



Press release
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Future EU Presidency Cyprus fails to protect youth

Today Cypriote newspapers herald that forthcoming reports are highlighting the increasing problems of alcohol harm in Cyprus. Both traffic deaths due to alcohol use as well as rehabilitation clinic admissions have gone up dramatically over the recent years.

However, the Cyprus government remains untouched by these developments and does not plan to put in place alcohol policy measures.

Mr. Stavros Malas, Minister of Health in Cyprus, said: "We know that alcohol abuse is on the increase, but what can we do about it? Abuse of alcohol in nightclubs is not in the health ministry's portfolio." He continues: "If you increase the tax on alcohol, you will achieve no reduction [in alcohol use]..."

"We don't really understand what is happening in the Cypriote government and Ministry of Health, but they do not seem to be on top of things, when it comes to curbing alcohol harm and protecting society," says Andrea Lavesson, President of Active – sobriety, friendship and peace.

A look on the webpage of the Health Ministry shows it is working on tackling non-communicable diseases (NCDs). However, it only addresses three risk factors and leaves alcohol out. It fails to employ key documents, like World Bank 2011 report: to prevent NCDs, risk factors must be addressed, alcohol being a crucial one: "restrict access", "ban advertising" and "increase taxes".

"If Europe is ever going to recover from the crisis governments need to get their act together and protect youth from alcohol harm," says Andrea Lavesson. "Less alcohol use brings more freedom, creativity and social capital among youth. And the policies for reducing alcohol use are clear and evidence based."

The WHO alcohol strategy – adopted in consensus by 193 Member States (including Cyprus) – outlines 10 "policy options", like: "availability of alcohol" and "pricing policies". Also the EU alcohol strategy from 2006 prioritizes to protect young people children. The EU alcohol strategy comes to its end in 2012.

"With Cyprus taking charge of the EU Presidency in the second half of 2012, we cannot but worry if the EU under their leadership will be able to live up to the task," says Andrea Lavesson. "We badly need a new and better EU alcohol strategy after 2012. Examples are many that show there is huge need. Member States should do better, to fill the words of adopted documents with action. Alcohol policy is an effective tool against the crisis and for a better future for young Europeans."