EU strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol related harm

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PURPOSE: to set out an EU strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol related harm.

CONTENT: this Communication addresses the adverse health effects related to harmful and hazardous alcohol consumption, as well as the related social and economic consequences, and answers to Council requests back in 2001 for the Commission to follow-up, assess and monitor developments and the measures taken in this field and to report back on the need for further actions. It focuses on preventing and cutting back heavy and extreme drinking patterns, as well as under-age drinking, and some of their most harmful consequences such as alcohol-related road accidents and Foetal Alcohol Syndrome.

The Communication recognises that there are different cultural habits related to alcohol consumption in the various Member States. There is no intention to substitute Community action to national policies, which have already been put in place in most of the Member States.

This comprehensive strategy to reduce alcohol-related harm in Europe until the end of 2012 explains what has already been done at national and Community level. The Commission considers that its main contribution to the strategy should be based on the existing approach of complementing national policies and strategies in this area and therefore, does not intend to implement the strategy through specific new legislative proposals. The Commission will report regularly on the implementation of measures to tackle harmful and hazardous alcohol consumption, as described in this Communication, as well as on the impact of the EU strategy set out in this Communication; this will be based on regular reporting from the Member States on the implementation of the relevant measures.

Certain existing Member States actions are to be considered as examples of good practice and have proven their effects. In respect of the principles of subsidiarity and better regulation, these actions need to be strengthened in order to achieve the goal of this strategy. The Commission will contribute through its role of complementing Member States efforts, by adding value to their actions and dealing with issues that Member States cannot effectively handle on their own.

In order to address the above concerns, and based on the outcomes of the impact assessment process, the Commission has identified the following **five priority themes**, which are relevant in all Member States and for which Community action in complement to national policies and coordination of national actions has an added value:

• protect young people, children and the unborn child;

• reduce injuries and death from alcohol-related road accidents;

• prevent alcohol-related harm among adults and reduce the negative impact on the workplace;

• inform, educate and raise awareness on the impact of harmful and hazardous alcohol consumption, and on appropriate consumption patterns;

• develop and maintain a common evidence base at EU level.

These themes cut across EU, national and local level, and call for multi-stakeholder and multi-sector action. It should be noted that Member States have the main responsibility for national alcohol policy. In addition, the Community encourages cooperation and coordination between the Member States and lends support to their action. As a complement to these national initiatives, the Commission implements policies in the field of alcohol related harm, in particular through the Public Health Programme and the Research Framework Programme. There are thus **three levels of actions**:

1. **National level**: action to improve consumer information, at point of sale or on products, on the impact of alcohol abuse on health and work performance. Action to better enforce age limits for selling and serving alcohol. Interventions and educational programmes. Introduction and enforcement of rules against serving alcohol to intoxicated persons.
2. **The coordination of national policies at Community level** toprevent and promote strategies to protect citizens from alcohol-related harm.
3. **Actions by the Commission** on the basis of its prerogatives. In this context, the main role of the Commission is: (a) to inform and raise awareness on major public health concerns at EU and Member State level, and to cooperate with Member States in addressing these; (b) to initiate action at EU level when this relates to its field of competence, in particular through sectoral programs and (c) to support and help coordinate national actions, in particular by identifying and disseminating good practice across the EU.