



Drinks industry 'allowed to target young people with ads'

by **Ann Cahill**
Europe
Correspondent

THE drinks industry is playing far too big a role in shaping alcohol policy, allowing it to produce advertising that targets very young people, an international conference has been told.

Jillian van Turnhout, an Irish member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), accused the industry of orchestrating a campaign to destroy the prestigious body's report — a report that will help shape EU policy.

"This was a David and Goliath battle, and we overcame the might of the alcohol industry," she told the expert conference in Stockholm where she was guest speaker.

Lobbyists from the industry went to employer bodies and others who could influence the members of the EESC to have the report changed. When that failed, they tried to discredit children's champion, Ms Van Turnhout.

She said: "They said I had no experience and was some kind of deranged zealot."

She was particularly critical of the spirits industry and said it was specifically targeting children with its range of sickly sweet drinks.

"The EESC is not a very high-profile organisation but we were subject to a lot of lobbying. I can only imagine what pressure the member states and the council representing them come under," she said.

Her report calls for alcohol advertising to be restricted on TV and elsewhere.

Chief executive of the **Children's Rights Alliance**, she said: "It is clear to me through my work that alcohol marketing attracts underage drinkers.

"There are consistent findings that exposure to television and sponsorship that contains alcohol encourages increased drinking and encourages young people to drink."

Five to nine million children in the EU are adversely affected by alcohol and more alcohol is consumed in the EU than anywhere else on the globe.

"Most consumers drink responsibly and for most of the time but a staggering 55 million Europeans — 15% of the population — drink harmful levels on a regular basis," she said.

Harmful alcohol use is the third biggest cause of early death and illness in the EU, and this has dire consequences for our society and our economy, she added.

The first step should be to control by law the kind of advertising and marketing that is having an effect on young people, she said.

"Self-regulation by the industry is not working. It is time we took a stand," she said.

The EESC is made up of government appointees from civil society, employers' bodies and trade unions and meets regularly in Brussels to advise EU institutions. Sweden made the issue of alcohol and health a main plank of its six-month EU presidency.



Five to nine million children are adversely affected by alcohol in the EU, which tops global alcohol consumption.