

*Stockholm, 2 March 2017*

*Brussels, 2 March 2017*

To members of Icelandic Parliament, Alþingi

***Concerning planned alcohol policy changes in Iceland***

Nordic Alcohol and Drug Policy Network (NordAN) and European Alcohol Policy Alliance Eurocare urges members of the Icelandic Parliament and political parties to drop the bill proposing abolition of a public monopoly on sales of alcohol and of the alcohol advertising ban.

Studies show that restrictions on availability is one the most effective measures to prevent alcohol problems. Monopolies, high prices and advertising ban are highly recommended by the WHO.

***Iceland as a rolemodel***

Iceland has been a rolemodel for the whole world in implementing effective alcohol policies and you have excellent records showing that these policies work extremely well. Recently the global media has circulated an article [„Iceland knows how to stop teen substance abuse but the rest of the world isn't listening“](#) explaining the interventions that have decreased the use of alcohol and drugs in Iceland to levels that can't be seen in any other European country.

The article concludes: „In Iceland, the relationship between people and the state has allowed an effective national programme to cut the rates of teenagers smoking and drinking to excess – and, in the process, brought families closer and helped kids to become healthier in all kinds of ways. Will no other country decide these benefits are worth the costs?“

We cannot overemphasize how important the monopoly system and advertising ban are for creating an environment where youth are protected from alcohol harm and from pressure to start drinking. These are the cornerstones of effective alcohol policy that reduces the likelihood of underage drinking and overall harm in society.

Considering the fact that you have efficiently enforced these policies for several decades, the negative effect of increasing alcohol availability and allowing alcohol advertising will be with cumulative effect for your society. Allowing different economic operators with clear vested interests to play an important part in alcohol regulations will introduce you problems that so many countries are facing today.

***Comparison to other countries***

With these planned changes Iceland is moving opposite to other countries as almost all European States are adopting changes that limit availability and advertising, among other measures.

Estonia is about to adopt the strongest alcohol policy bill in more than two decades. Beer taxes will be raised by 160% by 2020, alcohol availability will be restricted by introducing separate departments into major food stores with non-transparent walls. Outdoor alcohol advertising will be banned and alcohol ads will be limited to showing only the product that may be presented on single color background, and without sound and visual design elements.

Major changes are planned also in Lithuania, where among other measures, government is thinking

about introduction of monopoly by creating a special shop system, very similar to the state monopoly implemented in several Nordic countries. For starters Lithuanian Parliament adopted (in December 2016) legal changes which will substantially increase alcohol tax from March 2017.

The Scottish Government has over 40 measures designed to reduce alcohol-related harm. Introducing Minimum Unit Price, to protect the health of their citizens, has been under a fierce attack from the alcohol industry but the policy has been ruled lawful twice in the Scottish courts.

Irish Government has recently approved its Public Health (Alcohol) Bill that consists of 29 sections and includes five main provisions. These are: minimum unit pricing; health labelling of alcohol products; the regulation of advertising and sponsorship of alcohol products; structural separation of alcohol products in mixed trading outlets; and the regulation of the sale and supply of alcohol in certain circumstances.

### ***Results of weakening alcohol policies***

The main principle of public monopoly on sales of alcohol, namely to minimize alcohol-related problems by selling alcohol in a responsible way, without profit motive cannot be replaced by bringing the profit motive back into the picture.

The report by Swedish Systembolaget „[If Retail Alcohol Sales in Sweden were Privatized, what would be the Potential Consequences?](#)“ concludes that: „Privately licensed specialty shops annually would result in an estimated 700 additional deaths, 6,700 additional assaults, and 7.3 million additional sick days. With grocery stores, the estimated additional annual toll would be 1,580 deaths, 14,200 assaults, and 16.1 million days of sick leave.“

Acknowledging that there is an inherent conflict of interest between the goal of public health and the profit interests of the alcohol and related industries total alcohol advertising ban is one of three “best buys” advocated by WHO as a cost-effective measure for reducing alcohol related harm. [Partial alcohol](#) advertising restrictions implemented in most European countries produce disproportionate financial and administrative cost for the governments and give alcohol industry and advertisers power to interpret regulations in their favor.

