

Letter concerning alcohol marketing to the Prime Minister of Estonia Mr. Jüri Ratas and Minister of Health and Labour Mr. Jevgeni Ossinovski,

International scientific support for amendments to Alcohol Act and Advertising Act in Estonia.

Utrecht, 14-12-2016

Dear Mr. Ratas and Mr. Ossinovski,

As President of EUCAM, the European Centre for Monitoring Alcohol Marketing, I am writing you this letter. First of all, I would like to congratulate you all on the leadership your country is showing by the proposed strong, effective measures to address the marketing and availability of alcohol.

I have asked the world's leading scientists in the field of alcohol marketing and drinking behaviour to voice their support for the proposed amendments to the Alcohol Act and Advertising Act. As you can see below, five eminent scholars have undersigned this message.

As you may well know, Estonia has a high per capita consumption level (10.2 l) and one of the highest number of deaths attributable to alcohol consumption (1). While there have certainly been positive developments in Estonian public policy concerning alcohol consumption in recent years, the actual effects of these measures on drinking in your country have been relatively modest. The proposed plans are expected to have a bigger impact, because they form an integrated, multifaceted approach (restricting availability in stores and petrol stations as well as restricting marketing), rather than concentrating on one policy area.

The proposed plan to establish rules in statutory regulations about the content of alcohol advertising, seems to be directly inspired by the French regulation of alcohol advertising. This French 'Law Evin' is commonly referred to as one of most effective forms of alcohol marketing restrictions in the world in order to protect young people (3). By implementing the proposed amendments, it is expected that Estonia will henceforth be referred to as one of the countries with effective and broadly supported restrictions on alcohol advertisements in the world.

However, proposing effective legislation that will protect (young) people against the harmful effects of alcohol marketing, often comes with opposition from the alcohol industry. The restrictions proposed by the alcohol industry are mainly based on self-regulation and these restrictions are seen by experts as weak and offering an almost free space for advertisers to reach and impress new generations of drinkers.

Quoting a recent report (3): “Evidence demonstrates that self-regulatory schemes contain commitments which are usually vague and most often not based on the most effective approaches to limit alcohol harm and improve diets. This has been made clear in a range of evidence reviews, as well as evaluations of specific food and alcohol self-regulatory initiatives.”

On the other hand statutory regulations, especially those who formulate literally what is allowed in terms of marketing, will reduce primarily the volume of marketing practices substantially and are better to control.

You will be able to pride yourself for proposing strong regulations where other countries are still hesitant. There is a large evidence base suggesting that exposure to alcohol marketing leads to drinking at an earlier age, as well as increasing the amount consumed (4,5). Based on the large body of scientific work concerning alcohol marketing and drinking behaviour, the signatories of this letter expect a significant protective effect on the health of young people and future generations coming from the amendments to the Alcohol Act and Advertising Act. Not only do the undersigned support the proposed plans, we hope to see them implemented in the near future.

Sincerely yours,

Ir. Wim van Dalen Msc.

President of EUCAM (European Centre for Monitoring Alcohol Marketing)
Director Dutch Institute for Alcohol Policy STAP

Co-signatories

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Reiner Hanewinkel, Professor of Medical Psychology & Sociology, University of Kiel; Director of the Institute for Therapy and Health Research, Kiel, Germany

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Jurgen Rehm Associate Professor, University of Toronto; Director, the Social and Epidemiological Research Department at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Sources:

1. WHO, Status report on alcohol and health in 35 European countries 2013 (2013).
2. STAP, Effective alcohol marketing regulations. Policy report (2010).
3. European Public Health Alliance (EPHA). Self-regulation: a false promise for public health? Brussels, 2016.
4. Anderson, P., De Bruijn, A., Angus, K., Gordon, R., & Hastings, G. (2009). Impact of alcohol advertising and media exposure on adolescent alcohol use: a systematic review of longitudinal studies. *Alcohol and alcoholism*, 44(3), 229-243.
5. Smith, L. A., & Foxcroft, D. R. (2009). The effect of alcohol advertising, marketing and portrayal on drinking behaviour in young people: systematic review of prospective cohort studies. *BMC public health*, 9(1), 51.