

## EU ALCOHOL STRATEGY

### EU Alcohol and Health Forum update

Actions by the Alcohol and Health Forum, which will implement the strategy to reduce alcohol-related harm in Europe, are ongoing. The group which will assist the Forum with scientific advice is assembled. But who will provide the technical services to the Forum is not decided.

The Forum member commitments for 2008 are publicly visible through the Commission's web pages<sup>1</sup>. Among the 75 commitments the vast majority are programmes with vague or non-significant effects in controlled scientific studies. Forty-seven are about developing information and education programmes, either on the effect of harmful drinking or on responsible consumption. Twenty-six are about better cooperation or actions on responsible commercial communication and sales.

STAP (Netherlands) and non-governmental organisations made commitments for a joint action to create a new European monitoring centre on alcohol marketing, EUCAM<sup>2</sup>. EUCAM collects, exchanges and promotes knowledge and experience about alcohol marketing throughout Europe. It promises to be an updated and comprehensive knowledge bank on research and regulations in that area.

#### Science Group assembled

The Science Group will likely become increasingly proactive as Forum commit-

1 [http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_determinants/life\\_style/alcohol/Forum/alcohol\\_forum\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/Forum/alcohol_forum_en.htm)

2 <http://www.stap.nl/eucam/home/home.html>

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ments for actions have to be 'relevant' and show 'impact' and 'effectiveness'. In late 2007, the Swedish National Institute of Public Health and the international temperance organisation IOGT-NTO sent a joint letter to key academic experts to encourage them to respond to the European Commission's open call for expression of interest for the Science Group. Following a discussion in the Forum at their 2<sup>nd</sup> plenary meeting in April 2008, the Commission appointed 20 individual scientists to the Science Group. A reserve list of experts was also set up. On its first meeting on 30 June 2008, the Science Group received its first request for scientific advice, on the

impact of marketing communication on the volume (and patterns) of consumption of alcoholic beverages, especially by young people. The request came from the Forum task force on marketing communication.

#### Technical service to the Forum yet to be assigned

The Forum service assignment is a Secretariat function that will provide the Forum with administrative background and support material. The European Commission has launched two calls for tenders, with a slight change in the assignment specifications from the first to the second call. The Regional government of Catalonia and the Swedish and Slovenian national institutes of public health submitted a joint tender upon the first call (deadline August 2007). Despite the fact that this tender was considered to be of a high technical standard, because there was only one bidder the tender was declared invalid and the process was restarted in the spring of 2008. The new deadline, originally set to 13 June, was postponed to 7 July. Due to the altered nature of the assignment, the Swedes decided not to re-apply. Applications to the 2008 tender call is now likely to go through a speedy review and decision process within the Commission. ¶

European Commission's web pages about the Alcohol and Health Forum, Science Group members list, et c.:

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_determinants/life\\_style/alcohol/Forum/alcohol\\_forum\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/Forum/alcohol_forum_en.htm)

### Alcohol on the Swedish EU presidency agenda

Marketing, risk consumption among the elderly, and border trade are three →



Swedish National Institute  
of Public Health

**sub themes with focus on alcohol to be tackled by the EU during the autumn of 2009. But the commitments must be carried out during Sweden's six months of EU presidency.**

Sweden is part of a joint 18 month Presidency programme with France and the Czech Republic that is currently being developed. The other two Presidencies are less keen on adding alcohol to the joint programme. Therefore, the Swedish government will have to organise, undertake and deliver the alcohol-related activities in their 6 months rather than in a more developed process (Council Conclusions or Recommendations) that would involve the other Presidencies.

The Swedish government will convene an expert meeting 28-29 September 2009 to discuss the next steps concerning the EU Strategy on Alcohol and Health. As background document, DG SANCO will be issuing an evaluation on implementation of the alcohol strategy for the end of 2009, from which a draft would be available for discussion at the expert meeting. The meeting will be directly followed by a WHO conference on 30 September 2009. ¶

The 18-month programme of the Council:  
<http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/10302/a/98858>

## COMPETITION

### Reform of the EU wine regime: First phase into force

**On 1<sup>st</sup> August 2008, the first phase of the reform of the Common Market Organisation (CMO) for wine was realized. Europeans will be encouraged to "drink less but drink better".**

Earlier issues of *Alcohol and the EU* have followed the controversial reform that aims to radically change the way that EU subsidizes its wine sector. The changes are to bring balance to the wine market, phase out expensive market intervention measures and increase environmental protection. Resulting budget savings are to be used for measures such as support for promotion campaigns in third countries as well as information campaigns on responsible consumption within the EU.

