



PRESS RELEASE

Press contact: Maik Duennbier,
alcoholpolicy@activeeurope.org

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Spending money is not enough to stop the AIDS epidemic

Active urges for more coherent strategies to stop the spread of HIV/ AIDS

Active – sobriety, friendship and peace commemorates the World AIDS Day by sending our compassion to millions of victims and by urging decision makers to do more in fighting HIV/ AIDS.

The AIDS epidemic around the world continues to destroy lives, families and entire societies. 2 Million People die annually from AIDS and Eastern Europe is threatened by another AIDS epidemic, as a recent study from UNICEF shows. Nowhere in the world is the number of new infections increasing as rapidly as in Eastern Europe. In particular young people are threatened. 15 to 24-year olds accounted for an estimated 40% of all new HIV infections worldwide in 2008. In Eastern Europe 80% of all newly infected people are younger than 30.

“Many of our members have personally seen the problems and so we’re alarmed by the immensity of the threat and because we understand that the decision-makers and public institutions still lack strategies to address the problem coherently and effectively” says Andrea Lavesson, the President of the European umbrella youth organisation Active – sobriety, friendship and peace.

The European Commission announced two things on the eve of World AIDS Day: a 10% increase in contributions, spending €1.3 billion to fight AIDS as well as a stronger effort to improve “early detection” allowing better and earlier treatment of the disease.

“Our members welcome the effort to step up action. But spending money is not enough. Improving testing is not enough. What we need is a coherent approach to fighting the AIDS epidemic. We want an effort to preventing HIV infections. That means that the EU, national governments as well as development NGOs need to take into consideration the role of alcohol,” according to Andrea Lavesson, President of Active.

The link between alcohol and the spread of HIV/ AIDS has been long known. But alcohol’s role in the AIDS epidemic continues to be neglected. Both in 2008 in Cape Town and in 2009 at the WHO expert conference in Stockholm alcohol’s role in the AIDS epidemic were on the agenda and the picture of the reviews became clear: Alcohol use increases risk taking in both injection drug use and sexual intercourse; it also increases the number of different sexual partners; the disease develops much faster in infected persons who drink. Alcohol weakens the immune system. Mouth cells which had been exposed to 4% of ethanol (usual amount of alcohol in beer) for 10 minutes, showed between a 3 to 6 times greater susceptibility to infection from the HI-Virus. Alcohol plays a major role in the spread of HIV/ AIDS. These findings are strongly supported by the fact that 40% of the cases of newly HIV-infected women are related to alcohol.

“As we see in Eastern Europe, young people are especially threatened by the spread of HIV/ AIDS also because they are using alcohol in heavy amounts across the region. Efforts to improve early detection are not enough. To protect youth we need HIV prevention programs to target alcohol consumption. Both in health and development aid strategies we need to address the role alcohol plays in the AIDS epidemic”, says Andrea Lavesson from Active and concludes that “our success depends on the willingness to back up spending money with effective strategies that include all aspects of the AIDS epidemic.”

“Active- sobriety, friendship and peace” is a non - governmental organisation gathering European youth temperance organisations working for a democratic diverse and peaceful world free from alcohol and other drugs where an individual can live up to her full potential. Active has more than 35 000 members in 26 European countries.