Written Question P-0375/04
by Martin Kastler (PPE-DE) to the Commission
(6 February 2004)

Subject: Measures to prevent the consumption of alcopops by young people

Alcohol is one of the most important factors posing a risk to health in European countries. Europe is the continent with the highest per capita consumption of alcohol in the world, and experts estimate the burden placed on health budgets by alcohol-related illness and disability at between 8% and 10%. More serious problems include the fact that the age at which young people begin consuming alcohol is dropping, and the targeting of young people in advertising for alcopops.

1. Self-regulation of the economy, which was the method proposed in the Council Recommendation on alcohol and young people (1), is not producing the desired results. In particular, the consumption of alcopops by young people has increased several fold within a few years in certain Member States. Has the Commission carried out any investigations into alcopops?

2. Do specific plans exist for achieving a uniform reduction in the consumption of alcopops by young people at European level, with regard to either sales, advertising or taxation?

3. Are specific measures, campaigns or funding planned over the next few years to alert young people to the problems of alcohol consumption?


Answer given by Mr Byrne on behalf of the Commission
(18 March 2004)

1. The Commission fully shares the concerns of the Honourable Member on the problems caused by alcohol and especially by sales of ‘alcopops’ to young people. In the Commission’s view, the alcohol industry bears a significant responsibility for the development, marketing and selling of their products. This especially concerns industry activities which target children and young people.

At its meeting of 5 June 2001 the Council adopted the Council Recommendation 2001/458/EC on the Drinking of Alcohol by young people (1), in particular children and adolescents. As part of the Commission’s preparation of its proposal for this document, several inquiries were made on the consumption of alcopops. The inquiries showed that there was a growing problem of drunkenness and binge drinking among teenagers and young adults in the Community. It was obvious that the consumption of alcopops by young people could neither be dealt with completely separately from the consumption of other alcohol beverages, or separately from the problems due to the inappropriate consumption of alcohol in society as a whole. Many studies have shown that the age of first drinking alcohol, and advanced drinking habits at a young age, are associated with increased risk of subsequent problem drinking.

2. The youth culture underlying the drinking behaviour of young people is increasingly of an international nature. This fact requires an integrated approach at all levels. The Commission is at present following up and monitoring the implementation of the above mentioned Council Recommendation in the Member States. The follow-up of the Recommendation will show whether the alcohol industry has taken a more responsible approach to young people and alcohol. The Commission is invited to draft a first report on the implementation of the proposed measures by the end of 2005. In this report the Commission should also consider possible need for further actions required to reduce alcohol-related problems among young people. The enforcement of existing laws and regulations needs special attention in this context.

3. At its meeting of 5 June 2001, the Council also adopted Conclusions on a Community strategy to reduce alcohol-related harm. In its Conclusions the Council invites the Commission to make concrete proposals on this. The strategy should complement national policies. The Commission is preparing
a proposal for a strategy and a timetable for the different actions. As one important part of the work, the Commission will present information on the economic and social burden of alcohol, including issues of promotion of alcohol, protection of children and young people.

4. Community actions have to complement national policies. But as the Community can only adopt binding legislation within the remits of paragraph 4 of Article 152 of the EC Treaty, the Commission would like to emphasise the central role of the Member States in tackling these phenomena. Hence combating problems caused by alcopops and by alcohol in general needs concerted actions by all stakeholders, including families, schools, employers, industry, advertisers and national regulators. Effective enforcement of existing national legislation, for example on age limits, could already make a significant difference.


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WRITTEN QUESTION E-0379/04
by Alexandros Alavanos (GUE/NGL) to the Commission
(12 February 2004)

Subject: Dismissal of pregnant workers

Workers at the Citizens’ Service Centres (KEPs), whose creation and operation is funded by the European Union, have been taken on with freelance contracts although there is not the slightest doubt that these contracts in fact conceal employment, as the work they do meets fixed and constant needs. The workers at the KEPs are thus deprived of leave, allowances etc. There are cases of women who have been dismissed by the KEPs because they have become pregnant.

On 10 February 2004 the case of Philomela Kontari is being heard in a court in Corfu. She worked at the Paxos KEP and was dismissed in her eighth month of pregnancy because, on medical orders, she was temporarily not supposed to work, until the birth, because of complications in the pregnancy.

1. Can the Commission investigate and decide whether the freelance contracts of the staff at the KEPs, which are funded by Community appropriations, illegally conceal employment contracts?

2. Does the Commission consider that in the case of pregnant women Greece is contravening Directive 92/85/EEC (1), which seeks to improve the health of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding, and Directive 76/207/EEC (2) on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment?


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Answer given by Mr Dimas on behalf of the Commission
(22 March 2004)

1. The determination of the nature of a working relationship, and in particular whether it is an employment or a self employment relationship is an issue that has to be addressed by the Member States’ competent authorities

2. According to the information provided to the Commission, Greece has properly transposed Directives 92/85/EEC and 76/207/EEC as regards the protection of pregnant workers against dismissal. The Commission services will however contact the Greek authorities with a view to obtaining further information in relation to the position of pregnant workers in KEPs and will inform the Honourable Member of Parliament as soon as the information is received.