

Strategies to reduce the harmful use of alcohol

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Presentation of egta

egta is *the association of television and radio sales houses* (both independent of a channel or in-house) that commercialise the advertising space of both private and public TV channels and radio stations across Europe.

In October 2008, egta counted 106 member sales houses which operate across 30 European countries. With members in most EU Member States and other European countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, Croatia, Norway, etc., egta has members in most countries covered by the European branch of the World Health Organisation. Altogether, egta members collect over 70% of the European television advertising investments.

egta provides a network to its members based on relationships with over 1000 high-level advertising executives. egta fulfils different support functions for its members in areas as diversified as regulatory issues, audience measurement, sales methods, interactivity, cross-media, etc.

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Introductory comments

egta – the association of television and radio advertising – welcomes the World Health Organisation’s Report by the Secretariat on “Strategies to reduce the harmful use of alcohol consumption”, *document A61/13*. This report reflects the complexity of issues related to excessive alcohol consumption and highlights the need for multi-faceted policy responses “*based on the best available evidence*”.

As broadcast advertising professionals, egta members wish to highlight that commercial communications form an integral part of a modern market economy and play a key role in ensuring effective free competition and in facilitating innovation. In doing so, it plays an essential role in building brand awareness and value by allowing consumers to develop preferences for a particular product over its competitors in the same range. **egta members thus deeply believe in the added-value of advertising in our societies so long that it is done in a responsible manner.** For this reason, egta member sales houses are committed to ensuring that advertising is always decent, legal honest and truthful.

At the same time, egta members understand that alcoholic drinks are not ordinary consumer goods, and that their abuse can cause a small proportion of the population alcohol-related harm. In view of the importance of television and radio advertising and its impact on society, egta members are well aware of their responsibilities when it comes to advertising alcoholic beverages. In fact, legislative measures setting safeguards on the advertising of alcoholic beverages on broadcast media have been implemented across Europe for more than 20 years by television and radio sales houses. For instance, specific regulation is in place for broadcast advertising by means of international conventions, *e.g. the Council of Europe’s Convention on Transfrontier television*, as well as European Union regulations, *e.g. the EU directive on Television Without Frontiers*, and of national laws. In addition, advertising self-regulatory mechanisms apply to broadcast advertising for alcoholic beverages, which are subject to detailed safeguards established in industry codes of conducts.

It is against this background that egta would like to comment on the paragraph 14 of the report by the Secretariat on Strategies to reduce the harmful use of alcohol consumption. In particular, egta would like to emphasise on the following aspects:

1. The protection of adolescents and young people on broadcast media;
2. Further advertising regulation and the issues of advertising content, control, placement and partial bans.

1. The protection of young people and adolescents on broadcast media

Numerous safeguards already exist to prevent television advertising of alcoholic beverages from neither specifically targeting nor being made in such a way as to be specifically appealing to minors. **Numerous layers of regulation build on each other** so as to ensure that the safeguards are properly applied.

Firstly, at **European Union level**, article 15 of the EU “Television without Frontiers” directive sets out many safeguards and these have been successful in preventing advertisements of alcoholic beverages from:

- ✎ specifically targeting minors;
- ✎ Showing people who are, or appear to be minors consuming alcoholic beverages;
- ✎ Linking the consumption of alcohol with concepts appealing to young people (e.g. enhanced physical performance, social or sexual success, etc.)

In fact, these sensible rules will be extended even further by the future “Audiovisual Media Services” (in article 3d) in order to cover all forms of commercial communications on new audiovisual platforms, such as mobile TV, IPTV, etc.

Secondly, **the Council of Europe** sets the same rules for transfrontier broadcasts in article 15 of the Convention on Transfrontier Television. Similarly, these rules will be extended to all forms of audiovisual commercial communications in the upcoming Convention on Audiovisual Media Services, which is currently under discussion¹. Because the Council of Europe’s geographical coverage is wider than the European Union, it means in practise that 47 European countries apply these minimum safeguards relating to minors in the case of audiovisual advertising.

