

**Open Letter to
European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy Mr. Tonio Borg**

06/02/2013

Dear Commissioner Borg,

I hope that this letter finds you well, and that the year 2013 has started out well for you and your team in the Directorate General for Health and Consumers. I also, on behalf of the members of IOGT International, want to express the warmest welcoming wishes to you in your (new) position as member of the European Commission.

I was very interested to read in very recent news articles around Europe about your trip to Greece. Media outlets report your statements pointing to the economic burden that public health costs caused by tobacco smoking are creating.

I want to congratulate you for highlighting the costs of ill-health and unhealthy lifestyles in this crisis-ridden European Union, and support you in this message. All too often health promotion and prevention measures are put aside these days to focus on what is believed to be most important.

You are for instance being quoted saying that tobacco use has negative impact on the productivity in Greece.

I also note and applaud you for spelling out the effects that a reduction of tobacco use in Greece and the European Union at large would have: economic advantages and benefits because public spending on ill-health due to tobacco use would decrease. And, you make this point emphatically according to media outlets; the lost revenue from tobacco taxes was not a counter-argument because people would spend their money on other consumer goods instead.

Tobacco is the leading cause of cancer, and along with European Commission and your Directorate-General, so did also IOGT International and our members commemorate and celebrate World Cancer Day, two days ago. Alcohol use is the second biggest cause for cancer and, like tobacco use, a major risk factor for Non-communicable diseases. But unlike cancer, alcohol use is also causing tremendous social harm. In the European Union there live at least 9 million children of alcoholics, to name just one example.

And that is why, Mr. Borg, I would like to encourage you to extend your view to the havoc alcohol is wreaking in the European economy: early onset of alcohol use and intoxication in young people predicts school drop-out and thus unemployment; the report "Alcohol in Europe" that was commissioned by the EU in 2006 clearly shows the negative impact of alcohol use on the productivity and the Science Group of the European Alcohol and Health Forum has pointed to the negative effects alcohol has at the workplace; the tangible costs of alcohol to the European society are €156 Billion every year.

The alcohol industry argues that it adds to the European economy, but evidence shows that the costs of alcohol harm – in its social, public health, economic and democratic dimensions – are far greater and burden the young generation disproportionately. It is obvious that the same reasoning you articulate concerning tobacco, applies to alcohol. And as research shows that alcohol is the socially most harmful drug, I want to use this opportunity to encourage you to speak out against alcohol harm as clearly as you speak out against the harm caused by tobacco use.

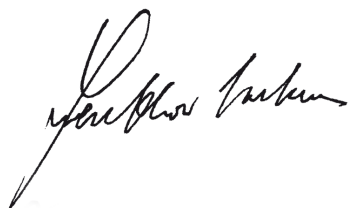
The Member States of the European Union have recognized this and ask for a new EU Alcohol Strategy. In the European Union of 2013, hit hard by an economic crisis that is turning into a social crisis, we need a EU Alcohol Strategy that addresses the tremendous negative impact on the economy and social fabric. We need your leadership for a new and better EU Alcohol Strategy that promotes evidence-based, high-

impact and cost-effective measures to reduce and prevent alcohol harm. It is evident that what you say about measures reducing tobacco use, also applies to measures reducing the overall consumption of alcohol: they are tools to promote economic recovery and competitiveness, sustainability of the welfare state and public health systems and hope for the young generation.

But, Mr. Borg, I also want to be clear that this is not only about expressing the need for a new and better EU Alcohol Strategy. This letter, inspired by your stance on tobacco use, is about the leadership you can choose to take in terms of addressing alcohol harm. Much progress has been made in Europe, but much more progress needs to be made.

And thus I encourage you to be as outspoken on alcohol harm as you are on tobacco harm. I encourage you to make use of the evidence we have today, like in the case of tobacco, to work relentlessly for reducing overall alcohol use in the heaviest alcohol consuming region in the world.

Yours sincerely,



Sven-Olov Carlsson,

International President

IOGT International, Stockholm, February 06, 2013