

Tallinn, Estonia
May 11, 2017

Open letter to the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania

Estonian Alcohol and Tobacco Control Coalition urges Lithuanian Parliament to adopt the alcohol policy package that has been proposed by the government as it is clearly based on WHO recommendations and all available scientific evidence.

Baltic countries have been struggling with alcohol related problems and as you are well aware, Lithuania ranks currently third in per capita consumption of alcohol in the world. This is a time for action and we are glad to state that Estonia is taking similar steps to tackle alcohol related harms.

Estonian Parliament has completed the first reading of the alcohol policy bill that plans to decrease alcohol availability and advertising. Baltic countries have several positive cooperation experiences and alcohol policy should be one of those. It is important, in our minds, that Latvia should join the effort and not use the opportunity keeping alcohol prices low so that it would appear as an appealing cheap market for both Estonian and Lithuanian consumers.

It is understandable that public health oriented alcohol policy opposes several industry interests which creates fierce opposition from their representatives. We want to remind you that your first responsibility is to stand for the health and well-being of your citizens. None of the proposed measures creates obstacles for adult consumers who choose to consume alcohol. These measures are proven to be effective in addressing youth drinking, binge drinking and drink driving for instance.

Looking back to the history of both of our countries, it could be easy to conclude that by increasing these control mechanisms, we are moving backwards to the society where citizens have less freedoms. To get the correct perspective we should instead turn our attention towards Nordic countries, which top almost every positive ranking list in the world. And one of the common practices that they have is a strong and public health oriented alcohol policy. While they have very strong alcohol retail monopoly systems, that keeps the physical availability of alcohol very low, their citizens value these systems. 80% of norwegians for instance favors the Vinmonopolet system, opposed to the situation where alcohol could be available in every grocery store. Policy that prioritizes public health is the correct way forward. It saves resources, it makes the country more competitive and builds a better foundation for future generations. Alcohol is no ordinary commodity and it is only correct to regulate it accordingly.

As a network of Estonian NGO-s we hope that Estonia and Lithuania are taking these correct steps in 2017 and change the course our countries have been moving on the past 20 years.

Yours sincerely,
Dr Andrus Lipand, board member
Lauri Beekmann, board member

Member organisations of the coalition: Estonian Medical Association, Estonian Temperance Union, Estonian Lung Association, Estonian Union for Child Welfare, Union of General Practitioners, Estonian Psychiatric Association, Health Promotion Union of Estonia, Estonian Cancer Society, NGO Salutäre, NGO Tobacco Free Estonia.