



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
ORGANISATION MONDIALE DE LA SANTÉ
WELTGESUNDHEITSORGANISATION
ВСЕМИРНАЯ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЯ ЗДРАВООХРАНЕНИЯ

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EUROPE
BUREAU RÉGIONAL DE L'EUROPE
REGIONALBÜRO FÜR EUROPA
ЕВРОПЕЙСКОЕ РЕГИОНАЛЬНОЕ БЮРО

Head office:
UN City, Marmorvej 51,
DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark
Tel.: +45 45 33 70 00; Fax: +45 45 33 70 01
Email: eurocontact@who.int
Website: <https://www.who.int/europe>

Date: 3 November 2023

Members of Parliament
The European Parliament
60, rue Wiertz / Wiertzstraat 60
1047 Brussels, Belgium

envi-secretariat@europarl.europa.eu

Dear Members of Parliament,

The European Union (EU) Europe's Beating Cancer Plan is both a timely and imperative initiative designed to enhance cancer prevention and care across Europe, addressing many modifiable risk factors such as alcohol and tobacco. The European Parliament's Resolution on strengthening Europe in the fight against cancer – towards a comprehensive and coordinated strategy (2020/2267(INI)) adopted on 16 February 2022 is part of EU joint work towards better prevention, early detection, diagnosis and treatment and better quality of life for people with cancer and survivors. However, the EU continues to have the highest alcohol consumption levels worldwide and the associated harms and conditions related to alcohol use impose a significant financial burden on health-care systems already facing considerable strain.

Cancer is the primary cause of death among alcohol-attributable deaths and the second leading cause of mortality in EU. Equally alarming is the fact that Europe has almost one sixth of all cancer cases worldwide, while it has less than 6% of the world's population. Unless decisive actions are taken, cancer incidence is set to increase by 18% by 2035, making it the leading cause of death in the EU. In this regard, despite the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan's €4 billion of funding, political effort must be made in order to prevent the impact cancer has on social, economic and individual health. The public lacks awareness of the connection between alcohol and cancer and easily understandable warning messages on labels and advertisements of alcoholic beverages is of extreme importance.

Without unlimited resources, prevention is key. I have been closely monitoring the implementation of the EU Beating Cancer Plan with increasing concern, noticing how the initial strong commitments in the document have slowly eroded in various documents, including the important resolution mentioned. The terminology of "moderate and responsible drinking information" or "harmful consumption of alcohol" is scientifically inaccurate and worrisome in the context of cancer prevention. The removal of the European Commission's commitment to introduce cancer-specific health warning labels in this resolution diverts the European effort from its ambitious trajectory of reducing the prevalence and incidence of cancer in the EU. While I recognize that this document is of an advisory nature, I am troubled by the trend witnessed in the finalization of the crucial Report on noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), overseen by the Sub-Committee on Public Health of the European Parliament.

WHO and the International Agency for Research on Cancer have been working jointly to ensure that evidence is used to improve the health and well-being of European citizens, and as such have produced a joint statement and fact sheet that may be considered to inform the ongoing debate and decisions in the

finalization of the Report on NCDs as well as any other documents relevant for the implementation of the EU Beating Cancer Plan.

Yours very truly,



Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge
Regional Director

Encls:

Joint Statement by WHO/Europe and IARC to the European Parliament: Raising Awareness on the Link Between Alcohol and Cancer

Fact sheet "Alcohol and Cancer in the European Union. A Call for Action"

Copy for information to:

Ms Oxana Domenti, WHO Representative to the European Union, WHO Office at the European Union, Eurostation 5E, Place Victor Horta, 40/10, Brussels 1060, Belgium, E-mail: weu@who.int, domentio@who.int