



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
HEALTH & CONSUMERS DIRECTORATE-GENERAL

Directorate C - Public Health and Risk Assessment  
**Unit C4 – Health Determinants**

## COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL ALCOHOL POLICY AND ACTION

### 6th Meeting

LUXEMBOURG, 27-28 January 2010

### Summary Report

The meeting was chaired by Michael Hübel, Head of Unit C4.

*WEDNESDAY 27 JANUARY*

#### 1. Welcome and adoption of the agenda

- The Chair welcomed all participants (*cf. List of participants in Annex I*).
- Since the last meeting in June several relevant developments have taken place:
  - The successful Swedish EU Presidency;
  - The Lisbon Treaty entered into force in December 2009, giving the EU explicit competence on alcohol and tobacco as health topics (Art. 168, replacing Art. 152);
  - John Dalli (Malta) will be the new Commissioner for Health and Consumers;
  - WHO is in the process of adopting a Global strategy on alcohol.
- The draft agenda was adopted.

#### 2. Looking back and ahead

##### The Swedish EU Presidency

- Karin Nilsson-Kelly gave an overview of Swedish Presidency activities on alcohol and health, including the informal Health Council in July, the Expert Conference on Alcohol and Health in September, and the adoption of Council conclusions on alcohol and health (1<sup>st</sup> December 2009), introducing alcohol and ageing as a further topic to complement the EU Alcohol Strategy. Conference report is available [http://www.se2009.eu/sv/moten\\_nyheter/2009/9/21/expertkonferens\\_om\\_alkohol\\_och\\_halsa](http://www.se2009.eu/sv/moten_nyheter/2009/9/21/expertkonferens_om_alkohol_och_halsa) in:
- Upon request from the Swedish Presidency the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted (30<sup>th</sup> September 2009) an opinion on "How to make the EU strategy on alcohol related harm sustainable, long-term and multisectorial".

### From the first Progress Report on the Implementation of the EU Alcohol Strategy towards 2012

- The Chair invited members to give their views on the first progress report, presented at the Expert Conference on Alcohol and Health (September 2009), and to a first reflection on the process toward the second progress report that is foreseen in 2012.
- Commission services highlighted that there was limited new information to draw upon, in relation to relevant harmful alcohol use indicators, in the development of this progress report – partly because little time had elapsed since the adoption of the Strategy. It was highlighted that the Commission is now reflecting on the data instruments to feed into the next report on progress, and that MS should be aware in case they are able to influence the timing of studies or data gathering exercises in their own countries that could contribute.

## **3. Report from WHO**

### The draft Global strategy at the Executive Board (EB) meeting

- Dag Rekve summarised the importance of alcohol as a major health determinant, referring to the latest update of the Global burden of disease study (2009).
- As agreed at the meeting of the WHO Executive Board, a draft global strategy on alcohol will be submitted to the World Health Assembly (WHA) for adoption in May.

### Joint WHO/EC data collection on alcohol

- Lars Møller recalled that in 2008 joint data collection was carried out by WHO EURO and the Commission. Results will be available online through the European Information Systems on Alcohol and Health (EISAH) and in Status Reports. Continued cooperation between Commission and WHO to align global, European and EU data gathering processes is foreseen. The Chair invited members to send suggestions for the next round of data collection.

## **4. Alcohol labelling: Eurocare's initiative for a library**

- Eurocare has commissioned a set (library) of pictorial health warnings for alcoholic beverages. Mariann Skar, Secretary-General of Eurocare, said consumers have a basic right to information on the composition of the products they consume and risks related to consumption. Labels are an appropriate medium for giving this kind of information. The initiative aims at giving the EU policy discussion on this topic a new impulse. The results of testing the labels with consumer panels will be presented at the 4<sup>th</sup> European Alcohol Policy Conference, on 21-22 June 2010 in Brussels.

## **5. Update on alcohol-related projects funded under the Health Programme**

- Dirk Meusel, project officer at the Executive Agency for Health & Consumers (EAHC), pictured the state of play of ongoing projects, including SMART, Building Capacity, PROTECT and VINTAGE.
- Attention was drawn to the recent Workshop on Best Practice Models for Addiction Prevention Projects: <http://ec.europa.eu/eahc/projects/highlights.html>

## 6. Report from Member States on alcohol policy developments

- Doris Kohl presented the work of the Austrian Alcohol Forum (started in 2007) that brings together of NGOs, medical organisations, economic operators and public authorities to formulate suggestions for a national alcohol strategy. 37 Recommendations were presented to the Health Minister in October.
- Sonya Toteva presented on alcohol policy in Bulgaria. A National program for prevention of alcohol abuse 2010-2014 has been developed, to which leading health specialists and representatives from the alcohol industry contributed. The program will probably be approved shortly by the Council of Ministers.
  
