



NORDAN  
RESOLUTION  
2015

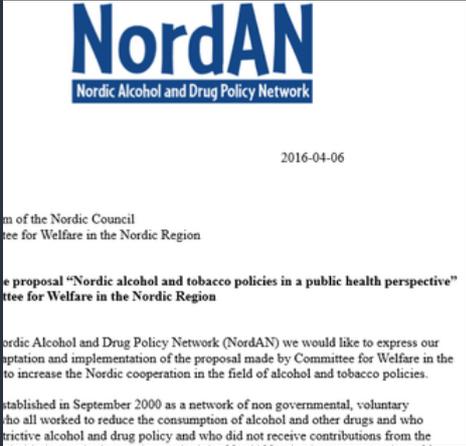
ICELAND

ALCOHOL  
SALE BAN  
IN GAS  
STATIONS

LITHUANIA

NORDIC ALCOHOL  
AND TOBACCO  
POLICIES

NORDICS



ESTONIA

ALCOHOL  
POLICY  
BILL



GLOBAL

SPONSOR-  
SHIP IN F1

# WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE?



During the past year, NordAN has been involved with various issues in different countries. Among other interventions, NordAN has sent some letters to politicians and institutions urging deciders to make choices that would uphold public health principles. With this report we are looking what has happened after these letters, how have these issues developed further.

# NordAN resolution 2015: The monopoly system in Iceland

Resolution adopted by NordAN's annual assembly of representatives held in Helsinki, October 23rd 2015. The Nordic Alcohol and Drug Policy Network (NordAN), strongly urges members of the Icelandic Parliament, Alþingi, to veto the bill proposing the abolition of a public monopoly on sales of alcohol and authorizing the right to sell alcohol at all retail outlets which is now being dealt with by the Parliament.

## What has happened since then?

In March 2016 the 'alcohol bill' seeking to deregulate the retail sale of alcohol in Iceland was approved by a majority of members of the Icelandic Parliament ('Alþingi') General Affairs Committee. The bill received the endorsement of a cross-party majority of committee MPs and moved on to Alþingi for further legislative processing.

„The committee consists of nine members, thereof are four of them among the movers of the proposal. It is of course a matter of question why all the evidence based information and arguments provided against the bill and the strong opposition on behalf of all those working in the field of public health, health promotion, prevention and child and youth affairs has so little weight in the minds of these “public servants,” said Arni Einarsson, NordAN board member from Iceland, back in March. „We will of course continue to express our public health arguments and point out that the majority of the people are opposed to the bill,” Einarsson concluded.

In April Iceland's prime minister Sigmundur David Gunnlaugsson found himself in the middle of the Panama Paper scandal and the whole nation was turned upside down. As Parliament elections were getting

close also, the „alcohol bill“ never reached Alþingi which means the topic was removed from the agenda completely. Although the elections took place in the end of October the new government was agreed between the Independence Party, The Reform Party and Bright Future so late as January 11, 2017. Arni Einarsson has expressed fears that this „alcohol bill“ might now re-emerge and that there could be „another attempt in the coming months.“

Unfortunately he was right as already in February 2 four parties – the ruling coalition of the Independence Party, the Reform Party and Bright Future, in addition to the Pirate Party – introduced a bill to parliament that would permit the sale of alcohol in private shops, starting in the beginning of 2018. In addition, the advertising of alcoholic beverages would also be legalized.

Local NGO-s have put together a working group to organize their countermeasures and activate as many as possible already from the beginning to oppose the bill. NordAN is also committed to contribute and support the existing alcohol policy that have raised Iceland as the front-runner in reducing underage drinking and drug use.

# LITHUANIA: Alcohol sale ban in gas stations

NordAN sent a support letter to the Parliament of Lithuania yesterday, November 9, 2015, urging parliament members to vote in favor of the alcohol sale ban at petrol stations. The letter came as a reaction to a plan to revoke the ban that was supposed to come to force from January 1, 2016.

The proposal was rejected and as of 1 January 2016, a provision of the Law on Alcohol Control came into force, banning alcohol sale in the country's petrol stations.

## What has happened since then?

Encouraged by a good example from Lithuania, Estonia added a gas station sales ban into its own alcohol policy bill. As a result of party politics, the specific amendment was later (in January 2017) removed from the bill. At the same time a new point was added to the bill: a total ban for alcohol advertising in social media. Whether these changes were related to each other or not, that we are not aware of.



# Alcohol policy bill in Estonia

In November 11 2015 NordAN sent a support letter addressed to the prime minister of Estonia and several other ministers and party leaders. The Ministry of Social Affairs, with the initiative of Minister of Health and Labour Jevgeni Ossinovski have introduced a bill that aims to cut majority of alcohol advertising and reduce alcohol availability, including banning alcohol sale at petrol stations. According to initial plan the law changes were supposed to come into force January 1, 2017.



## What has happened since then?

In January 2016, the bill was open for public consultation after which it was amended slightly. In February Justice Minister Urmas Reinsalu did not approve the bill saying the bill of amendments did not sufficiently prove the need for and expediency of the planned measures. The minister of economic affairs and infrastructure, Kristen Michal, likewise withheld his consent for the proposed changes.

