among politicians and even among health professionals over what the real impact is of alcohol on public health and over what is to be done to alleviate this. Analogous to the previous situation within the tobacco field, the 'pressure group' concerned originated within the Spanish Society of Epidemiology (SEE); it has seen a growing number of professionals associated with it, it managed to obtain small grants from the National Plan on Drugs and it has been successful in organising conferences and other advocacy work and has produced key publications. It is expected that this initiative indeed will create a basis on which preventive policies regarding alcohol in Spain may be built.

- Lauri Beekmann reviewed recent developments in the Baltic countries, in particular in Estonia, where for the third year in a row alcohol consumption has decreased. In 2015 a number of measures were taken such as: a) a ban on the sale of beverages with an alcohol content higher than 22% in gas stations, in shops smaller than 150 square metres and shops less than 50 metres from primary, secondary and vocational schools; b) a ban on thus far allowed open air ads of low-alcoholic beverages (a ban on strong alcohol was already in force) etcetera.

- Lisa Schölin from the European Office of WHO, made a very interesting and comprehensive presentation on trends in alcohol consumption and related harm in the countries of the WHO European Region and referred to the impressive amount of publications by the Regional Office.

b) The other main agenda item of this Symposium addressed **the role of the industry in alcohol policy making**.

Excellent presentations on the subject were made by 6 experts and discussion took place. It appeared that a clear APN position on this matter would be very helpful persons and institutions in governmental and non-governmental agencies. Based on the expert reports and the discussion held a paper was developed outlining the Principles of the Alcohol Policy Network Europe (APN) on the role of the alcohol industry and its partners in alcohol policy making. This paper is included in the Links and Publications page of the APN web-site.