- The Chair invited other members to present recent developments:
  - In *Switzerland* the political climate around the amendment of the Alcohol Act is challenging.
  - The *UK* voluntary labelling agreement has not met expectations and legislation is now considered. The Health Committee of the House of Commons has published a report on alcohol. A campaign on health risks of long-term alcohol consumption, targeted at adults, has been launched. Discussion on minimum pricing and excise duties continues.
  - In *Slovenia* drink driving legislation has been sharpened; brief assessment and motivational interview will be introduced for offenders.
  - The launch of a national alcohol plan in *Malta* has been delayed because the responsible minister (Mr Dalli) is moving to Brussels. Activities to prevent drink-driving have continued.
  - In *Portugal* the National Programme awaits approval by Government.
  - In *Germany* alcohol and young people will remain a priority for the new coalition government. The Federal Institute for Health Information (BZgA) has launched a campaign on adverse effects of binge drinking, targeted at youth. Emerging topics include harmful interactions between alcohol and medication in elderly people.
  - In the *Netherlands* the bill amending the Licence and Catering Act is under discussion in Parliament. Excise duty on wine has been increased.
  - In *Romania* campaigns are carried out to improve compliance with the 0-BAC limit. A health tax will be levied on spirits, and beer might be added to the products on which the recently announced obesity tax will be levied.
  - In *Italy* initiatives to introduce age limits for selling alcoholic beverages are developed at local level. At national level, minimum age has only been fixed for serving alcohol. Introduction of a 0-BAC limit for novice drivers and drivers younger than 21 is being discussed
  - In *Sweden* the final decision on whether to allow private farms to sell alcoholic beverages has been postponed in order to study the topic in more detail.
  - In *Norway* the Supreme Court found the comprehensive ban on alcohol advertising (24 June 2009) justified under the EEA agreement. Government has decided to increase alcohol excise duties. Restrictions on hours for selling and serving alcoholic beverages have been tightened to reduce alcohol related violence.
  - In the *Czech Republic* excise duties on alcohol and tobacco have been increased as of 1<sup>st</sup> January, and breath testing of drivers has been extended to all occasions on which a car is stopped for control.

- In 2010 the National Action Plan will be evaluated in *Slovakia*. Introduction of a 0-BAC limit for cyclists is being discussed.
- In *Lithuania* measures are taken to curb night-time sale of alcoholic beverages. Expansion of sales of non-commercial home made spirits is being discussed.

*THURSDAY 28 JANUARY*

## **7. Alcohol and Mental Health**

- Jürgen Scheftlein, policy officer at SANCO/C4, gave a brief overview on the link between alcohol consumption and mental health.
- In June 2008 the European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being was launched. The Pact is a framework for exchange and cooperation between EU-institutions, MS and NGOs. Thematic conferences have been held and an online database of good practice has been launched: the EU Compass for Action on Mental Health and Well-being.
- Finally options were discussed for aligning alcohol policy and mental health policy, including alcoholic beverage labels carrying messages on alcohol and mental health.

## **8. Work of the Committee on Data Collection, Indicators and Definitions**

- Gudrun Gudfinnsdottir (SANCO/C2) reported that the Committee has agreed on key indicators for monitoring across the EU the volume of consumption, pattern of consumption and alcohol attributable health harm. Identifying indicators for the five priority themes of the EU Alcohol Strategy was not possible in all cases; new indicators can be developed for instance through projects.
- The Chair concluded that implementation at national level is an important next step and that the topic might deserve a closer look at a next meeting.

## **9. Forum related topics**

- The European Alcohol and Health Forum has discussed possible topics for the Science Group. Terms of reference for a scientific opinion on alcohol and the workplace, a priority theme of the EU Alcohol Strategy, will be discussed by the Forum in March.
- The Forum has undertaken a mapping exercise to determine the state of development of systems for self-regulation. One of the findings of the mapping exercise was that state of play (in the development of systems for SR) was variable across the EU. In some countries there are advanced systems in place; other Member States do not yet have a functioning self regulatory organisation.
- The resulting report is available on the SANCO website. An update will be made in the summer. Committee members are invited to review the report, for example to check the information on their country.
- At the last Forum meeting EuroCommerce (EU umbrella of retailers) presented its work to develop guidance for responsible selling of alcoholic beverages. HOTREC (EU umbrella of the hospitality industry) has carried out a similar exercise. National contact lists of these organisations will be circulated to the Committee.
- On 22 April the 3<sup>rd</sup> Open (Alcohol and Health) Forum will be held. CNAPA members are invited to attend and participate in a steering group preparing the programme.

## **10. Other updates from the Commission**

- On 26 October 2009 the Commission has adopted the communication "Solidarity in health: reducing health inequalities in the EU" (COM(2009) 567 final). Health inequalities, both within and between countries, are linked to alcohol.
- On 25 February Commission services will organise a seminar on Youth drinking and binge drinking (first announcement circulated in December). Those CNAPA members attending the seminar were asked to consider participation in a round table.
- The Commission services are setting up a Clearing House of initiatives on alcohol and youth health. CNAPA members were invited to become test users.

