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PRESS RELEASE

Better alcohol control policy means less injuries, more safety and money saved

Budapest, Hungary, June 16, 2011- The European Union is the heaviest drinking region in the world. Therefore, in Europe we suffer from the highest alcohol related problems. It is estimated that 58 million adults in the EU drink at risky levels, and 23 million are alcohol addicted. Alcohol constitutes the primary risk factor for accidents, injuries and violence. Approximately half of the deaths attributable to alcohol are from injuries.

This issue is being addressed at the 3rd European injury prevention conference, organised by EuroSafe in cooperation with the Hungarian Presidency of the European Council. Today stakeholders in the prevention of accidents and injuries from Europe and other continents meet in Budapest to exchange, debate and discuss the latest results in injury research, policies and practices.

As the “Recommendations of the European Council on the prevention of injury and the promotion of safety” from 2007 highlight; every year, about 235 000 citizens of the Community die as a result of an accident or violence. In children, adolescents and young adults accidents and injuries are the leading cause of death, with alcohol playing a major role.

Over one fifth of the European population aged 15 years and older report heavy episodic drinking; 16% of cases of child abuse involve alcohol; 350 000 youngsters age 15 to 16 report fights involving alcohol. Alcohol abuse can be attributable to 4 out of 10 homicides in the EU and 1 in every 6 suicides involves alcohol. The list can be extended and thus injuries represent a huge financial burden on health and welfare systems, causing about 20% of sick leave and constituting a major factor for reduced productivity.

Andrea Lavesson, President of Active – sobriety, friendship and peace points out that “safety is a real welfare issue and injury prevention thus is a question with decisive influence on young European’s quality of life. That’s why we need and demand leadership to take the 2007 European Council Recommendations by their wording: better alcohol control policies reduce alcohol harm and in doing so improve injury prevention and make Europe safer and financially sustainable.”

Mariann Skar, European Alcohol Policy Alliance Secretary General, emphasized: *‘in the times of economic hardship we cannot afford to waste money in public health budgets on admissions that could be easily avoided. This can be achieved by better control and enforcement of drink driving regulations (BAC levels) and age restrictions as well as neither promoting nor selling alcohol at mass sports and music events which target audience is primarily young people.’*

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Facts and figures on alcohol:

- Europe has the highest drinking levels in the world, the highest alcohol per capita consumption and the highest alcohol- related harm problems.
- Chronic diseases, to which alcohol is the 3rd main contributory factor¹, are in the top of global risks next to such threats like fiscal crises².
- Across the EU some €125bn a year (equivalent to 1.3% GDP)³. This is figure for 2004 likely to be higher by now
- Alcohol is a major contributory factor in accidents; 1 in 3 of all road traffic deaths are caused by alcohol
- Alcohol causes nearly 195,000 deaths in the EU each year
- 1 in 4 of male deaths between 15-29 years are due to alcohol

¹ World Health Organization (2009). *Global health risks*. Geneva

² *World Economic Forum (2010) Global risks 2010. Geneva, Retrieved from:*
<http://www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/globalrisk/Reports/index.htm>

³ Actual spending on alcohol related problems accounts for €66bn:

- Healthcare and treatment: The cost of treating alcohol-attributable ill health is estimated to be €17bn, together with €5bn spent on treatment and prevention of harmful alcohol use and alcohol dependence.
- Crime: Alcohol-attributable crime is estimated to cost European police, courts and prisons €15bn per year, as well €12bn in crime prevention expenditure & insurance administration and €6bn of criminal damage.
- Traffic accident damage (€10bn)

Potential production not realised due to absenteeism, unemployment and premature mortality accounts for a further €59bn