In addition, egta identified in a survey carried out among its members four additional domains where its member sales houses address the issue of alcohol advertising directed at young people. The principles abided by sales houses originate from **national legislations** but mostly from **advertising self-regulatory initiatives** stating that a commercial for an alcoholic beverage may not:

- ✎ Use symbols (music, characters, languages, etc.) likely to catch a child’s attention;
- ✎ Make a connection between the consumption of alcohol & maturity, or non-consumption & immaturity;
- ✎ Exploit a child’s immaturity;
- ✎ Exploit the credulity of those who are mentally or socially vulnerable.

In the area of advertising, self-regulation took shape long ago in many European countries and matured over the years so that its added-value is now recognised by decision-makers and numerous stakeholders. In addition to standards developed and agreed on by the three parts of the industry, *i.e. advertisers, agencies and media*, self-regulation in the field of advertising is characterised by the existence of independent bodies, self-regulatory organisations, responsible for drafting and providing interpretations of the code, as well as for ensuring compliance with the code itself.

¹ Draft amendments to the Convention on Transfrontier Television are published and currently open to public consultation: www.coe.int/media

Enforcement is made possible thanks to an independent complaint committee or jury that is tasked to handle complaints. Monitoring exercises are regularly carried on the compliance of advertising for alcoholic beverages with ad-hoc standards and codes. These monitoring exercises have revealed very high levels of compliance over the last years².

As a last element in addition to all the above safeguards, **alcohol producers' own codes of conducts** and **alcohol sector-specific codes** set additional safeguards to be respected internally. These cover various aspects of commercial communications, from the issue of appeal to the one of placement³.

In applying all these safeguards, broadcasters and sales houses take extreme precautions not least because they are legally responsible in case of breaches of regulatory provisions. In fact, the proper functioning of these safeguards was recognised in recent independent studies⁴.

egta thus wants to emphasise that European sales houses and broadcasters are already committed to ensuring that audiovisual advertising for alcoholic beverages is neither directly targeted at nor appealing to minors and by extension to adolescents.

² The compliance rate for the content of adverts in 15 of the participating countries was at 95.6% in 2007, compared to 96.0% for 2006 and 96.4% for 2005; compliance at country level ranged from 86% to 100% in 2007. These exercises are carried out by EASA, the European Advertising Standards Alliance, and national self-regulatory organisation, under the supervision of independent reviewers.

³ For examples of sector-specific codes: <http://www.efrd.org/main.html> or http://www.brewersofeurope.org/asp/about_us/whatwedo_beer.asp. Companies' codes can be accessed on the website of manufacturers directly.

⁴ Carat & Koan - Comparative study on the impact of control measures on the televisual advertising markets in European Union Member States and certain other countries – for the European Commission – July 2005.

INRA & Bird & Bird - Study on the impact of television advertising and teleshopping on minors - for the European Commission - March 2001.

Both studies accessible at http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/info_centre/library/studies/index_en.htm.

2. Further advertising regulation and the issues of advertising content, control, placement and partial bans

egta is very concerned about the report by the Secretariat in highlighting that “Controls or partial bans on volume, placement and content of alcohol advertising are important parts of a strategy”.

The reasons leading individuals into alcohol abuse are numerous and complex among which are psychological and social adjustment problems, financial difficulties, depression, etc. For this reason, egta has always expressed doubts that wide-ranging advertising restrictions have any impact on combating alcohol abuse. This belief is reinforced by the evolution of drinking patterns in countries that have followed different policy approaches such as Denmark and France: there is no link between the number of commercials viewed and the prevalence of alcohol abuse. A study by the German Ministry of Health came to the conclusion that there is hardly any link between advertising and alcohol consumption of young people⁵ (see appendix).

