



[Joint Public Statement]

Eurocare and EPHA response to misleading industry media campaign ahead of the 13th plenary meeting of the European Alcohol and Health Forum

Brussels, 20 November 2013 - Following the news that a number of Eurocare members and EPHA partners representing young people have withdrawn from the European Alcohol and Health Forum (EAHF) (1), **a number of inaccurate claims have been made by the alcohol industry to undermine an ambitious future EU Action Plan on alcohol-related harm and NGO commitments to achieve this.** In several media articles, alcohol industry representatives (2) have attempted to **misrepresent the reasons why these civil society organisations resigned from the EAHF.** EPHA and Eurocare would like to address this and reiterate our concerns about the reliance by the European Commission on self-regulation (3) and the role of economic operators (4).

The primary obligation of the drinks industry is to increase shareholder value by increasing sales of alcohol, whereas the primary obligation of the health community is to prevent alcohol related harm by advocating for proven policies with a strong evidence base (5). The drinks industry has a massive media and lobbying budget and uses this power to oppose any evidence based policy which is likely to reduce their profits, the majority of which come from sales. As such the two sets of organisations have inherently opposed objectives.

The European Commission is in a difficult position as it has to square the circle of opposing views, as a democratic institution it decided to establish the EAHF, with the aim of fully exhausting all potential avenues short of legislation that could reduce alcohol related harm. **Evidence from both alcohol and tobacco has shown that these voluntary initiatives by industry achieve little in public health terms.** Similarly there is no evidence that any of the initiatives taken by the drinks industry in the Forum have prevented alcohol related harm (6). Frustration with this state of affairs has understandably resulted in the IOGT and youth member organisations leaving the EAHF.

Rather than attacking these organisations, **the drinks industry should** be looking at its own actions and seeking to **modify business models to reduce alcohol related harm.** EPHA and Eurocare are attending the next EAHF as a commitment to the democratic process, but until the European Commission is prepared to put

the health of EU citizens above the vested interests of a few powerful corporate actors, more members of the health community are likely to vote with their feet.

- **Notes to editors**

- (1) Several NGOs (Active-Sobriety, Friendship and Peace (Active), IOGT-NTO, European Youth forum and UNF – the Swedish youth temperance association,) withdrew from the European Alcohol and Health Forum due to the lack of use of scientific evidence and the reliance on self-regulation. More information is available at: [Eurocare members leaving the Alcohol and Health Forum](#)
- (2) See [the press release from The Brewers of Europe](#), article by [Paul Skehan, Director general of spiritsEUROPE](#) and Matthew Walsh Director of Corporate Affairs of [Media Intelligence Partners \(MIP\)](#) opinion piece.
- (3) [Eurocare together with 28 European and national NGOs](#) called for European Commission and the governments to take concrete and binding decisions to address alcohol-related harm in the new EU Alcohol Strategy. [EPHA responded to DG Connect consultation](#) on Code for Effective Open Voluntarism: Good design principles for self- and co-regulation and other multi-stakeholder actions
- (4) As Dr. Chan commented in an article in the British Medical Journal at “In the view of WHO, the alcohol industry has no role in the formulation of alcohol policies, which must be protected from distortion by commercial or vested interests.” [Letter in reply to BMJ feature on the alcohol industry - Doctors and the alcohol industry: an unhealthy mix?](#)
- (5) The Joint Report on health systems prepared by the European Commission and the Economic Policy- Committee, European Economy, Occasional Papers 74, December 2010 states. “There is a wide array of health promotion and disease prevention measures authorities can and should make use of in many different settings (at work, at school and in health institutions). These range from public information campaigns in the media, excise taxes on certain products such as tobacco or alcohol, bans and stricter regulation on labelling, advertising and selling, to health education on school curricula and financial incentives for consumers, patients and providers.” The availability, affordability and exposure are also part of the 10 point European action plan to reduce the harmful use of alcohol 2012–2020 endorsed by all 53 Member States in the WHO European Region.

(6) At an [EPHA and Eurocare event earlier this year](#) the tactics of the alcohol industry to slow down or derail minimum unit pricing were discussed more information. [Friends of the Earth Europe have a briefing on the alcohol industry lobbying.](#)

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