The initial proposal, published by the Commission in 2006, ran into heavy opposition from Member States and wine-producers. Agriculture Ministers rejected the Commission's proposals in July 2007, despite the fact that the planned actions were already heavily diluted from the initial plans outlined in 2006. Media

reports indicate that the opposition was led by France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Portugal.

Agriculture ministers finally reached an agreement in December 2007, which will realise of the reform in two phases starting from 1 August 2008. Phase one includes the measures to create market balance, phase two the measures to improve competitiveness. The Commission now hopes for a fast restructuring of the wine sector in that it includes a voluntary, three-year grubbing-up scheme to provide an alternative for uncompetitive producers and to remove surplus and uncompetitive wine from the market. Subsidies for crisis distillation and potable alcohol distillation will be phased out. The reform is budget neutral. The EU yearly wine budget is 1.3 billion euro. ¶

<http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/newsdigest/2008/186.htm#cnt9>

## SALES AND MARKETING

### Web site on health launched by global beer producer

**One of the largest global brewing companies, British SABMiller, has launched a web site for health information on alcohol, "the first initiative of its kind to be launched globally". In several languages the company declares its moral responsibility for its products, but the national public health authority in Sweden is worried.**

Despite the aim of the site to inform on the health risks of alcohol there are only smiling and compelling young faces on the site. Whereas it is stated that youth under 18 years should not drink alcohol, the company is careful to point out that this is not for medical reasons. In a video an expert states there are exceptions to the rule that parents should not offer alcohol to their children.

–The text and video material on the web site confuses and seems to encourage a nonchalant attitude towards alcohol laws, says Sven Andréasson, M.D., researcher and head of the Alcohol and Drugs department at the Swedish National Institute of Public Health. –Research has shown that adolescents who are offered alcohol by their parents drink more than others of the same age. And the lower the alcohol debut age the greater the risk to develop a dependence.

Looking at recent years of research evidence, also SABMiller's statement on

the site that marketing and advertising would have "a small if any" effect on underage drinking is at odds.

–It is worrying that the alcohol industry now openly puts the research evidence about the harmful effects of alcohol on youth into question, says Dr. Andréasson. –By addressing young people and by conveying misleading information in particularly strategic areas, the methods of the alcohol industry is similar to that of the tobacco industry.

The alcohol industry is showing an increasing interest for health issues. It coincides with the commitment made by



You will not see pictures like this on the web site.

major beer, wine and spirits organisations to actively contribute to decreasing Europe's high levels of alcohol harm, as brought about by the Alcohol Strategy and the EU Forum on Alcohol and Health. However, each member of the Forum independently selects its commitments. Unfortunately, there is a risk that the selected commitments made by alcohol producers may rather increase than decrease alcohol problems in Europe. ¶

More on industry initiatives regarding the social aspects of alcohol consumption:

P. Anderson The beverage alcohol industry's social aspects organizations: A public health warning *Addiction*, 99, 1375-1381 (2004)

<http://www.eurocare.org/euseminar/presentations/anderson-speech.pdf>

### Strong resistance to health labelling of alcoholic beverages

**There is still no decision as to when European consumers will be informed on ingredients or health hazards regarding alcohol beverages.**

During 2008 DG SANCO's legislative proposal for food labelling, including

alcoholic drinks, is being discussed in the European Parliament and Council (i.e. "co-decision process"). There is a risk that this document will not complete the legislative passage before April 2009 when the Parliament will break for the election campaign. This means that a legislation will not be adopted before 2010.

The legislative proposal states that alcoholic drinks must list all of their ingredients and provide information on nutritional elements such as calories. However, spirits, wine and beer have a 5 year derogation from this requirement. This means that essentially it is only alcopops that have to provide this information. No mandatory health warning labels are mentioned at all in the proposal.

At the same time, the European Commission seems to act against national governments that are attempting to bring in their own health warnings. Finland has been informed by the Commission that it is not in favour of general health warnings on alcohol but could accept specific messages targeted at women to indicate dangers to the foetus. This led the Finnish Parliament, with the votes 110 to 52, to withdraw their proposed law on health warnings. Instead, the social committee in the Finnish Parliament now proposes a immediate tax increase on alcohol and a further tightening-up of the new alcohol act from 1 January 2008 that limits alcohol advertising in television.

