Public health: drinking of alcohol by children and adolescents. Recommendation

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The committee has adopted the report by Catherine Stihler (PSE, UK), which makes substantive amendments to the proposal in the framework of the consultation procedure. The report emphasises several factors that give grounds for concern: the tendency to mix tobacco, alcohol and drugs, the propensity to consume these products at increasingly early ages, which intensifies the risk of addiction in adulthood and the correlation between alcohol consumption and anti-social behaviour. The committee therefore believes there is a need to take preventive measures in order to reduce demand; at the same time, these measures should also be designed to limit the supply of the products in question. The main proposed measures are the introduction of a provision prescribing the labelling of products with consumer information on alcoholic content. This measure has been made all the more necessary by the appearance on the market of a vast range of alcoholic refreshments or ready-mixed soft drinks with an alcoholic content. It is particularly important to ensure that trade names, advertisements and other forms of customer conditioning do not blur the distinction between alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. Parallel to these efforts, provision must also be made for compulsory cautionary warnings on the labels of all alcoholic drinks, and steps must be taken to ensure that, when goods are displayed in shops, a rigorous distinction is made between genuine soft drinks and alcoholic beverages, with warning signs indicating the latter, especially in supermarkets. The parliamentary committee also calls for a provision stipulating that, at public events where alcohol is sold for immediate consumption, at least one non-alcoholic drink must be available at a price not exceeding that of the cheapest alcoholic beverage. Steps must also be taken to ensure that the renunciation of advertising aimed at children and teenagers must not be confined to the printed media but must also apply to radio and television advertising. The committee also emphasises the need to conduct 'appropriate studies' on the problem of alcohol consumption among young Europeans and believes that the collection of data 'must take place in a standardised manner' so that the collected data will be comparable. Finally, in place of the terms 'dependence' or 'abuse', the committee prefers the expression 'harmful use of alcohol', since very few adolescents are actually dependent on alcohol.