

Brussels, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2007

## **European Commission, businesses and NGO's create Forum to battle alcohol-related harm**

*More than 40 businesses and non-governmental organisations, responding to a European Commission initiative, agreed today to take action to protect European citizens from the harmful use of alcohol. EU Health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou and representatives of the businesses and NGO's signed in Brussels the Charter establishing the Alcohol and Health Forum. The Forum, scheduled to meet twice a year, is to focus especially on concrete actions to protect children and young people and to prevent irresponsible commercial alcohol communication and sales. The move comes at a time when an estimated 200,000 Europeans die every year because of harmful alcohol use. More than one out of four deaths among young men is attributed to alcohol.*

EU Health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou said: "My expectations for this Forum are high, as they need to be given the health challenge posed by alcohol related harm. In particular I expect the alcoholic beverages industry to market their products responsibly. The media, advertisers, retailers, as well as owners of pubs and bars should also contribute to changing attitudes and behaviours, especially among young people. We simply cannot afford to see so many young European lives being wasted every year because of the inappropriate use of alcohol."

### **Platform for action**

The European Alcohol and Health Forum is a common platform for action. Its members are economic operators and NGO's that are willing to devote time and resources to adopt meaningful actions to prevent alcohol-related harm. EU Member States, European Institutions, the World Health Organisation and the International Organisation of Vine and Wine participate as observers.

The Forum is to meet twice a year and to be chaired by the Commission's Directorate General for Health and Consumer Protection (DG SANCO). The Forum will establish a Science Group, which – at the request of the Forum – will provide scientific advice and guidance on matters under discussion. The Forum can also establish Task Forces. The first two have already been established and cover Marketing Communication and Youth-specific aspects of alcohol.

### **Members' commitments**

In order to become a member of the Forum, a business or an NGO has to submit a written commitment to take action. In other words, all the members have to present a concrete action plan with objectives and information on how the results will be monitored and evaluated. Participation for the sake of participation will not be possible as members will need to report on what they have done and their achievements.

Furthermore, all action plans and commitments will be made public and all will be observed within one single monitoring framework. The results will also be made public through DG SANCO's website. This will allow the evaluation of successful initiatives, which, in turn could be examples for the other members of the Forum to follow.

### **Health effects of alcohol-related harm**

It is estimated that harmful alcohol use kills approximately 200,000 people a year in the EU. Harmful alcohol consumption is responsible for one in four deaths among young men aged 15-29 and one in 10 deaths of women in the same age group.

According to the recently published special Eurobarometer on Alcohol, one in 10 Europeans usually drink five or more drinks in one session, which is the widely used definition of binge drinking for men. This figure was particularly high among the youngest respondents. Almost one in five young people in the 15-24 age group (19%) drink five or more alcoholic beverages in one session.

Therefore, it is no surprise that the vast majority of Europeans, according to the same Eurobarometer, would welcome measures to protect vulnerable groups of society and to reduce death by road accidents.

### **Background**

On October 24 2006, the European Commission adopted a Communication setting out an EU strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol related harm. The priorities identified in the Communication were: to protect young people and children; reduce injuries and deaths from alcohol-related road accidents; prevent harm among adults and reduce the negative impact on the economy; raise awareness of the impact on health of harmful alcohol consumption; and help gather reliable statistics.

The Commission identified areas where the EU can support Member States' actions to reduce alcohol-related harm, such as financing projects through the Public Health and Research Programmes, exchanging good practice on issues such as curbing under-age drinking and exploring cooperation in the field of information or tackling drink-driving and other Community initiatives.

The Charter establishing the European Alcohol Health Forum can be found at:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_determinants/life\\_style/alcohol/alcohol\\_charter\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/alcohol_charter_en.htm)

For more information, please visit:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_determinants/life\\_style/alcohol/alcohol\\_com\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/alcohol_com_en.htm)

The special Eurobarometer on Alcohol is available at:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_publication/eurobarometers\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_publication/eurobarometers_en.htm)