With regards to the issue of young people in particular, the numerous safeguards already applicable to audiovisual commercial communications address both the issue of the content of advertising messages and the placement. In practise, self-regulatory mechanisms are used to make sure that the content of advertising messages does not appeal to minors and the placement of advertising breaks around programmes specifically designed for minors is prohibited by legislative means.

egta nevertheless acknowledges that a certain number of adolescents will always be incidentally exposed to some advertising for alcoholic beverages on television, for instance when they watch adults programmes. That being said, so long as these advertising messages do not specifically appeal to minors, egta refutes the idea that adolescents would be harmed in case they incidentally see them. There is indeed no scientific evidence to support the argument that there is a link between adolescent's exposure to alcoholic advertising and greater risks to engage in under-age drinking. For this reason, egta is surprised to read in the article 14 of the Report by the Secretariat that “research results underline the need for such controls or bans(...)”.

Even if one was to conclude a “potential cumulative effect of advertising over time”, legislative and self-regulatory safeguards already limit exposure of adolescents to alcoholic beverage advertising on television, as previously exposed. The cumulative effect is thus largely avoided.

As a consequence, further restrictions on the placement or volume of television advertising for alcoholic beverages would, in egta's view, be disproportionate and would fail to meet any public health objective.

Firstly, any control or partial ban on volume or placement would overly restrict the alcohol industry's ability to promote its products and brands to adults on television. So long as responsible drinking is not harmful to health, is socially accepted and legal, it is unacceptable in egta's view that alcohol producers be prohibited from responsibly advertising their products to adults. In addition, this would not lead to a

⁵ „Alkohol und Werbung – Auswirkungen der Alkoholwerbung auf das Konsumverhalten bei Kindern und Jugendlichen“, ZEUS GmbH, Zentrum für angewandte Psychologie, Umwelt- und Sozialforschung, Bochum; Expertise commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Health 2002, p. 48.

better protection of adolescents whose audience share in adult and family programmes is very low⁶ and whose media consumption patterns are constantly evolving.

Secondly, today's adolescents and children are no longer only consuming television but are increasingly using new media such as the internet. These media offer many new forms and drivers of marketing communication that do not apply the same high-level of standards applicable to broadcast media. By failing to grasp this reality, further restrictions on broadcast advertising would not only have no positive public health impact but it would put broadcast media at a serious competitive disadvantage against these new media. Instead of further regulation, egta believes that the level of protection on broadcast advertising should be used as a benchmark for new media.

Lastly, any restrictions on TV advertising for alcoholic beverages would have a significant economic impact on the European audiovisual industry given that revenues from this sector represent an average of 6% of the turnover of European sales houses. At a time when broadcast media are already seriously hit by the early signs of a profound economic recession and when Europe is looking at strengthening the competitiveness of its broadcast industry, calls for advertising restrictions would seriously harm this creative industry.

In conclusion, egta would like to reiterate its opposition to any further restriction on audiovisual advertising for alcoholic beverages and would like to recall that European decision-makers recently ruled out such a policy option when adopting the new EU directive on Audiovisual Media Services, whose purpose is precisely to rule on audiovisual advertising.

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Taking into consideration the importance of television and radio advertising and its impact on society, egta members are well aware of the problem presented by the excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages and are fully complying with European and national regulations aimed at restricting irresponsible alcohol advertising.

egta fully supports the World Health Organisation comprehensive strategy whereby it tackles the root causes of the problem of excessive alcohol consumption but expresses strong concerns as to its approach to marketing communication. egta believes that one should avoid putting too much emphasis on the issue of broadcast advertising, which thanks to the safeguards already in place, is the one marketing practice offering the most comprehensive set of safeguards.

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⁶ Audience data show a clear distinction between programmes appealing to minors and adult / family programmes. The share of minors in the latter programme is always very low. Numbers can hardly be given as they depend on countries and the overall share of minors in the population. Even in the case of major sports events transmission such as the German "Bundesliga", these attract on average only 2,6% of young people aged 14-19 years old.

