

Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen. My name is Tiziana Codenotti and I am Vice President of Eurocare (the European Alcohol Policy Alliance), an alliance of 50 voluntary organizations and NGOs across Europe working on the prevention of alcohol related harm.

Our member organisations are involved in a variety of activities including research and advocacy, provision of counselling services and residential and outpatient support for problem drinkers, prevention programmes in workplaces, school-based programmes and information to the public.

First of all I want to warmly thank you all for contributing to this important event which we hope will help focus on the reduction of alcohol related harm and increase the protection of the unborn child. A sincere thank you to MEPs Mairead McGuinness and Catherine Stihler for generously accepting to host this event and for their ongoing genuine support and dedication to the protection of public health, in particular the most vulnerable groups.

Pieter de Conninck represents the European Commission and Directorate for Public Health, another important institution moving public health issues forward on the political agenda. We are grateful for his support and willingness to be here with us tonight and update us on the Commission activities.

We also extend our warm thanks to our speakers Diane Black and Benoit Titran; we are very grateful to you for sharing your knowledge with us and greatly admire your determination, drive and passion.

As it has been clearly highlighted by our speakers, there is an evident public health interest in informing consumers. Labels are one important and visible way of informing the consumers on the dangers and health risks associated to the consumption of alcohol, particularly with regard to the protection of the unborn child.

Although we recognise that labelling as a stand alone measure will not suffice to significantly reduce the incidence of alcohol related harm, **Eurocare believes that labelling, like any other alcohol policy measure, should be part of a comprehensive strategy in order to be effective. In this case the strategy should be aimed at providing information and educating consumers about alcohol.**

Alcohol labels should inform consumers about the potential damages to health (liver cirrhosis, cancers, etc) as well as the risk of dependence. But they should also warn consumers about the dangers associated with the consumption of alcohol in certain circumstances; for example **when planning to have a child and during pregnancy, when driving a vehicle, at work, especially when operating machinery, and when taking certain medications.** These circumstances have been long indicated by World Health

Organizations official documents as alcohol-free situations, and people should be informed.

Health warnings should be precise, consistent and unambiguous, as well as rotating and with sufficient vividness and strength to attract consumers attention.

As you will probably be aware, the Parliament is currently debating the proposal from the Commission on the provision of food information to consumers. We regret that beer, wine and spirits have been exempted from the obligation to list their ingredients and provide nutritional information, as is the case with drinks like juice and soft drinks. Consumers have the right to know the ingredients in what they are drinking. A healthy lifestyle is high on the agenda, alcoholic beverages have a high amount of calories and consumers have the right to know how many they get with, for instance, a couple of beers.

We also regret that this proposal does not contain an obligation to carry health warning messages. We believe this is a missed opportunity for a more comprehensive approach to the reduction of alcohol related harm in Europe.

Placing health warning labels on alcoholic beverages is a cost effective way to inform consumers and allows producers to bear some of the financial burden of preventing alcohol related harm. There is a wide public support for health warning labels. It has been already outlined that the Eurobarometer 2007 reports that three quarters of the European citizens (77%) agree with having such warning messages on alcoholic beverages.

Let us take this opportunity to stress the need for European data on FASD. There is a number of local studies describing the phenomenon, but European-wide research should be developed.

We applaud the French example of the pregnancy pictogram as a first step in the right direction. However, we believe there is still room for improvement; for example by increasing the size of the pictogram. Back in 1991 France was again a good example regarding the Loi Evin on alcohol advertising, which is after 17 years still a European "lighthouse".

There are some valuable lessons to be learnt from the tobacco field, with regards to enhancing the effectiveness and ensuring a greater impact of warning labels.

Eurocare calls the European institutions to place the protection of European citizens' health ahead of economic interests of the alcohol industry and to require alcohol producers to provide information on the ingredients, nutritional values and the risks associated with alcohol consumption.

Let me finish by being once again grateful to you all for being here tonight, to our host MEPs, to the speakers, to all participants and finally to our Eurocare staff in Brussels for their work in organising this reception.