

OPENING SPEECH
Working for responsible consumption patterns: Beer and the
Mediterranean experience
Brussels, 4 May 2010

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President of The Brewers of Europe

Speech for the President of The Brewers of Europe

Thank you Jacobo.

Ladies and gentlemen, why are we all here this afternoon? The reasons are beer and the associated consumer element, and that is... the health of all those who drink our product.

There is simply no denying that beer is part of our European culture, heritage and tradition and has been for the last 6,000 odd years. It goes back to well beyond PLATO's time – a man who once said "he was a wise man who invented beer."

Throughout the world, beer has been a staple part of many people's diets for thousands of years and, when consumed in moderation, as is done by the vast majority of people, beer can form an integral part of a balanced and healthy lifestyle. And this is what you'll hear more about this afternoon and indeed enjoy afterwards in a convivial atmosphere.

We know only too well though that excessive and inappropriate beer consumption can be harmful and is associated with many chronic health problems.

The Brewers of Europe, its member associations and the thousands of brewers across Europe take the issue of alcohol-related harm very seriously and have assumed a leading role in the **fight against inappropriate consumption of beer** and, consequently, against alcohol abuse in general.

During the past 5 years Europe's **almost 4,000 brewers** have supported and funded over **300 responsibility initiatives**.

The success of our initiatives lies on the fact that **we work on alliances and synergies** developed **with a plethora of locally-based third party stakeholders**. Our only request ever is that these third party stakeholders share our vision, meaning that they recognise that alcohol misuse is an issue, that it makes sense to be tackled at the local level taking account of cultural differences, and that our product not be demonised. And so far, this approach appears to be working.

Our partners have included; local authorities, doctors' groups, road safety authorities, NGOs and consumer organisations, and we've been able to reach our objectives and obtain positive results along the way in terms of our social responsibility. But why again do we do this? We do this because we believe that we have a positive role to play and because responsible common-sense on the ground local partnerships which can help tackle the issue of alcohol misuse and in the long term deliver results.

The local approach though isn't just something supported by brewers. In a resolution adopted by the World Health Organisation at its assembly in 2008, they stated, "many problems related to alcohol have a local or regional base and can only be addressed adequately and solved at the appropriate level."

This type of work led The Brewers of Europe to supporting and becoming a **founding member of the European Alcohol and Health Forum**. Through this forum, again we have committed ourselves to making concrete commitments that contribute to tackling alcohol-related harm.

To date, The Brewers of Europe and its members have made 50 or so of the total 150 commitments to the EU Alcohol and Health Forum and these all by and large focus on delivering actions at local, national and regional levels.

So, whether by putting in place measures to address the binge-drinking phenomenon in Finland; to tackling underage consumption in Belgium, Germany, Poland and Romania; to discouraging drink-driving in Denmark, Poland and Spain, to spreading the message in Italy to expectant mothers that alcohol can wait, or to further strengthening self-regulation systems in the Czech Republic and across the whole of the EU in general – Europe's brewers are on the case and are making their responsible contributions. Our belief today is that these **local actions are becoming BEST PRACTICE because they are producing results**.

Summing up, we as a sector support the European Commission's initiative at tackling alcohol-related harm across the EU, but we argue against a pan-European "one size fits all" approach. It is action at local and country level that best reflects Europe's cultural diversity and the behaviour patterns that differ from one side of the EU to the other.

Ladies and gentlemen, as president of The Brewers of Europe and as someone coming from the southern European countries where we observe and take part in moderate drinking patterns of beer, it gives me great pleasure to be here with you this afternoon and to speak at this event. I'm sure you will find the insights from the different speakers both informative and inspirational, and may even get you to see beer in a more fascinating light. Remember, with alcohol or without, beer remains Europe's convivial drink. Thank you!

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Summing-up remarks for the President of The Brewers of Europe

Ladies and gentlemen, I asked the question in my opening speech concerning, why we were all here this afternoon. I said the reasons were beer and the associated consumer element, meaning, the health of all those who drink our great product.

And it is a great product. It is the drink of conviviality and enjoyment and has been associated with European culture and traditions for indeed many thousands of years.

Today we learned about beer consumption patterns in southern European countries, the types of partnerships and programmes which brewers have supported in Spain, Portugal and Italy aimed at tackling alcohol misuse and promoting responsible consumption, and also how the image of the product is different to what it is in other countries. Europe is diverse, but that's the beauty of it.

For me personally though, and of course as a Portuguese citizen, I smiled when the various speakers talked about how climate, regional diet, food pyramids, all have an impact the way consumers perceive our product - beer. These are factors. What was indeed very interesting too was the high proportion of non-alcoholic beer being sold and consumed in these southern European countries. A refreshing beer doesn't always need to contain alcohol it would seem. And that's a good message and one which we as brewers need to promote.

This all links in quite well to what I said in my opening remarks at the beginning of this seminar, those being, that when it comes to working towards prevention of inappropriate beer consumption, that Brewers have a role to play and can be part of the solution. This has been exemplified by the dynamic actions carried out by the brewing associations in their respective countries, as well as the commitments made before the European Alcohol and Health Forum, which makes us one of the most active and responsible sectors. The work is ongoing, but we are committed.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, we've listened to some great presentations and accounts from speakers this afternoon and I want to tell you all, that as President of The Brewers of Europe, I thank you very much for your involvement in this seminar. As I again said at the outset, hopefully participants will now leave by seeing the work of brewers in partnership with various actors in a more informative, inspirational and fascinating light. And see beer too, whether with alcohol or without, as the drink that it is – i.e. Europe's convivial drink!

Thank you! Mrs de la Mata Barranco.....