In issue 5 of *Alcohol and the EU* we reported that a clear majority of European consumers supports health warnings on alcohol (data from the 2007 Eurobarometer "Attitudes towards alcohol"). While the consumer's right to receive, and the producer's obligation to provide, information on the dangers associated with a product is obviously not yet secured in the case of alcoholic beverages, it will soon be for foods containing azo dyes. The EU Parliament recently voted for warning labels on foods containing some of food colourings E 110, E 104, E 122, E 129, E 102 and E 124. These must now be labelled not only with the relevant E number but also with the words "may have an adverse effect on activity and attention in children".<sup>3</sup> ¶

On the industry's involvement in alcohol policy - the Finnish case on warning labels:

M. Montonen Alkoholindustrins politiska inflytande växer. (Swedish) *NAT* 25, 36-44 (2008)

The legislative proposal from the European Commission:

3 In Swedish: "Kan försäkra hyperaktiva reaktioner hos barn"

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/labellingnutrition/foodlabelling/proposed\\_legislation\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/labellingnutrition/foodlabelling/proposed_legislation_en.htm)

Press release from European Parliament on azo dyes:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress\\_page/067-33565-189-07-28-911-200807071PR33563-07-07-2008-2008-false/default\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/067-33565-189-07-28-911-200807071PR33563-07-07-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm)

## TAXATION AND CUSTOMS

### The effect of the single market on excise taxes

**Europe's single market has reduced the ability of member governments to tackle binge drinking through higher taxes. This conclusion was drawn from research presented at the British Royal Economic Society's annual conference in March 2008. The Commission now releases a call for experts who can analyse possible changes in the minimum rates and structures of excise duties on alcoholic beverages**

The realisation of EU's single market in 1993 has required removal of trade barriers between member states such as harmonisation of taxes. In practise, governments have not been able to raise alcohol and tobacco duty as much as they might like because of fear of revenue loss. For example, five years after the start of the single market the loss of revenue to the UK government from legal cross-border shopping was estimated to around £375 million a year. In 2003/04, the loss to the UK Treasury was ten times as much. In the absence of joint agreements of minimum taxes, a member state cannot raise taxes without encouraging more people to shop, or shop more frequently, in a neighbouring member state. That means even those who do not travel benefit from lower alcohol prices.

In November 2006, during the Finnish EU Presidency, the Council mandated the Commission to prepare a study on how the system of minimum alcohol excise duties on alcohol works. The document was supposed to be ready by mid-2007. DG Taxation and Customs (TAXUD) have now finally launched the call for tender on the study. Experts are welcome to apply before 25 September. ¶

Contract notice, TAXUD/2008/AO-06, 2008/S 158-212737 (available in several languages):

[http://ted.europa.eu/Exec?DataFlow=N\\_list\\_results.dfl&Template=TED/N\\_result\\_details\\_cur.htm&Page=1&docnumber=2008212737&StatLan=g=EN](http://ted.europa.eu/Exec?DataFlow=N_list_results.dfl&Template=TED/N_result_details_cur.htm&Page=1&docnumber=2008212737&StatLan=g=EN)

Ref: B Lockwood, G Migali "Did the single market cause competition in excise taxes? Evidence from EU countries" Warwick economic research papers, No 847, University of Warwick, UK.

<http://econpapers.repec.org/paper/wrkwarwec/>

## RESEARCH

### Registered vs unregistered alcohol consumption: Total consumption still matters

**Previous research has indicated that the intake of unregistered, i.e. illegally produced, smuggled, or privately imported, alcohol is associated with a more risky drinking pattern. A recent study shows total consumption is the most powerful predictor of harm.**

The study, presented in *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, investigated whether the market share of the retail monopoly Systembolaget influences the level of harm in different Swedish regions. The harm indicators were alcohol poisonings among adults or adolescents, hospitalisation with alcohol diagnose, drink driving, and assaults.

The analysis revealed a statistically significant correlation only for alcohol poisonings in the age group 10-19; meaning an increase of Systembolaget market share by 1% would give a 2% reduction in poisonings. However, since a change in unregistered consumption is likely associated with changes in total consumption, the authors found no effect of market share on poisonings when correcting the model for total consumption.

Although the results suggest that an increase in Systembolaget market share would not reduce harm rates, they still implies that Systembolaget does have a significant role in reducing alcohol-related harm. The analysis showed that the effect of a lower registered plus unregistered consumption, i.e. total consumption, also means lower numbers of alcohol-related diagnoses, drink driving and, in particular, assaults. ¶

Norström T and Ramstedt M (2008): Unregistered alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harm in Sweden, 2001-2005. *Nordic Studies of Alcohol and Drugs* 25:101-113.

<http://nat.stakes.fi/SV/arkivet/2008/2/sida/norstrom.htm>

## PUBLIC HEALTH

### Wine organisation urge for standard drink units

**The international organisation of vine and wine (OIV) has previously challenged public health interests on a standard drink unit definition. In June, the issue was again brought**

## up in the General Assembly.


The OIV is an intergovernmental organisation that promotes, through its recommendations, international standards and guidelines, harmonisation and the sharing of information and research knowledge, in order to enhance productivity, product safety and quality and the conditions for producing and marketing

vine and wine products. The organisation has 47 member countries worldwide and enjoys observer status in the EU Alcohol and Health Forum.

