

**PREPARATORY MEETING  
FOR  
THE EUROPEAN ALCOHOL AND HEALTH FORUM**

**4 JUNE 2018, 10.00 - 12.30**

**LUXEMBOURG, DG SANTE**

Chair: John F.Ryan, Director of Public Health

**MINUTES**

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**INTRODUCTION BY THE COMMISSION**

The meeting was opened by John F. Ryan, Director for Public health, country knowledge and crisis management at DG SANTE. Former and current Forum members participated.

The objective of the meeting was to reach an agreement on how to relaunch and structure the Forum and to decide whether or not there is genuine agreement to start to work in the new format of the Forum under the revised methodology.

Mr Ryan emphasized that the Commission has been working since 2015 on the revitalisation of the Forum. The new methodology is based on the model for the EU Platform on Diet and Physical Activity that has proven successful. Moreover, it is based on contributions of former Forum members and was shared with current Forum members in writing.

It is intended to support Member States to reach the Sustainable Developments Goals, the WHO target on reducing alcohol related harm with 10% by 2025 in the context of the WHO “Global action plan for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases”. Therefore, Forum commitments will be encouraged to have a clear link with WHO-agreed objectives and UN Sustainable Development Goals in the area of alcohol related harm and with the core mission of stakeholders.

The two main changes for the Forum working methods will be a closer linkage to Member States policy priorities and an independent ex-ante scientific scrutiny of proposed commitments. The proposed changes in the functioning of the Forum and the new methodology were designed to ensure that the public health objectives can be better achieved and that the credibility of the Forum will be reinforced. The new methodology is in full respect of the founding Charter of the Forum.

If following the discussions in the current meeting the Commission will conclude to continue the preparations for the renewal of the Forum, the Commission will invite former and current Forum Members to submit commitments, which will be assessed according to the new methodology by the Commission, based on the opinion of the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and WHO. The assessment process will be transparent.

Based on the experience gained with the assessment of these commitments, DG SANTE will decide whether or not to reconvene the Forum and call for **the first official Forum meeting under the new methodology.**

**PRESENTATION OF THE NEW METHODOLOGY**

DG SANTE presented the new Forum methodology that has been sent earlier to all former and current members of the Forum. The key points are:

- The public health authorities of the Member States via Committee of National Policies and Actions (CNAPA) will provide guidance to the Forum. The Forum members will be asked to orientate their commitments, to be in line e.g. with the objectives of the Action Plan on Youth Drinking and on Heavy Episodic Drinking and other relevant policy documents. Commitments should target priority areas identified by CNAPA, by the Strategy or Action Plan (examples of possible areas: drink driving, drinking during pregnancy, labelling, alcohol content, workplace dimension, server training/age limits).
- In parallel, commitments will be encouraged to have a clear link with WHO-agreed objectives and UN Sustainable Development Goals in the area of alcohol related harm and with the core mission of stakeholders.
- DG SANTE, based on the JRC and WHO opinions, will do an ex-ante assessment of the commitments' relevance to public health objectives, according to the assessment grid which was circulated. The assessment will serve as an advice and feedback to the commitment owners how to improve their commitments before starting implementing them.
- The assessment of each commitment will be transparently reported in the context of the annual monitoring reports of the Forum and in other relevant public and Commission-internal documents. However, respecting the Charter and the voluntary nature of the Forum process, no commitments will be refused.

## **TOUR DE TABLE AND DISCUSSION**

The Chair invited all meeting participants to focus during the discussion on concrete comments on the methodology (improvement, credibility, etc.) and on their views whether restarting the Forum is desirable.

**Eurocare** noted that the methodology is a good step in the right direction, especially with the inclusion of WHO and JRC and will increase the credibility of commitments. Their General Assembly last year concluded to be in favour of restarting the Forum as long as it goes in the right direction and strictly follows the new methodology.

They also expressed disappointment on the Commission proposal on Multiannual Financial Framework and the role of health promotion and diseases prevention in there. In addition, they also announced the 8th European Alcohol Policy Conference in Edinburgh on 20-21 November 2018.

