Excessive alcohol consumption and binge drinking among young people in the EU have raised eyebrows in Brussels.

“Responsible Party” is a Pernod Ricard commitment as a member of the European Commission’s Alcohol and Health Forum, which brings together a variety of stakeholders in an effort to reduce alcohol-related harm.

It is the first EU-wide alcohol prevention programme implemented by the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) with the aim of promoting “Responsible Drinking”.

Volunteers are informing students about the harmful effects of alcohol overconsumption at parties as well as distributing water for free. The ESN is a network of around 550 member associations covering around 1,000 local campuses in 40 different countries.

Does this activity have an impact on students’ drinking habits? Is it effective in reducing alcohol consumption?
‘Responsible Party’ has some impact on students’
drinking habits, report finds

Stakeholders take careful steps to revive
EU Alcohol and Health Forum

ESN President: Access to water is an integral
part of ‘Responsible Party’

‘Sea Battle’: Students learn
to party smart on boat cruise

Erasmus students want to see alcohol
prevention in EU Youth Strategy
‘Responsible Party’ has some impact on students’ drinking habits, report finds

By Sarantis Michalopoulos

‘Responsible Party’, an awareness-raising campaign against the excessive use of alcohol, has helped students consume less alcohol and improve their habits by drinking water too, a study has found.

The reduction of alcohol use was not enormous, but it is a positive first step. The European Commission welcomes the initiative but says public health NGOs should also be involved.

Responsible Party is a Pernod Ricard commitment as a member of the European Commission’s Alcohol and Health Forum, which brings together a variety of stakeholders in an effort to reduce alcohol-related harm.

It is the first EU-wide alcohol prevention programme implemented by the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) with the aim of promoting “Responsible Drinking”.

Volunteers are informing students about the harmful effects of alcohol overconsumption at parties as well as distributing water for free. The ESN is a network of around 550 member associations covering around 1,000 local campuses in 40 different countries.

A recently published evaluation

Continued on Page 5
Continued from Page 4

report focused on the drinking habits of European students as well as the effects of the Responsible Party campaign.

The survey was conducted in the period August 2016 – July 2017 in two phases: one before the exchange programme and another six months later, both for Erasmus and local students.

According to the results, students who had begun or planned an exchange stay drank on average larger amounts of alcohol compared to local students. Larger prevalence of harmful consumption (AUDIT) and binge drinking were also marked.

As for binge drinking, the results showed that 67.5% of students are not binge drinkers, 14.5% had moderate binge drinking habits while 18% had intense consumption.

As far as the AUDIT score is concerned, more than 40% are in the severe ‘red zone’ and 2.8% indicated a possible dependence. Students mainly consumed beer (42.7%), wine (26.5%) and spirits (16.6%) while men drank significantly more than women.

**HOW THE CAMPAIGN AFFECTED STUDENTS**

The second part of the survey mainly focused on the impact of the Responsible Party (RP) campaign on students at parties. Some 46% of the students said the prevention programme proved quite helpful and 42.8% partly agreed.

The survey emphasised that a “slight decrease of alcohol consumption” during the RP events was reported by students suggesting an “encouraging impact” of the campaign’s prevention messages.

In addition, a modification of alcohol-related behaviours was also noticed as, for instance, students drank more water, which the vast majority found quite useful.

The report also noted that a decrease in both AUDIT and binge drinking scores were observed between the start and the end of the academic year, mainly for those students who attended RD events.

Overall, the campaign does not change students’ behaviour in the long run but during parties: they drink more moderate amounts of alcohol, which has a positive short-term effect and is considered a “first step”.

**COMMISSION: GOOD BUT NOT ENOUGH**

Contacted by EURACTIV, the European Commission said that awareness-raising campaigns about the harmful effects of alcohol are not among the most effective measures to reduce alcohol abuse. The Commission also stressed that any level of alcohol consumption can have harmful health effects.

But in this case, it did recognise some positive features that go in the right direction.

“The evaluation of the Responsible Party initiative concludes that some of its elements could be considered for other similar initiatives – for example, the fact that the campaign was unbranded and that its evaluation was carried out by an independent third party,” a European Commission spokesperson said.

The EU official noted that the participation of a student organisation was not enough and recommended that public health organisations also get on board in designing similar initiatives in order to ensure that the campaign messages address the relevant public health objectives in the most effective way.

In June 2015, twenty public health NGOs pulled out of the European Alcohol and Health Forum (EAHF), a stakeholder platform aiming to develop strategies to fight alcohol abuse.

