THE WINE CONTRIBUTION TO HEALTH

AN EU PROJECT

Remarks by
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Assemblée des Régions Européennes Viticoles
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Meine sehr verehrten Damen und Herren,

Ich freue mich sehr über die Gelegenheit, auf dieser Generalversammlung der AREV die Alkoholstrategie der Europäischen Kommission vorstellen zu können.


Aber ich weiß, dass der bekannte Werbeslogan für die hiesige Region lautet: "Mir könnt alles außer Hochdeutsch", und insofern befinde ich mich dann ja in guter Gesellschaft…

Gerade in Deutschland hat ja das Thema Alkohol und Jugendliche in den letzten Wochen eine herausragende Rolle in den Medien gespielt, und auch in der politischen Diskussion zu Überlegungen geführt, wie der exzessive Alkoholkonsum von Jugendlichen bekämpft werden kann.

Ich weiß sehr wohl, dass in Deutschland und in vielen anderen Ländern Wein bei diesen Exzessen nur eine untergeordnete Rolle spielt; aber neben der Politik, den Medien und der Gesellschaft als ganzer ist eben auch die Alkoholindustrie insgesamt aufgefordert, einen Beitrag zur Lösung dieses Problems zu leisten.

Ich freue mich sehr, dass Deutschland nun in der Folge dieser Ereignisse verstärkt darüber nachdenkt, wie insbesondere Jugendliche besser vor exzessivem Alkoholkonsum geschützt werden können. Leider handelt es sich hier, um ein Phänomen, dass europaweit immer stärker um sich greift, und dass daher auch Maßnahmen auf europäischer Ebene erfordert.

• My principal purpose in being here is threefold:

  o What can Europe do to help? What can you do to help Europe?

  o To state my admiration for and support of the EU wine sector's "Strategy for Responsible Consumption".
To ensure widest possible wine sector support for and involvement in the EU "Alcohol and Health Forum" to be launched in Brussels in six weeks' time.

1) How do we define the problem?

2) What do we want to do (5 goals)

3) How we propose to do it?

- At Community level, we have consulted Member States and the wine sector since 2005. We adopted in October of last year a Communication on a European strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol related harm.

- This Communication does not target the moderate and responsible consumption of alcohol, but instead harmful and hazardous consumption.

- Alcohol related harm kills almost 200,000 people a year in the EU: mainly from diseases related to excessive alcohol consumption, such as liver cirrhosis, certain forms of cancer, and neuro-psychiatric conditions.

- But not only those who abuse alcohol suffer. Three elements here:
  - More than 10,000 deaths a year are due to alcohol-related road accidents, killing in many cases young men and women who should still have most of their lives before them.
  - 40% of all cases of homicide are related to alcohol consumption.
  - The harm done to children living in families with alcohol problems is clearly unacceptable – as is the harm done to the young, who are at risk of destroying their education and employment perspectives, and of damaging their health, because of the binge drinking trends which we see on the rise almost everywhere in Europe.

- And in addition to the human suffering, excessive alcohol consumption triggers massive costs to health care systems, economies and society in general.
• I trust none of you would disagree that overall, this paints a most disturbing picture.

• The Commission’s Communication addresses all these areas of concern. It does so in a balanced manner. It is very clear about respecting the limits of competence between the European Union and individual Member States. It is equally clear about the diversity of wine and alcohol cultures in Europe, the broad and positive role of the sector in the economy and in society, the need for more to be done, the need for a very sharp focus on alcohol misuse and harm, not on alcohol as such.

• This approach was endorsed by Member States in November 2006.

• The Communication recognises alcohol-related harm as a major public health, social and economic concern across the EU, and underlines the need for action also at European level – something which many have fought hard to avoid.

• In essence, what we want to achieve with the Communication is a collaborative effort of all stakeholders and at all levels – local, national and European – in order to contribute to the good health of European citizens and to reduce alcohol-related harm.

Aims

What we want to do:

• To this end, the Communication identifies five priority areas, which are relevant in all Member States and to which Community action clearly can add value as a complement to national policies:

  o Youth – to protect young people, children and the unborn child;

  o Drink-driving – to reduce injuries and death from alcohol-related road accidents;

  o Drink at work – to prevent alcohol-related harm among adults and reduce the negative impact on the workplace;
Drink education – to inform, educate and raise awareness on the impact of harmful and hazardous alcohol consumption, and on appropriate consumption patterns;

Drink research – to develop and maintain a common evidence base at EU level.