**Eurocare; European Mutual Help Network for Individuals and Families with Alcohol related problems (EMNA)** said that the new methodology might be too timid to restart the Forum but they are willing to try again.

**Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME)** needed to abstain from taking a concrete position since they have not yet had the official agreement to go forward under the new methodology. However, they confirmed their positive opinion on the restart of the Forum.

**Eurocare; Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP)** expressed their strong commitment to working at EU level. They would welcome a more rigorous approach to see whether the commitments have an impact on improving public health and whether the Commission could assess this impact.

**Eurocare; Alcohol Policy Youth Network (APYN)** is willing to work under the new methodology, but will also rigorously evaluate whether the process is going in the right direction.

**No Excuse Slovenia** is supportive and hopeful, but at the same time sceptical and reserved until they see the concrete results.

**Eurocare; United European Gastroenterology (UEG)** supported the relaunch of the Forum and considered the new methodology as a unique chance to restructure the Forum work. They encouraged

a closer cooperation with CNAPA and WHO and asked the Commission about a new Alcohol Strategy.

**World Federation of Advertisers (WFA)**, also a member in the Nutrition and Physical Activity Platform, noted that there are always areas with diverging views and criticism, especially in advertising. However, diverging views should not be an impediment for action. They firmly agree to address the concerns about the marketing of alcohol e.g. through the Responsible Marketing Pact and are positive about the re-launching of the Forum under the new methodology.

**SpiritsEUROPE** fully support multi stakeholder dialogue, welcome the possible restart of the Forum and the statement that the Forum Charter will remain as reference. They highlighted that as an umbrella organisation they represent all their members (even though not present on the day). Future commitments will be taken in consultation with members – and next steps should give sufficient time for such consultation. They welcomed broad membership of the Forum and encourage dialogue also with other Commission Services. The remaining questions on practicalities of the new methodology do not object to re-launch the Forum under the new methodology.

**SpiritsEUROPE; Pernod-Ricard** is committed to improve the level of commitments and they think the new methodology can help redefine commitments.

**SpiritsEUROPE; Moët Hennessy** hopes to continue with the new methodology and to provide good commitments through their Trade Associations, for the future

**SpiritsEUROPE; Diageo** is fully supporting the future collaboration in the Forum based on the new methodology.

**Comité Européen des Entreprises Vin, (CEEV)** is in favour of restarting the Forum in line with the Charter. They are grateful for this meeting helping clarify the scope and functioning of the new methodology. For them the key issues are: How will new methodology affect ongoing commitments which have been evolving and improved over time? How is the core mission defined? How will be the physical meetings organised? Regarding the commitments' link to Members' core-mission, CEEV underlined the risk of losing efficient actions and partnerships with national NGOs (not Members of the Forum). As an example of a successful project which may be seen as outside of their core mission, CEEV mentioned the local partnership between parents and Wine in moderation in Portugal on awareness rising.

**Brewers of Europe (BoE)**, as indicated in their reply to the Commission earlier, are very supportive of the revival of the Forum and in full agreement with the new methodology.

**Brewers of Europe; Anheuser-Busch InBev** welcomed the revival of the Forum and expressed the company's attachment to the multi-stakeholder approach.

**Brewers of Europe; Heineken** supported the new methodology. They stressed that the multi-stakeholder approach should remain at the centre of the new working methodology to enhance European cooperation.

**Brewers of Europe; Carlsberg** was supportive to the new methodology and looks forward to seeing soon concrete actions.

**HOTREC** welcomed the preparations for the re-launch and fully supported the multi-stakeholder approach and sharing best practices as the most significant added value of the Forum. Their questions on the methodology were: How ongoing commitments will be handled? Could they continue or should/can be re-submitted? How will the organisation of the Forum be, namely, in terms of meetings?

**Other participant which supported the relaunch of the Forum and the new methodology at the meeting:** European Travel Retail Confederation (ETRC), Alcohol Beverage Federation of Ireland (ABFI), Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL), European Transport Safety Council (ETSC) and Eurocare; European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL).

