

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Dear Chairman,

The Commission would like to thank the House of Lords for its Opinion on a new EU Alcohol Strategy and for the detailed observations and suggestions it makes.

The House of Lords addresses an important topic. Harmful use of alcohol has serious consequences for individuals and society as a whole. The Commission shares the House of Lords' concern about the damage that alcohol inflicts on people's health and the need to co-operate at EU level to address this issue. The developments in the United Kingdom, where the rate of liver disease related deaths has nearly quadrupled in 40 years and where, according to the House of Lords, alcoholic liver disease accounts for 84 % of liver deaths in England, highlight the gravity of the issue.

The Commission would like to emphasise that while according to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union a high level of health protection shall be ensured in all Union policies and activities, the main responsibility for public health and alcohol related harm is within national competence. The Commission shares the House of Lords' view that any further action at EU level on alcohol related harm should respect the Treaty and aim at supporting Member States.

The Commission is currently in the process of defining deliverables on health with a clear added value. In this context, the Commission is considering how to best support Member States' action to reduce alcohol related harm. The House of Lords' views provide valuable input to this process.

In the meantime, the Commission supports Member States and stakeholders in their efforts to reduce alcohol related harm through the Committee on National Alcohol Policy and Action and the European Alcohol and Health Forum. The Commission will look into possibilities to make best use of the potential of these structures which were set up within the context of the 2006 EU Strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol related harm. This includes ongoing work on how to improve the governance of the EU Alcohol and Health Forum and the reporting of commitments by its members.

*Lord BOSWELL
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In addition, a Joint Action to Reduce Alcohol Related Harm was launched on 31th January 2014 and will run until the end of 2016. It is being co-funded under the framework of the EU Health Programme 2008-2013 thus providing support to Member States in taking forward work to reduce alcohol related harm. This joint action aimed at providing comparable data on levels and patterns of alcohol consumption and alcohol related harm and to foster consensus on good practices to help reduce harm from alcohol. Finally, the Commission supports monitoring, data collection and research.

The Commission takes note of the House of Lords' views on the rates and the structure of excise duties. It lies within the competence of Member States to consider pricing policies and measures, as long as they comply with the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and EU legislation. Questions related to minimum unit pricing in Scotland have been referred to the Court of Justice of the European Union and the Commission will await the judgment of the Court before commenting on the matter.

The Commission welcomes the conclusions of the House of Lords on advertising, which will be taken into consideration in the evaluation of the Audiovisual Media Service Directive currently carried out under the Commission's Regulatory Fitness and Performance Programme. The Commission is also funding a study on the exposure of minors to alcohol advertising in audiovisual media services and other online services. In addition, the Commission is supporting Member States and stakeholders' action on responsible advertising, through the Committee on National Alcohol Policy and Action and the European Alcohol and Health Forum.

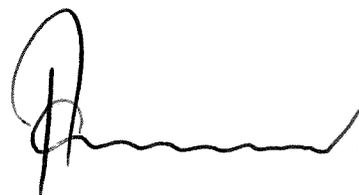
Regarding labelling and the application of the requirement to provide information on ingredients and nutrition information to alcoholic beverages, the Commission notes the opinion of the House of Lords. A Commission report on this matter is under preparation. Studies and reports funded under the Health Programme have contributed to the knowledge base on various alcohol related questions, including the use of age limits and the use of labelling. The Commission will also in the future carefully consider where more knowledge is needed and how it can best be obtained. In this regard, the Commission works together with the WHO to monitor the situation in the Member States, e.g. consumption level and policy development.

The Commission hopes that these clarifications address the issues raised by the House of Lords and looks forward to continuing our political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,



*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*



*Vytenis Andriukaitis
Member of the Commission*