

**Question for written answer E-008648/2013
to the Commission**

Rule 117

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Subject: Raising minimum excise duties on alcohol to improve public health

Limiting the use of alcohol is an important part of public health policy in many EU Member States. Regulating prices through excise duties on alcohol is an important tool in implementing such policies. The link between alcohol prices and consumption is well established: the higher the prices, the lower the consumption, especially among heavy drinkers.

With the single market, EU-wide minimum levels for excise duties on alcohol are necessary in order to avoid the dilution of pricing policy through cross-border purchases. However, current minimum excise duties have not been changed since 1992, meaning that their real value has decreased by approximately one third because of inflation, not to mention the fact that the real value was rather low even in 1992.

The decline of the real value of minimum excise duties on alcohol is causing difficulties for health policies in several Member States. In Finland the government reduced excise duties in 2004 in a response to the growing trend for purchasing alcohol from Estonia, where the taxes are very low. The outcome as regards public health was extremely negative. The Danish Government decided to cut the beer tax by 15 % on 1 July 2013, which made alcohol more affordable not only for people living in Denmark, but also in neighbouring countries. This is a sign of a race to the bottom: a decrease in taxes in one country will lead to decreases in taxes in the neighbouring countries.

Does the Commission agree that raising the minimum excise duties on alcohol would be useful in protecting public health?

If so, is the Commission planning any legislative proposals in the near future?