**Replying to the above issues raised the Chair clarified the following specific aspects:**

- Fully respecting the Charter, the Forum process must remain open for development. Therefore, the new Forum methodology is suggested to be annexed as Annex 5 to the founding **Charter of the Forum**.
- The Commission is ready to continue investing substantial resources into bilateral dialogues with Forum members to improve the quality of commitments, also with the involvement of an external contractor (as a good example, recently in the Nutrition Platform more than 60 bilateral meetings took place in about one year). It will be considered if and how contribution from other Commission services can be channelled into the commitment process.
- The transparency of the commitment process will be further strengthened in all aspects, most importantly concerning the joint assessment of commitments involving JRC, WHO and SANTE.
- Ongoing (i.e. not having been assessed with the new methodology) and new commitments as well as commitments with a favourable and unfavourable overall assessment according to the new methodology will be strictly separated in the Forum database and reported on.
- There is an option for members to re-submit ongoing commitments if they wish them to be assessed with the new Forum methodology.
- Producing labelling and promoting a product is considered to represent a close link to the **core mission/core business** of economic operators in the Forum while education programmes, activities aiming at a positive behavioural change in children - particularly when branded - do not. CEEV clarified that no such 'branded' commitments had been put in place within the European Alcohol and Health Forum. The credibility of new commitments needs to be enhanced to this end, mixed messages (e.g. marketing and public health messages at the same time) should not be sent.
- In general, commitments with an unfavourable assessment and from outside of the core mission of the commitment owners will not be refused for submission but will primarily be encouraged to be implemented outside of the Forum commitment process. This is already foreseen in the Charter.
- In case the Forum will be formally relaunched, there will be **regular physical meetings** of the Forum. In parallel, members are encouraged to use the potential of the EU Health Policy Platform for the exchange of information, webinars, and virtual meetings. This platform can also be a useful tool to present discuss improve highlight and promote the commitments.
- The Commission under its current mandate will not propose a new **EU Alcohol Strategy**. The Commission has a horizontal approach to prevent chronic diseases and promote healthy lifestyles, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Replacing eleven Commission expert groups active in public health, the recently established Steering Group on Promotion and Prevention focusses now on implementation of best practices according to Member States priorities, aiming to support them to reach these Goals.
- The Commission proposed in the new Multiannual Financial Framework that the Health Programme will be part of the EU Social Fund (ESF+) with similar budget as the current programme and more flexibility. Promotion and prevention are well covered by several points in the Commissions proposal. Separate funding to support Forum members' activities/commitments is not foreseen; to support Member States activities to reduce alcohol related harm, EUR 4 million is available in the Health Program for the period of 2017-2020.

### **Conclusions by the Chair:**

- All but one participant were in favour of relaunching the Forum with the new methodology (the Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME)) abstained, needing more time to officially consult its members – but definitely interested in moving forward along the new methodology);
- The new Forum methodology has been accepted unanimously and will be annexed as Annex 5 to the founding Charter of the Forum;
- SANTE will revise the on-line template used for the submission of commitments, to be in line with the new working methodology;
- Clear distinction will be made between ‘old’/ongoing commitments (submitted before the new methodology entered into force, i.e. this meeting) and ‘new’ commitments (submitted after the meeting); ‘old’/ongoing commitments will not be reassessed with the new methodology unless re-submitted;
- ‘New’ commitments will be assessed according to the new methodology involving JRC and WHO Europe; final SANTE assessments will be made public, which is expected to improve the quality of commitments with time;
- The 'core mission' will be an integral part of the assessments; (e.g. education programmes and activities to change children's behaviour is primarily not considered as core business of economic operators);
- Bilateral meetings with individual Forum members are planned to support the improvement of future commitments, both by an external contractor and SANTE (on methodological issues and on topics/objectives for commitments);
- Participants are invited to use the Health Policy Platform to interact; in the future, webinars, videoconferences and audioconferences will also be proposed besides physical meetings;
- Conclusions/minutes of the meeting as well as the proposed next steps will be shared with the meeting participants in due time.