



Group of the Progressive Alliance of
Socialists & Democrats
in the European Parliament

eurocare

European Alcohol Policy Alliance

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Will consumers be left wondering forever?

Today in the European Parliament,

In 2011 the European institutions passed Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 that requires food and soft drinks, including fruit juice and milk, to label nutritional information and ingredients. However, after heated debates alcoholic beverages were exempted from this obligation. Currently, when a consumer drinks alcohol it is highly unlikely that they know exactly what they are drinking.

In March 2017, the European Commission published a report clearly stating that no objective grounds were identified which would justify the absence of information on ingredients and nutritional information on alcoholic beverages.

The European Commission gave the alcohol producers one year to deliver a self-regulatory proposal that would cover the entire sector of alcoholic beverages. In March this year (2018) industry produced a self-regulatory proposal. The European Commission is taking now more than half a year to assess that self-regulatory proposal. In the meantime, consumers are still being left to wonder what they are really drinking.

“Given the limited timeframe for work in the current European Commission mandate, we urge the European Commission, to address the issue and align requirements for alcoholic beverages with those for other food and drinks producers. The current situation created disparities in the internal market, where a milk producer has a higher administrative burden than a vodka producer. We believe that the EU should allow a level playing field for all economic operators and not favour producers of one category of goods” said Member of the European Parliament Biljana Borzan.

Industry failed to produce a uniform approach for the whole sector, instead presenting sector specific annexes. Additionally, the proposal leaves it up to the food business operators responsible for the food information to decide how to display the information. Discrepancies in implementation and interpretation of the EU Reg 1169/2011 could create a mosaic of styles and forms instead of following the already existing framework (set out in EU Reg 1169/2011) to which consumers are accustomed to.

Whilst the brewing sector reports that three quarters of beers will be labelling ingredients and half will be labelling energy per 100ml by the end of this year, some sectors of the industry suggest providing information online, in form of weblinks, QR codes, bar codes etc. As stated in the European Commission's report on alcohol labels from 2017, the majority of consumers "never or rarely" use off-label information sources to access information on nutrition values and ingredients of alcoholic beverages. According to the Digital Economy and Society Index (2017) 44% of Europeans (169 million) between 16 and 74 years do not have basic digital skills. 'Off-label' information would exclude millions of Europeans of their right to know what they consume.

"On labelling, the alcohol industry enjoyed preferential treatment dating back to 1978. It's about time that the consumer came first. There is no reason that alcohol should be treated differently to any other foodstuff. It is utterly bizarre in 2018 that we even have to have this discussion. It should be obvious for any decent company to provide information to their consumers about their products at the point of sale. It really puzzles me why some sectors of the alcohol industry are so reluctant." said Mariann Skar, Secretary General of European Alcohol Policy Alliance.

Listing ingredients contained in a beverage alerts the consumer to the presence of any potentially harmful substances. More importantly, providing nutritional information such as energy content allows consumers to monitor their diets better, and makes it easier to keep a healthy lifestyle.

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The European Alcohol Policy Alliance (Eurocare) is an alliance of non-governmental and public health organisations advocating prevention and reduction of alcohol related harm in Europe. Member organisations are involved in advocacy and research, as well as in the provision of information and training on alcohol issues and the service for people whose lives are affected by alcohol problems.