

Open letter of the European Centre for Monitoring Alcohol Marketing (EUCAM) to the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania

Members of the Board of EUCAM: Alkohol & Samfund, Denmark; AV- OG-TIL Norway, IOGT-NTO Sweden, Dutch Institute for Alcohol Policy, The Netherlands and EUROCARE Italy.

Copenhagen, Stockholm, Oslo, Padua, Utrecht,

14th May 2017

Dear members of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania,

The European Centre for Monitoring Alcohol Marketing (EUCAM) strongly supports the proposed alcohol policy measures that will soon be decided by the Lithuanian Parliament. It is an unambiguously scientifically proven fact that not only the price of alcohol and the availability of alcohol (such as the amount of selling places, age limits and its enforcement) but also alcohol advertising is directly related to the extent of alcohol problems and the age young people start to drink. Alcohol advertising also increases the amount and frequency of drinking by those young people who already drink.

Young people are confronted with large amounts of alcohol advertising through different media: television, street advertising, advertising in supermarkets, price campaigns, product placements and social media. This has been proven by recent scientific studies (1,3,4,7). It has also been shown that alcohol advertising on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube is increasing (4).

The big question is: how can this overwhelming amount of advertising best be regulated and/or restricted. In other words, how can we protect young people from the harmful impacts of alcohol advertising?

In the AMMIE and FASE reports on alcohol advertising, it has not only been shown that young people are exposed to large amounts of alcohol advertising (oftentimes more than adults), but that statutory regulation in Europe and the dominant presence of non-legal self-regulation actively promoted by the drinks industry are completely insufficient (3,9). Data analysis in the FASE report shows that Norway's and France's statutory regulations are the most effective at protecting young people from the harmful impact of alcohol advertising. Norway has a total ban on alcohol advertising as well as on alcohol sponsorship and France's Loi Évin restricts alcohol advertising to only product characteristics.

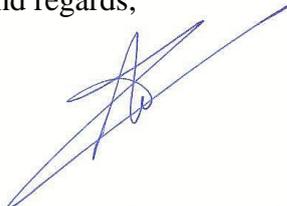
Globally, the alcohol industry propagates self-regulation as the optimal solution. However, self-regulation is mainly about advertising content and hardly about who and how many times they see the advertisements. All the while, it is the volume of alcohol advertising that is the

most important factor for the impact of advertising on young people (3). In addition, many complaints addressed to national committees of self-regulation about suspicious alcohol marketing practices are often rejected because many self-regulation articles prove to be multi-interpretatable. Our experience is that self-regulation is an alternative marketing strategy for the alcohol industry, with the aim of maintaining as much freedom as possible for them to advertise alcoholic beverages and prevent or stall more effective legal regulation.

The consumption of alcohol, which is an addictive and carcinogenic substance, has many health consequences that are unknown to many consumers, such as breast cancer in women. Even drinking one glass of alcohol a day is not 100% safe (2,10). The worldwide concept of "responsible drinking" promoted by the alcohol industry is thereby a false statement in the literal sense. Consequently, EUCAM is in favor of an overall ban on alcohol advertising, just like is currently the case for tobacco products.

It is good to note that more countries are realizing the importance of statutory restrictions on alcohol advertising. Finland prohibited alcohol advertising through social media in 2016, in Scotland there is growing support for stricter advertising regulations and outside of Europe, in South Africa, more people are starting to realize that alcohol advertising has to be banned given its impact on new generations. EUCAM sincerely hopes to be celebrating Lithuania as the next example of good evidence-based policy-making in this field and that Lithuania can become an inspiration to other countries around the world.

Kind regards,



Ir. W.E. van Dalen, president of EUCAM

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