The current alcohol policy in Iceland has generated obvious benefits as can be seen by the very positive situation regarding alcohol and drugs amongst children and youth in Iceland and the fact that the total consumption of alcohol in Iceland is lowest in Europe.

We urge you to keep your decisions on the safe side of public health and listen to your own alcohol and public health experts who have warned against these changes.

Yours sincerely,

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president, NordAN

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*NORDAN was established in September 2000 as a network of non governmental, voluntary organizations who all worked to reduce the consumption of alcohol and other drugs and who supported a restrictive alcohol and drug policy and who did not receive contributions from the commercial alcohol industry. Acting on these principles NordAN today have grown to have 90 non-governmental, voluntary member organisations in all the eight Nordic and Baltic countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden), all active in the alcohol and drug field.*

*EUROCARE is an alliance of non-governmental and public health organisations with around 60 member organisations across 25 European countries advocating the prevention and reduction of alcohol related harm in Europe. Member organisations are involved in advocacy and research, as well as in the provision of information and training on alcohol issues and the service for people whose lives are affected by alcohol problems.*

Letter is also supported by:

***Belgium***

Vereniging voor Alcohol-en Andere Drugproblemen vzw (VAD)

***Bulgaria***

Foundation Horizonti 21

***Croatia***

Mali Plac

***Czech Republic***

Centrum Alma

***Denmark***

Alcohol and Society

Central Denmark Region, Alcohol and Traffic Secretariat

NGO Fontana

***Estonia***

Estonian Temperance Union

***Finland***

Finnish Association for Substance Abuse Prevention

***France***

Association National de Prevention en Alcoologie et Addictologie (ANPAA)

***Germany***

Deutsche Hauptstelle für Suchtfragen (DHS),

Deutsche Guttempler IOGT e.V

***Hungary***

Oasis

Centre for Healthy Hungary

***Iceland***

Foreningen for Edruskapundervisning

IOGT Island

FRÆ Oplysningscenter for rusmiddel-prevention

***Ireland***

Alcohol Action Ireland

North West Alcohol Forum

Dothain

***Italy***

A.I.C.A.T (Associazione Italiana Club Alcolisti in Trattamento)

Eurocare, Italy

Associazione Aliseo ONLUS

Gruppa Logos – Onlus

***Lithuania***

Agapao

Lithuanian National Tobacco and Alcohol Control Coalition

***Netherlands***

STAP: Dutch Institute for Alcohol Policy

***Norway***

Actis – Policy Network on Alcohol and Drugs

Frelsesarmeens Rusomsorg

IOGT Norway

***Poland***

The State Agency for Prevention of Alcohol related problems (PARPA)

The Polish IOGT Foundation

Krajowa Rada

MONAR

***Portugal***

Centro de Alcoologia Nova Rumo

Sociedade Anti-Alcoolica Portuguesa (SAAP)

Centro de Alcoologia Ricardo Pampuri

***Russia***

Foundation Union Society

***Slovenia***

UTRIP

***Spain***

Foundacion Salud yComunidad

Asociacion de Ex-Alcoholicos Espanoles

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Associacio RAUXA

Federacio Catalana D'Alcoholics Rehabilitats (FARC)

***Switzerland***

Addiction – Info Switzerland

***Sweden***

IOGT-NTO

Swedish Council on Alcohol and Drugs

MHF

***Turkey***

Turkish Green Crescent Society

***United Kingdom***

Institute of Alcohol Studies

Alcohol Concern

Alcohol Focus Scotland

Alcohol Health Network

Balance, North East Alcohol Office

Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP)

***International***

ACTIVE - Sobriety, Friendship and Peace

Alcohol Policy Youth Network

Blue Cross International

EUFASD, European

IOGT International

EMNA (European Mutual Help Network for alcohol related problems)

EASL (European Association for the Study of the Liver)