EU strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol related harm

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drawn up by Alessandro **FOGLIETTA** (UEN, IT) on an EU strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol-related harm. Whilst it welcomed the Commission's approach, it called on the Commission to formulate **ambitious general objectives** for the Member States. The latter should pay particular attention to vulnerable social groups, such as children, young people and pregnant women, and address the problems of hazardous and harmful alcohol consumption by young people, workers and drivers by means of information and awareness-raising campaigns and, where appropriate, a review of compliance with existing national laws.

Parliament acknowledged that alcohol consumption could be considered as a part of the **European cultural heritage and life style**, and that that low alcohol consumption might under certain conditions help to prevent cardiovascular diseases and ischemia in some middle-aged individuals. However, hazardous and harmful alcohol consumption occurs in all social groups and is caused by a wide variety of factors, making a comprehensive approach to combating this problem essential.

The report stressed that Member States are free to determine the form of measures to be taken at national level, but that they should report to the Commission on the progress made. It also noted that the Commission has a supporting role to play in the achievement of the European objectives by helping the Member States to exchange knowledge and best practices and to carry out European research.

Parliament called on the Commission and Member States to adopt certain measures with a view to preventing harmful alcohol consumption among children and young people:

- to launch education campaigns, especially through school-based educational programmes;
- to involve retailers and the catering industry in identifying concrete measures to prevent the selling and serving of alcohol and alcohol pops to minors;
- to focus on such beverages as "alcopops", through measures such as stricter labelling requirements, and requirements for clearer separation of alcopops from soft drinks in shops, and to promote higher taxes on such beverages;
- to draw up guidelines setting an age limit for purchasing, selling and serving alcoholic drinks;
- to promote at European level blood alcohol content (BAC) limits as close as is workable to 0.00 % for new drivers;
- to take any necessary measures to increase controls on drink-driving to the maximum;
- to strengthen the sanctions for drink-driving imposed by Member States;
- to encourage the extension of "designated-driver programmes";
- to set up a European prize for the best campaign against hazardous alcohol consumption directed at schools and young people;
- to intensify the exchange of best practice between Member States on how to work against hazardous and harmful alcohol consumption, and between national police forces on controls on drink-driving by young people.

Parliament also called on the Commission to quantify the incidence of FAS (Foetal Alcohol Syndrome) and FASD (Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders) in the Member States with a view to formulating European objectives aimed at curbing FAS and FASD. Both women and men should be better informed about the risks of alcohol use during pregnancy, for example through warnings on packaging, in order to avoid new-born babies being affected by problems caused by alcohol use during pregnancy.

Parliament stated that **alcohol advertising and marketing practices** should not be directed at minors. It welcomed the self-regulation undertakings given, for example, by the advertising industry and alcoholic beverage producers. It called on the Commission and the Member States to check that these undertakings are honoured and, if they are not, to impose penalties.

The report recommended certain measures with the aim of **reducing the number of road accidents**:

- to promote a considerable increase in controls on blood alcohol content and to address the highly varied enforcement rate between Member States aiming at convergence of the frequency of controls as well as exchanging good practices as regards the places where the controls should be carried out;
- to promote heavier sanctions for drink-driving, such as prolonged withdrawal of driving licences;
- to promote at European level blood alcohol content limits as close as is workable to 0,00% for drivers of transportation means requiring a category A and B driving licence and for drivers of transportation means requiring a higher category of driving licence and for all professional drivers;
- the further development of alcohol lock systems and other instruments which mechanically prevent drink-driving, notably for professional drivers.

The Commission and Member States were also asked to:

- draw up guidelines for the advertising of alcoholic beverages on television and to ensure the implementation of the new Television Without Frontiers Directive once it is adopted;
- encourage audiovisual media service providers to include in their codes of practice rules on the scheduling of alcoholic beverage commercials;
- submit, by 2010, an exhaustive general survey of hazardous and harmful alcohol consumption patterns and addictive behaviour and its causes;
- tackle the problem of illegal and black market sales of alcohol.