## **11. Alcohol and cancer**

- Dirk Lachenmeier from the Agency for Chemical and Veterinary Research (Karlsruhe) presented on the link between alcohol consumption and cancer. He contributed to one of the studies on alcohol and cancer conducted by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) of WHO. Dr Lachenmeier presented the main findings of IARC's work, such as:
  - Alcoholic beverages are carcinogenic to humans (IARC Group 1)
  - There is a linear dose-response relationship between the volume of alcohol consumption and cancer risk, with no clear-cut threshold for drinking without cancer risk.
- Questions and discussion focussed on the implications for alcohol policy:
  - Evidence of cancer risk, accumulating since the 1980s, has not been reflected in EU legislation on foodstuffs.
  - Alcohol consumption should be highlighted as a risk factor for ill health more generally, e.g. through labelling requirements.
  - Awareness should also be raised among the medical professions, resulting in increased communication with patients.
- The Chair concluded that there is also need for including alcohol issues in work on cancer, for instance via the newly started EU Cancer Platform.

## **12. Results of the special EU-Barometer "Europeans' Attitudes towards Alcohol"**

- In 2007 the first special Eurobarometer "Attitudes towards Alcohol" was published, focussed on alcohol consumption, awareness of risk and harm, and support for public policies. In October 2009 the poll was repeated, with some new questions added. Nicolas Bécuwe and Jean-Michel Lebrun of TNS Opinion presented the main findings of the recent study. The results will be published in the spring.

## **13. Excise duties: the EU perspective**

- Stephen Kent and Frank Van Driessche of the DG Taxation and Customs Union (TAXUD) described the two EU Directives on alcohol excise duties adopted in 1992. In 2006 the Commission proposed to adapt the minimum rates in order to compensate for inflation but the Council failed to reach unanimity.

- Most Member States do not prioritise health aspects when fixing duty rates.
- London Economics has been commissioned to carry out a study analyse possible changes in the minimum rates and structures of excise duties on alcoholic beverages, due to be completed in March.

#### **14. Reflection on method of working of CNAPA**

- In August 2009 the Commission services circulated proposals to facilitate reflection on the Committee's work, including developing the meeting format to enable in-depth discussion on specific topics. Members were in favour of adding "mini-seminars" and put forward suggestions for topics: health in all policies, implementation of the recent Council conclusions and of the WHO Global strategy, effectiveness of policies and enforcement, elderly people, infectious diseases, treatment, drink driving, health inequalities. At the next meeting a first mini-seminar will focus on alcohol and elderly people. Members were invited to make suggestions.

#### **15. Any other business**

- The next meeting will be held in the first half of September.

▪ **Annex 1 – List of participants**

MEMBER STATES + OBSERVERS	SURNAME	FIRST NAME
Austria - Bundesministerium für Gesundheit, Familie und Jugend	KOHL	Doris
Bulgaria - State Psychiatric Hospital of Treatment of Alcohol and Drug Addiction	ZHENKOVA TOTEVA	Sonya
Cyprus - Ministry of Health	KONSTANTINOU	Kostas
Czech Republic - Ministry of Health	KOSTELECKA	Lenka
Finland - Ministry of Health and Social Affairs	TUOMINEN	Ismo
France - Direction Générale de la Santé	TACHE	Cécile
Germany - Bundesministerium für Gesundheit und Soziale Sicherung	DYBOWSKI HOLZER	Sandra Tilmann
Ireland - Department of Health and Children	BREEN	Robbie
Italia - Istituto Superiore Di Sanità	SCAFATO	Emanuele
Lithuania - Public Health Division	KRIVELIENE	Gelena
Malta – Ministry of Health	SCHEMBRI	Jesmond
Netherlands - Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport	VAN GINNEKEN	Sandra
Norway - Ministry of Health and Care Services	BULL	Bernt
Poland - Ministry of Health	BRZOZKA KLOSINSKI	Krzysztof Wojciech
Portugal - Institute on Drugs and Drug Addiction	CARDOSO	Manuel
Romania - Department of Public Health and Management	FURTUNESCU	Florentina
Slovak Republic - Slovak Ministry of Health	OKRUHLICA	Lubomir
Slovenia - Ministry of Health	BLAZKO	Natasa
Spain - Ministry of Health and Consumers Affairs	LIBRADA	Maria
Sweden - Ministry of Health and Social Affairs	NILSSON - KELLY	Karin
Switzerland - Federal Office of Public Health	BAERISWYL	Petra
United Kingdom - Department of Health	ACTON	Crispin

WHO (Copenhagen)	MØLLER	Lars
WHO (Geneva)	REKVE	Dag
<b>EXTERNAL PRESENTERS</b>	<b>SURNAME</b>	<b>FIRST NAME</b>
German Agency for Chemicals and Veterinary Health	LACHENMEIER	Dirk
TNS Opinion	BECUWE	Nicolas
TNS Opinion	LEBRUN	Jean Michel
Eurocare	SKAR	Mariann
<b>EUROPEAN COMMISSION</b>	<b>SURNAME</b>	<b>SURNAME</b>
DG SANCO C4	HÜBEL	Michael
DG SANCO C4	THOMPSON	Ceri
DG SANCO C4	DE CONINCK	Pieter
DG SANCO C4	MONTONEN	Marjatta
EAHC	MEUSEL	Dirk
DG TAXUD	KENT	Steve
DG TAXUD	VAN DRIESSCHE	Frank