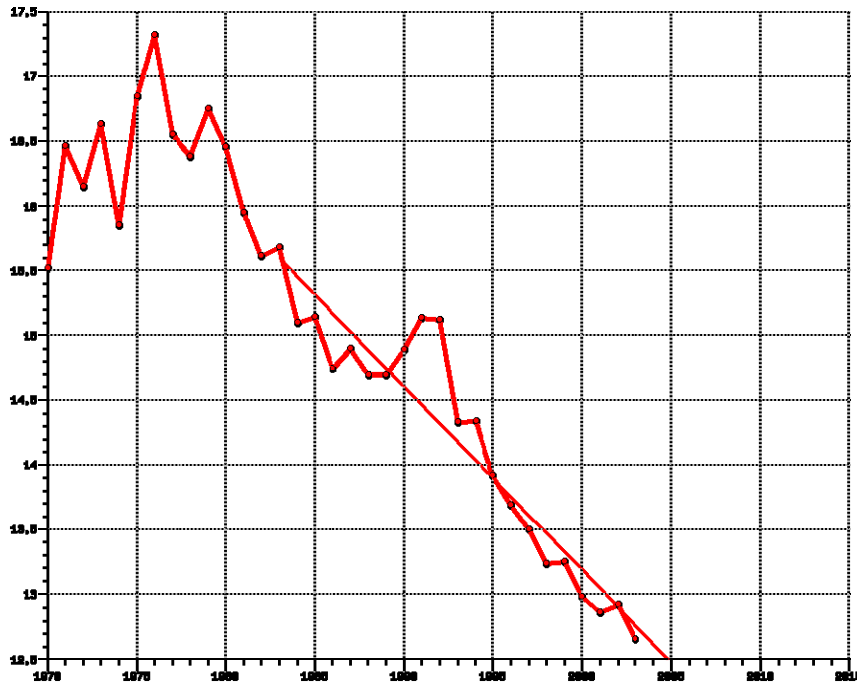
APPENDIX: TV Advertising restrictions & alcohol consumption in Germany

In Germany no binding restrictions are applied to TV alcohol advertising (voluntary code of conduct for alcoholic beverages in place from 1976). The alcohol consumption has been in decline for over a decade and continues on a downward trend. Even if the advertising expenditure for alcoholic beverages from 1990 to 2004 has increased from 100 to 147 on an index scale, the alcohol consumption fell in the same period from an index base of 100 to 83.

1. Restriction on advertising, sponsorship or brand identification of alcoholic beverages (source: Alcohol control database)

	Beer	Wine	Spirits
National TV	Voluntary agreement	Voluntary agreement	Voluntary agreement
Cable TV	Voluntary agreement	Voluntary agreement	Voluntary agreement
National radio	Voluntary agreement	Voluntary agreement	Voluntary agreement
Internet	Voluntary agreement	Voluntary agreement	Voluntary agreement
Printed newspapers/magazines	Voluntary agreement	Voluntary agreement	Voluntary agreement
Billboards	Voluntary agreement	Voluntary agreement	Voluntary agreement
Point of sale	Voluntary agreement	Voluntary agreement	Voluntary agreement
Cinema	Partial restriction	Partial restriction	Partial restriction
Rented videos	Voluntary agreement	Voluntary agreement	Voluntary agreement
Product placement in TV shows and films	Complete restriction	Complete restriction	Complete restriction
Sponsored events identified with brand name	Partial restriction	Partial restriction	Partial restriction

2. Trend in pure alcohol consumption (litre per capita) age 15+ (from 1970 to 2003) - Source: WHO European health for all database



3. Advertising expenditure for alcoholic beverages & alcohol consumption in Germany from 1990 to 2004 (Info institute, Munich and Nielsen Media Research, Hamburg)