The NGOs, most of which receive EU funding, decided to abstain from the platform in protest against the European Commission’s refusal to submit a new alcohol strategy, which formally expired in 2012.

**INDUSTRY VERSUS NGOs**

The alcohol industry is supportive of the initiative and pledges to do more. The spirits industry (spiritsEUROPE) told EURACTIV that since the launch of the European Alcohol and Health Forum in 2007, the spirits sector has funded over 440 initiatives in partnership with the local level to help reduce alcohol-related harm.

“It is the combination of well-designed prevention and awareness campaigns, with adequate legislation and most importantly enforcement, that leads to societal changes. However, changing attitudes and behaviour takes time and can only be achieved through a united effort, on a common objective,” Laure Alexandre from spiritsEUROPE commented, referring to the Responsible Party initiative.

“We recommend to all our federations and member companies to adopt a similar design when they decide to engage in harm-reduction initiatives, be it to address underage drinking, binge drinking, drink-driving or setting up training programmes for retailers and bar staff,” she added.

The EU brewers agree and they similarly back initiatives to promote responsible beer consumption.

For Jan de Grave, director of communications at Brewers of Europe, a promising example comes from Denmark. The Danish Brewers’ Association spearheaded the establishment of an “Alcohol Partnership”, supported by the
Danish Ministry of Health, as a way of helping to reduce harmful alcohol consumption and postpone the age when young people start drinking.

“Their 2015-2016 campaign successfully reduced the percentage of minors who buy alcohol illegally in stores,” he emphasised.

But for the NGOs, this kind of campaign is just another means of product promotion. “When the industry is involved in awareness-raising campaigns, it is difficult to differentiate between the ‘drink responsibly’ messaging, and promotion of the product,” Mariann Skar, secretary-general of the European Alcohol Policy Alliance (Eurocare), told EURACTIV.

Skar explained she was not aware of the details of the agreement and could not identify the “driving force” behind this campaign.

“As far as we understand it, Pernod Ricard has agreed not to have their logo on the products of this campaign. However, since all those involved in this agreement are well aware of the links, it appears to be a good promotional exercise for Pernod Ricard.”
Stakeholders take careful steps to revive EU Alcohol and Health Forum

By Sarantis Michalopoulos

The European Commission is trying to foster dialogue among stakeholders and find the best way to take the EU Alcohol and Health Forum a step forward.

The EU Alcohol and Health Forum (EAHF) is a Commission-led stakeholder platform with the aim of coordinating best practices and policies to tackle alcohol-related harm.

However, in June 2015, twenty public health NGOs pulled out. The NGOs, most of which receive EU funding, decided to abstain from the platform in protest against the European Commission’s refusal to submit a new alcohol strategy, which formally expired in 2012.

The alcohol industry makes it clear that the Forum is related to prevention actions and not policy; on the other hand, the NGOs insist that the industry should be prevented from influencing health-related messages.

COMMISSION: AN ONGOING DIALOGUE

Contacted by EURACTIV, a European Commission Spokesperson explained that in the last two years, the Commission had been in dialogue with both the current members of the Forum and the NGOs that left the Forum in 2015.

The aim of this ongoing dialogue, the EU official said, was to revive the Forum based on a renewed working methodology.

“This is considered necessary by the Commission to improve the quality, ambition and public health impact of the Forum commitments and thereby to strengthen the credibility of the Forum.”

“In the meantime, ambitious and high-quality voluntary initiatives illustrate the commitment of the relevant actors to contribute to the

Continued on Page 8
IT’S ABOUT PREVENTION, NOT POLICY

The alcohol industry has taken several initiatives to reduce alcohol-related harm as part of the EAHF commitments. “Responsible Party” is one of these alcohol prevention programmes. It’s a Pernod Ricard commitment as a member of the EAHF implemented by the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) [See background page 14].

Although the Commission pointed out that public health NGOs should also be involved in such projects, it also praised the fact that the campaign was unbranded and the evaluation was conducted by an independent party.

The spirits industry (spiritsEUROPE) believes that building on actions that are proven to work in real life settings should be the basis of the best practice exchange at EU level.

“An initiative like the Responsible Party programme not only increases but actually makes the value of multi-stakeholder platforms like the Forum […] and when proven successful, they should be endorsed, replicated and/or extended,” Laure Alexandre from spiritsEUROPE said.

Alexandre told EURACTIV that the coordination of member states actions (CNAPA) came subsequently and the industry has consistently called for more dialogue between the CNAPA and the Forum.

According to spiritsEUROPE, the Forum was created as a platform for actions, not policy.

