

**John Dalli**

Member of the European Commission, responsible for Health and Consumer Policy

## **Commissioner Dalli delivers speech at the 9<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting of the European Alcohol and Health Forum**

Check Against Delivery  
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

John DALLI, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, addresses the European Alcohol and Health Forum's 9<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting

**Brussels, Belgium, 19 October 2011**

WEDNESDAY 19 OCTOBER 2011, 14:30 HRS

Centre Albert Borschette - Brussels

**SPEECH**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join this plenary meeting of the European Alcohol and Health Forum. It is my first time here, even though I have already met many of you on other occasions.

I wanted to be here with you today for two reasons:

First, because our work together on alcohol-related harm is entering a crucial phase; and

Second, because work on alcohol-related harm - as a risk factor for Non Communicable Diseases - has now been put to the fore with the recent United Nations declaration.

The European Union was one of the forerunners in creating an action-based process to address harmful drinking.

This milestone gives renewed impetus to our efforts to tackle harmful alcohol consumption, together with action on smoking, poor diet and lack of physical activity. Indeed, I believe we need to step up efforts to address these factors which are the root causes of many diseases.

We must keep people well. We must invest on promoting good health, rather than spending on ill health. Our Alcohol Strategy is part of this agenda.

The Strategy aims to support and enhance Member States' efforts to address alcohol related harm, through joint action across society.

The Alcohol and Health Forum was set up as an innovative way to deliver the objectives of the strategy.

The Forum is not just a partnership of actors. It is a group committed to real action. It is a model of how voluntary cooperation can motivate all those concerned by alcohol issues to deliver on a set of commonly agreed objectives.

Together, you have launched an impressive number of concrete initiatives – almost 200 to date.

Many of these aim to protect young people by enhancing enforcement of age limits, by raising awareness, or by offering healthier alternatives.

We are making progress. That said, it is also clear that more can - and should - be done.

Despite our efforts, young people continue to drink at unacceptably high levels.

"Binge drinking" remains a serious issue. One out of four young people aged 15 to 24 admit having 5 drinks or more at least once a week.

8 out of 10 people the same age say they have easy access to alcohol.

Shall we just watch and do nothing while our youth drinks away its health and its future?

My answer to this is no.

Minimum age must be fully implemented by all.

I am aware of staff training initiatives on responsible selling and serving of alcoholic beverages. This is good progress. But youngsters still have easy access to alcohol.

I therefore call on the retail chain to step up efforts to further enhance compliance with legal age limits; and on youth organisations and others to help monitor compliance. And of course, Member States' authorities must play their decisive role in enforcement of the minimum age legislation.

Young people continue to be disproportionately affected by fatal traffic accidents.

It is a great development that 15 Member States have lowered the permitted blood alcohol limit for young drivers to 0.2 or below. The limit for drivers in general remains above 0.5 in only two Member States.

Curbing alcohol related harm among young people is a priority for our work, in particular tackling binge-drinking and preventing under-age drinking.

I encourage you to continue developing effective solutions for these issues through actions aimed at real, measurable impact.

Another key area of work where I believe we must focus efforts further is marketing and advertising.

As you know, the Science Group of this Forum examined available evidence a couple of years ago; and concluded that exposure to alcohol marketing increases the likelihood that adolescents start to drink, or drink more.

Unsurprisingly, as our Eurobarometer survey shows, a large majority of Europeans would welcome information about health risks on alcohol advertisements.

In this context, I am particularly pleased that so many of your commitments concern developing common standards and the implementation of codes of conduct for alcohol advertising and sponsorship.

I have been informed that progress has been achieved recently with the development of common standards for marketing in digital media. This is a very relevant issue. Digital media is where the world is. It is where messages must be present. It is where efforts must be pursued for responsible business practice.

This is why we need to make sure that sophisticated digital means used for advertising are also used for responsible messages. We need to live up to today's challenges by using today's tools.

Now that we are approaching the point where the EU alcohol strategy will be evaluated, and where impact will become all the more relevant, we need to show that voluntary action makes a difference.

We need to demonstrate concrete progress in reducing the exposure of children and young people to alcohol advertising and sponsorship.

We need to ensure that alcohol marketing in both traditional and new media complies with rules and standards, not just by the letter, but also in spirit.

And we need to encourage the industries concerned to be transparent about how self regulation works and to involve partners in the process of demonstrating that rules and standards respond to society's expectations.

I believe there are areas where opportunities to act exist.

Think of price. The price of alcoholic beverages matters, in particular for young people. Therefore, volume based price promotions, that encourage binge drinking should have no place in responsible business practices.

Some Member States are using alcoholic beverage labels to provide information about the risks of alcohol during pregnancy, and some alcohol producers have taken up this good practice on a voluntary basis.

I believe that such labelling schemes are a powerful and direct way of influencing behaviour, by giving people the information they need to take a decision. I would very much like to see them implemented right across the European Union.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have been entrusted a challenging task: to address harmful alcohol use as one of the various causes of non-communicable diseases; non-communicable diseases which, as we know, kill 63% of the world's population.

I am confident that this Forum can make a difference in reducing alcohol intake. Not for the sake of it, but because alcohol abuse translates into suffering, illness, and loss of life.

This is a forum of action on concrete objectives, and I expect it to deliver concrete solutions.

The Forum must continue to work on this basis. We need sustainable and result-oriented action. And we need to focus on the most challenging areas such as young people.



I urge you to be ambitious in your commitments. I can assure you that the Commission will continue to support your work in every way we can.

I intend to come again to this Forum, once we have evaluated the work we have done in the context of the Alcohol Strategy.

Showing progress is a key element to determine our future actions. We must not lose momentum. The time for stepping up action is now.

I invite you to meet the challenge

Thank you.

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