Four levels of partnership

1) Member States

- I am glad to say that after the adoption of the Communication, several Member States have already started to consider new or stricter measures aimed at reducing alcohol-related harm. I am particularly pleased to note in this context that Germany is about to introduce a zero BAC limit for novice drivers. That – plus the issue of minimum age for consumption – is for Member States to determine.

- Naturally, opinions vary as to what the most effective measures in these various areas might be. But we have strong research evidence to support the effectiveness of the various measures suggested.

2) Broad Partnerships

- In implementing the strategy, we very much count on the commitment from all stakeholders. The alcohol industry, retailers, the advertising industry, the media and many more stakeholders including the relevant NGOs need to be part of the solution.

- With his in mind, the Communication foresees the establishment of the Alcohol and Health Forum.

- This Forum will not be a talking shop. It is action that is needed now, and the Forum will develop the concrete multi-stakeholder action that we need at all levels, from local to European.

- We count on the economic operators to make, within the framework of the Forum, significant contributions towards measurable progress in the areas of concern that I have mentioned.
• I am very glad that the wine sector is committed to becoming and active member of the Forum, and I look forward to the important contributions which this sector can make to the Forum process. I have already stated my support for the sector's strategy for responsible consumption. There can be much synergy between it and the Forum. In particular, I would note that the two Forum Task Forces we propose, focusing on youth and on responsible advertising, overlap with two of the three pillars of your strategy – education and communication standards. So the wine sector will find the Forum in harmony with your emerging actions.

• The alcohol industry could, however, contribute further to the development of common standards for advertising, marketing and sponsorship, and invest in better training for staff.

• Moreover, even aside from all health considerations, there is certainly an ethical obligation for the industry not to specifically target young people through the design of alcoholic beverages, or through advertising, sponsoring and marketing.

3) Other EU Institutions

• Support from the other European Institutions is the third pillar we need for implementing the strategy.

• The Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee are currently preparing their reactions; we are also looking forward to European Parliament’s reaction. The relevant committees of these Institutions will also be invited to join the Forum as observers.

4) What does public opinion think?

• Perhaps the most important pillar as regards putting the strategy into practice, is the support and co-operation from European citizens.

• I am therefore more than glad – despite all the spin we saw in the media before the Communication was adopted – that we are getting encouraging feed-back from citizens on some of the good practice described in the Communication.
A Eurobarometer survey last year sought citizens’ views on alcohol policy. The results showed broad support for some of the major policy options mapped in the Communication.

This includes support for banning the selling and serving alcohol to people under the age of 18, for lower Blood Alcohol Limits for young and novice drivers, for random alcohol checks on EU roads and for health messages on alcoholic beverages and on alcohol advertisements – these could, for example, make pregnant women and drivers, better aware of the dangers of alcohol.

The challenge is to create a healthier, safer and more confident society – better skilled, more knowledgeable, more trusting of ourselves, and of others.

**To conclude**

This is a new beginning.

1) A new platform exists for Regions and for wine producers to share with many others their skills in education, moderation, life-skills training. Recognition leads to success through efforts to reverse trends and build trust.

2) We need to keep an open mind. Going back to Baden-Wurttemberg, in every country we know that there are places where you are judged by how you speak or look – a very human reaction. There is a danger that we inadvertently build in mistrust, so we need to sit down with people to keep them on board.

3) Need to make a real effort – you need to make sure your organisation is present, and well prepared, at the Forum launch on 7 June.

End

*Rough translation of the German introduction:*

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to present the alcohol strategy adopted by the European Commission at this general session of the Assembly of European Wine Regions.
As you can hear, my German is a little rusty – after enjoying some good wine at dinner it might be a bit smoother – and I will soon revert back to my mother tongue.

But I know that the famous publicity slogan for this region of Germany says "We’re good at everything, except speaking correct German", and therefore I’m confident I am in good company…

In Germany the issue of alcohol and young people has played a very important role in the media over recent weeks, and the sad events have also led to a debate at political level as to how excessive alcohol consumption by young people can be prevented.

I am very much aware that in Germany and many other countries wine is not the main cause of binge drinking among young people. However, apart from politics, the media and society at large, it is also the alcohol industry with all its different sectors that has to contribute to providing solutions to this problem.

I am pleased to see that in the wake of these events, Germany is even more concerned about preventing excessive alcohol consumption in young people. Unfortunately, this is a problem which is becoming increasingly serious across Europe, and therefore also calls for action at a European level.