“We should note that, by design, the public health lobby groups active on alcohol at EU level (some funded by religious/temperance groups) want policy. They do not care for prevention programmes and actions on the ground. The NGOs who left the Forum did not resign because the Forum wasn’t delivering. They left because it did exactly what it was set out to do – actions, not policy,” Alexandre emphasised.

“We invite those who value results over dogma to join the Forum, and support by their action the initiatives that make a positive difference to the drinking culture in Europe,” spiritsEUROPE added.

But it seems the industry and public health NGOs do not view the Forum in the same way.

DIFFERENT ROLES

The European Alcohol Policy Alliance (Eurocare) told EURACTIV that its position remained consistent with the WHO Global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol (2010) and that economic operators should have no role in affecting health and social policy.

“We will strongly oppose any moves to engage them in these areas or in influencing health-related messages,” Eurocare’s secretary-general Mariann Skar said, adding that she shares the Commission’s determination to find a common way forward.

“We welcome the Commissioner’s proposals for new practical arrangements and measures to ensure that the health agenda is prioritised and that conflicts of interest are avoided,” she noted.

Skar also explained that Eurocare sent a letter last June to EU Health Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis.

“We agreed to re-engage based on the Commissioner’s email statement that public health authorities, NGOs and industry have different objectives and scope for action, but that all have a role to play in reducing alcohol-related harm.”
Access to water is essential while consuming alcohol and it’s one of the main tools of “Responsible” Party campaign, João Pinto, the president of the Erasmus Student Network, told EURACTIV in an interview.

Responsible Party (RP) is an initiative by Pernod Ricard, as a member of the European Commission’s Alcohol and Health Forum, which brings together a variety of stakeholders in an effort to reduce alcohol-related harm.

It is the first EU-wide alcohol prevention programme implemented by the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) with the aim of promoting “Responsible Drinking”.

As part of the campaign, volunteers inform students at parties about the harmful effects of alcohol overconsumption and distribute water for free. The ESN is a network of around 550 member associations covering around 1,000 local campuses in 40 different countries.

According to Pinto, the message is very simple: you have to learn how to drink responsibly.

“We don’t tell people that they should not drink, as this is not our mission. On the contrary, we inform them how to have healthier alcohol consumption.”

The ESN president also stressed that RP seeks to change the drinking habits of students and highlights the value of water.

“Every dose of alcohol, based on someone’s weight or gender, should correspond to one dose of water. If this rule is respected, one will never cross the border to the bad effects of alcohol,” he said.

After the Responsible Party experience “I cannot personally think of drinking alcohol without having a bottle of water next to me,” he added.

He said the students did not take the programme too seriously in the beginning, but the main messages ultimately stayed in their minds.

He also cited a recently published independent evaluation report that found a “slight decrease of alcohol consumption” during the RP events, as well as a modification of alcohol-related behaviours as students drank more water.

Based on the findings of the study, he pointed out that it’s harder for the programme to be successful in Eastern and Central Europe. According to Pinto, this is related to various aspects ranging from culture to the low price of alcoholic beverages.

Turning to the next steps, Pinto explained the programme will expand in scope and go beyond the health aspect to focus also on education performance, which is affected, for instance, by the poor quality of sleep.
‘Sea Battle’: Students learn to party smart on boat cruise

By Sarantis Michalopoulos

As part of the “Responsible Party” alcohol prevention programme [See background page 14], Pernod Ricard Sweden has joined forces with the Erasmus Students Network (ESN) to implement a unique “Sea Battle” project.

Sea Battle is a 72-hour cruise on the Baltic Sea, attracting 1,800 students from all over the world for each round.

A group of volunteers are on board and they inform students about the harmful effects of alcohol overconsumption at parties and distribute water for free.

“Since the start, the Responsible Party programme has reached more than 330,000 students across Europe, of which 60,000 students have been reached in the Nordics and Baltics alone. Our goal is to encourage students to party smarter and consume alcohol in moderation,” Mikael Sundström, a senior manager at Pernod Ricard Sweden, told EURACTIV.

ESN volunteers’ objective is to find smart ways to first attract students’ attention and then be able to convince them to drink in a moderate way.

They distribute free water, snacks and responsible drinking messages and say they have already observed some changes in drinking behaviour.

Giulia Neulen, the ESN Sea Battle coordinator, said: “Last time I noticed that people were awake longer because, in the past, there were some people who got really drunk and went to sleep.”

The 27-year old volunteer said the main challenge was to make students understand the message of the campaign.

Continued on Page 11
"You don’t tell them what they should not do but on the contrary, you have to provide them with the reasons why they should not drink excessive alcohol," she noted.