At its General Assembly (GA) in June 2007 the

OIV secretariat hoped to bring about a vote in favour of a resolution on standard drink sizes. The aim of the proposed standard drink size - one unit equalling ten grams of alcohol - was to harmonise and facilitate research in the alcohol area and the interpretation thereof. However, due to persistent opposition from Sweden, Finland and Norway, the draft resolution was never submitted to voting in the GA. Among the arguments against was that international recommendations on a standard drink unit size should be referred either to the scientific community and/or to the WHO. Another argument was that setting a standard drink to ten grams is misleading, considering that this amount rarely correspond to the alcohol content in a glass of wine or beer.

At the following GA in June 2008, the controversial paragraph about the standard drink unit had been rewritten to further emphasize the "purely scientific" purpose of the standardisation. Sweden and Finland withheld that the resolution should be submitted to the WHO. In addition, Finland proposed that a unit size of 12 g would better agree with the amount of alcohol in a normal glass. The GA concluded that substantial changes in the resolution had to be made and that the WHO would need to be contacted. The resolution is thus suspended another year.

The OIV now drafts its strategic plan for 2009 to 2012. Among their proposed activities will be promotion of research on the health effects of wine consumption, and labelling. 


<http://www.oiv.org/>



## European Commission: "Higher taxes most important action against smoking"

**In the battle against cigarette smoking and illicit trade the EU proposes a gradual increase of the minimum tax on tobacco sales.**

The European Commission recognises that when it comes to decreasing smoking no preventive measure is as effective as price increases. If the proposal is realised it will mean that 11 countries will face an on average 20% price increase during the next five years. Poland would face the largest price increases; 47%.

The proposal is part of the EU strategy to increase protection against passive smoking, better regulate the ingredients of tobacco products, and tighten up marketing restrictions. 

[http://ec.europa.eu/news/economy/080716\\_1\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/news/economy/080716_1_en.htm)

### REPORTS


## ■ Alcohol use and mental health among adolescents

**It is five times as common with bad mental health among adolescents who have a high alcohol consumption than among those who do not, according to a new report from the Swedish National Institute of Public Health.**

In recent years adolescents' mental health in Sweden, boys as well as girls, has been deteriorating. At the same time alcohol consumption in the same age group has increased. To investigate the relationship between alcohol use and lighter mental disorders, the Public Health institute scrutinized 1303 peer-reviewed scientific papers. The disorders studied were depression, self-inflicted harm including suicides, and out-acting or hyperactive behaviour including ADHD and aggression.

It was found that high alcohol consumption increases the risk of both depression and self-inflicted harm. The study also showed the opposite relationship; depression and out-acting behaviour among adolescents leads to an increased alcohol consumption.


Today there is ample knowledge on good preventive methods to decrease mental ill-health as well as excessive alcohol consumption among youth.

The report gives advice on what these methods are. Examples are programs that gives adolescents tools to handle everyday conflicts and improve parent-child communication, cognitive behavioural therapy, social and emotional training, and Motivational Interviewing. 

The report is in Swedish only.

[http://www.fhi.se/templates/page\\_\\_\\_13931.aspx](http://www.fhi.se/templates/page___13931.aspx)


## ■ European alcohol policy conference: presentations available

**The Building Capacity for Health** alcohol policy conference in Barcelona 2-5 April 2008 attracted more than 300 participants, among them many top policy makers. The presentations from the parallel and plenary sessions, list of participants, photos, etc. are now being uploaded on the web: 

<http://www.dss3a.com/btg/html/plenary01.html>

## ■ Almost 400,000 Swedish children have parent with drinking problem

In a forthcoming report, Swedish Public Health Institute identifies that 385,000, or 20% of Swedish children, has at least one parent with alcohol problems. This is almost twice as many as previously believed.

By using its yearly national public health survey, the institute identified parents to children under 18 who have a risk consumption of alcohol, as categorised by the WHO definition. –385,000 is a lot of children, and generally they need more support from local authorities, says research leader Sven Bremberg, head of department of Child and Adolescent Health and Mental Health at the Swedish national Institute of Public Health. One of the greatest challenges to local authorities is how to detect these children, who often hide family problems well. 

**Upcoming conference on the subject: ALCOHOL, DRUGS AND HARM TO OTHERS — Victims are part of the solution.**

**Tallinn, Estonia, 10-12 October 2008. Organised by the Nordic Alcohol- and Drug Policy Network (NordAN)**

<http://www.nordan.org/conference2008/default.asp>