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Support letter for alcohol policy measures in Estonia

On behalf of the member organisations of the Lithuanian Tobacco and Alcohol Control Coalition (NTAKK) we are honoured to express strong support to the package of alcohol control policy measures proposed by the Estonian Government.

The WHO European Region is the region with the highest alcohol intake and alcohol related harm in the world. Therefore evidence based comprehensive alcohol policy measures in the region need to be implemented without delay. Reducing alcohol availability, increasing price and implementing marketing bans have strong evidence for effectiveness in reducing harmful use of alcohol. These measures are recommended by the World Health Organization and alcohol policy experts all over the world. It is important to mention that these measures are generally favorably viewed in the European society.

Newly elected Lithuanian Government also plans to significantly decrease alcohol availability, increase prices for all alcohol beverages, introduce minimum legal age to buy alcohol, move alcohol sale into specialized shops and introduce complete ban on alcohol advertising. Thus Estonian Government plans should not be considered as something unique, but rather a timely decision and a new trend among Baltic countries.

In Lithuania full ban on alcohol sales in petrol station has come into effect on January 1st 2016. The decision however was taken by the Parliament long time before that on December 23rd 2011. And less than 8 weeks before legislation came into effect, there was an unsuccessful attempt to revoke it. The attempt was repelled through intense NGO involvement in debate, presence in the Parliamentary committees, mobilizing local and international networks, civil society, politicians and presence during actual voting. This restriction on alcohol availability has now been in force since January 2016 and has helped to eliminate nearly 600 points of alcohol sale.

Industry interest groups in Lithuania has reacted by [applying very strong pressure towards elected politicians and has demonstrated expertise in abusing parliamentary processes](#): they used parliament members for gaining access for lobbyists to the parliament building, also for staging live protest next to the voting chamber, the date and time of the legislation discussions were changing unexpectedly, making it more difficult for public organizations to voice their concern. Another tactics was creating voting confusion by rapid introduction of several very similar amendments for discussions and voting. One year later we can conclude, that threats of moving business away from Lithuania by industry and chains of petrol stations, has failed to materialize.

Lithuanian Government previously also experienced direct and indirect pressure from Carlsberg group, including the visit of a Senior Vice President of the Carlsberg Group to the Minister of Economy of The Republic of Lithuania.

According to the National Institute for Health Developments of Estonia, petrol stations together with catering facilities most often sell alcohol to minors without asking ID. In Lithuania 2015 young volunteers carried out [an experiment demonstrating](#) that 14 out of 17 petrol stations sold alcohol to minors. This was widely reported in media, urging to protect most vulnerable members of society. Reducing youth drinking and alcohol-related road accidents are both among the priority themes of the EU Alcohol Strategy and in line with UN’s sustainable development goals..

We wish you strength and determination to withstand lobbyist pressure from the alcohol and related industries. Lithuanian experience has shown that the best result is achieved when governmental agencies cooperate with NGO sector in defending public health. It is very important that our countries, where alcohol related harm is one of the highest among European Member States take the lead in taking alcohol control seriously. NTAKK congratulates the Estonian Government for their efforts and urges to adopt these proposed plans.

NTAKK is a largest Lithuanian non-governmental umbrella organisation uniting 37 member organisations active in the field of evidence based control for all psychoactive substances.

Yours sincerely,

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