**PRIORITISING FREE WATER**

For the programme, the distribution of free water takes centre stage.

Especially in Northern Europe, this is a particular challenge due to its high cost. Sometimes it is even more expensive than alcohol and students are therefore not used to drinking alcohol and water at the same time.

Pernod Ricard recently signed a partnership with UPS, which will allow the French wines and spirits company to distribute water easily across Europe, even for a very small event. The company says it will now invest less in the delivery and stocks and more in the products.

Taha Haj, the national Responsible Party coordinator for Sweden, believes that sometimes the peer-to-peer approach is more impactful.

"I have seen it hundreds of times – a student refuses the water we offer just to take it a second later when his or her friend takes it."

**GETTING WASTED IS NOT A SOLUTION**

Referring to the Sea Battle progress in the last few years, she explained that it is becoming more and more of a fun event, without accidents.

"Our main aim is to create a fun and positive atmosphere on the cruise and among students, then use this nice interaction between the students and the team to provide them with advice on drinking habits," he said.

Haj added that students are starting to realise that getting wasted will not give them anything better than a bad hangover the next day – and that’s if they are lucky.

"Staying tipsy means fun for the whole party, great memories, no headache the next day, and almost no harm to them or the people around them. That’s why our message is what’s unique in this project," Haj concluded.
Programmes which focus on the prevention of excessive alcohol consumption should be considered in the next EU Youth Strategy, João Pinto, the president of the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) has said.

ESN is implementing the project ‘Responsible Party’, an awareness-raising campaign against the excessive use of alcohol with the support of Pernod Ricard. For the French company, this is a commitment as a member of the European Commission’s Alcohol and Health Forum.

Since the start, the Responsible Party programme has reached more than 330,000 students across Europe. But now its organisers want to take it a step forward.

Pinto told EURACTIV that there was an ongoing discussion on how to involve the Responsible Party programme in the discussions for the new EU Youth Strategy.

“Basically when it comes to health, we want to make sure that policies on an EU level really highlight alcohol consumption,” he said.

The Portuguese Erasmus students’ leader underlined that the current Youth Strategy already highlights alcohol, but the framework lacks concrete measures on how to actually fight excessive alcohol consumption.

“Our programme has concrete measures and could be highlighted at least from a moral and legal point of view as such,” Pinto noted.

Despite the fact that EU member states have overall responsibility for youth policy, the bloc’s education ministers have agreed on an EU-wide Youth Strategy, which sets out a

Continued on Page 13
framework for cooperation covering the years 2010-2018.

The post-2018 Youth Strategy is currently under discussion through the so-called Structured Dialogue, a platform which brings together EU and national policymakers and youth representatives. Through an 18-month process covering three EU Council Presidencies, all stakeholders jointly set the objectives and the priorities, which are then adopted by the ministers.

**BETTER INCORPORATING YOUNG PEOPLE’S CONCERNS**

For the EU, which has already put a strategy in place, alcohol-related harm is a major health concern, accounting for over 7% of all ill-health and early deaths on the continent.

According to Commission data, young people are particularly at risk of the effects of drunkenness, including accidents and violence; alcohol-related deaths account for around 25% of all fatalities in young men aged 15-29.

Contacted by EURACTIV, a European Commission spokesperson said that it was too early at this stage to plan specific actions for the next Youth strategy, as relevant stakeholders are still in the listening process.

The EU official explained that it was important to better incorporate the concerns of young people in policy areas such as education, health, employment, environment, social affairs, etc.

“The current EU Youth Strategy is coming to an end in December 2018, and the Commission plans to make proposals for the future before summer 2018, so that youth ministers have time to discuss and adopt the new strategy by the end of 2018,” the Spokesperson said.
Background

Responsible Party (RP) is a Pernod Ricard commitment as a member of the European Commission’s Alcohol and Health Forum¹, which brings together a variety of stakeholders in an effort to reduce alcohol-related harm.

It is the first EU-wide alcohol prevention programme implemented by the Erasmus Student Network (ESN)² with the aim of promoting “Responsible Drinking”.

Volunteers are informing students about the harmful effects of alcohol overconsumption at parties as well as distributing water for free. The ESN is a network of around 550 member associations covering around 1,000 local campuses in 40 different countries.

A recently published evaluation report³ found “slight decrease of alcohol consumption” during the RP events as well as a modification of alcohol-related behaviours as, for instance, students drank more water.

¹http://eurac.tv/9sqe
²https://esn.org
³http://eurac.tv/9sqg