



Brussels, 6 February 2012

Open Letter

To the attention of Mr Edwin Poots, Health Minister for Northern Ireland,
Dr James Reilly, Health Minister for the Republic of Ireland,

Dear Sirs,

I am writing to you in response to the announcement made at the first North/South Conference on alcohol misuse that took place on 26 January 2012. During this Conference, you notably presented the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs and announced a commitment to collaboratively tackle the burden of alcohol abuse. The European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) would like to express its support for this move and congratulate both of you on your willingness to take a bold step forward in the fight against a considerable public health threat in your countries.

As you will know, alcohol is the third leading cause of disease burden in Europe, accounting for over 7% of all ill-health and premature death¹. The harm resulting from alcohol abuse is not restricted to the individual. It also has serious consequences for society in general. Thus, it is estimated that alcohol-related problems cost an average £900 million to Northern Ireland² every year and €3.7 billion to Ireland³.

At a population level, alcohol consumption is driven by price, availability and marketing. Consumers are today, more than ever, confronted with cheap, readily available alcohol and outlets selling beer more cheaply than bottled water. This, combined with sophisticated marketing techniques, has led to a significant increase in consumption.

Given the associated cost to public well-being, health experts and civil society actors across Europe are allied in their conviction that the current state of play is unacceptable. Thus, your recent proposal to tackle the availability of cheap alcohol is particularly welcome and must be supported.

The European Public Health Alliance has consistently advocated actions, in the area of pricing, availability, access and marketing, to reduce alcohol-related harm. The World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe has produced comprehensive reports documenting the evidence for these actions. Cost-effective interventions to reduce alcohol related harm have been outlined, pricing interventions being the most effective way to reduce levels of consumption and minimum price per unit being the most effective measure of all.

¹ Global burden of disease and injury and economic cost attributable to alcohol use and alcohol use disorders, Lancet, 2009

² *Alcohol. What does it really cost?* Royal College of Psychiatrists

³ Alcohol Action Ireland, 2007

Alcohol use represents a number of challenges that go beyond borders and make collaborative approaches necessary. In that sense, the European public health community welcomes your willingness to jointly tackle one of the most preventable disease burdens and hopes this move will have a positive impact on alcohol policy developments across the European region.

EPHA wishes you every success in the implementation of the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs.

Yours sincerely,



Monika Kosińska, Secretary General
European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)

EPHA is the European Platform bringing together public health organisations representing health professionals, patients groups, health promotion and disease specific NGOs, academic groupings and other health associations. This letter arises from the European Public Health Alliance which has received funding from the European Union, in the framework of the Health Programme. Sole responsibility for this letter lies with EPHA and the Executive Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.