The bill was then repeatedly corrected and changed but several urgent matters kept it from the governments agenda. In August minister

Ossinovski met with Finnish NGO-s where he also said that „public health is one of the most important things to any country. Of course this may not affect business interests in a suitable way , but without a doubt, public health will always be a higher priority.“

In November 2016, the government changed and new coalition confirmed it´s support for stronger alcohol policy. In addition to minister Ossinovski´s bill, the government promised to raise taxes more than previously planned. In December 20, the excise raise plan was adopted by the Parliament. The main attention was placed on low alcohol: Beer excise duty will be raised by 65 percent from July 2017, and by 166 percent from the present, to 22.09 cents per percentage by volume per liter of beer by 2020.

Also in December 2016, NordAN sent another support letter as a strong alcohol industry´s pushback was building up. We invited and organized our international partners to ad their voice to support the evidence based alcohol policy plans and soon letters followed from Eurocare, NTAKK from Lithuania, ANPAA from France, EUCAM and European Heart Network.

On January 27 the Estonian government confirmed minister Jevgeni Ossinovski´s bill making changes to the Alcohol Act and Advertising Act before sending it on to the Riigikogu.

Should the bill be passed in the Riigikogu, the law will go fully into effect beginning January 1, 2018.

The final bill includes following points:

- in grocery stores alcoholic beverages will have to be placed separately from other products and cannot be prominently visible from outside
- stores with a sales floor of over 450 square meters in size; alcohol in these stores will not be permitted to be visible from the rest of the sales floor
- ads for alcohol must be sparse in information, focus on the product itself and not present the product in a positive atmosphere; advertising may not reference the positive effects of alcohol or the link between consuming alcohol and holidays and events
- with the exception of on their own page, alcohol advertising on the part of alcohol distributors will be banned from social media entirely

- ban on television and radio ads for alcohol before 10 p.m. (compared to the previous 9 p.m.) and ads appearing on the front and back covers of supplements included with periodicals
- in stores, alcohol tastings and happy hours in which alcohol is sold for cheaper than usual during specific hours will be banned and alcohol may not be sold for cheaper in multipacks than as individual bottles
- the bill will also toughen up requirements for sellers to verify the age of its buyers. Changes to the law will allow for control purchases to be made both to verify the appropriate restriction on the sale of alcohol to minors as well as discover the sale of bootleg alcohol
- The cap on fines for legal persons violating advertising laws will be increased to €50,000. Maximum fines for legal persons violating alcohol laws will also be increased.

# Nordic alcohol and tobacco policies in a public health perspective

After a meeting with Nordic Council's Welfare Committee's previous chairperson Swedish MP Penilla Gunther in Stockholm on March 2016, NordAN sent a letter (April 6, 2016) to Presidium of the Nordic Council and to the Committee for Welfare in the Nordic Region expressing our „wish for the adaptation and implementation of the proposal made by Committee for Welfare in the Nordic Region to increase the Nordic cooperation in the field of alcohol and tobacco policies.“



## What has happened since then?

Later the same month Nordic Council of Ministers for Health and Social Affairs met and agreed on the need to step up work on public health and issued a declaration in the light of the proposals contained in the report “The Future Nordic Co-operation on Health”.

The declaration calls for a new arena in which the Nordic countries can work together on public health and for the Nordic Center for Welfare and Social Issues (NVC) to provide the secretariat for this work.

The ministers also agreed to prioritize sharing information and experiences and joint development projects for cross-border preventative measures and health promoting activities. In particular, the work will prioritize addressing health inequalities, mental health and preventing the harmful use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco.

The new Public Health Arena had its first meeting in November. The arena has decided on three additional projects; one on cannabis, one on mental well-being of young people and one on alcohol. Earlier a tobacco project was already decided. Three new projects are waiting final approval from the Council of Ministers - it is expected in February. The alcohol project is called "Changing drinking habits among youth and among elderly - links between preventive measures and consumption".

The arena consists of senior government staff so their focus is on the governing policy level, according to NVC source.

While NordAN considers the Public Health Arena to be a positive development, we continue to see a stronger need for a pan-Nordic alcohol policy, especially in the absence of EU Alcohol Strategy and development in some Nordic countries which undermine the longstanding role of alcohol policy in these societies.

# Call to end alcohol sponsorship in F1

In June 2016 40 public health and civil society organisations (including NordAN) from around the world were calling for an end to alcohol sponsorship in F1. The call stated that „the principles not to link alcohol brands and driving are clearly established in both the EU regulation for advertising (Audio-Visual Media Services Directive) and in the drinks industry’s own codes. We are, therefore, asking for stronger legislation, both from the European Commission and from individual Member States, who should follow France’s example of banning alcohol sponsorship of sport events.“

## What has happened since then?

In only few days after the letter was sent Mr Jean Todt wrote back to Eurocare, the main organizer of the joint open letter, confirming that he is „aware that alcohol-related impairment is a significant cause of road crashes in many countries, contributing to too many unnecessary deaths and serious injuries.“ „While the regulation of alcohol advertising as well as drink-driving is primarily the responsibility of national governments, it is my firm belief that the alcohol industry also has an important social responsibility and a role to play. It must accept its responsibilities to make a fair, impartial and proportionate contribution to efforts to mitigate the negative impacts that arise from the consumption of its products.“

Mr Todt further expressed the interest to meet with Eurocare secretariat and that meeting also took place. Eurocare Secretary General Mariann Skar’s conclusion is positive: „They will focus far more attention to drink driving and enforcement across the world. The message as far as I have seen is the same as ours.“

FIA is planning an awareness campaign with global reach that should be launched in March in Geneva.