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European Parliament committee approves cancer plan urging health labels on all alcohol

The text keeps pressure on tighter marketing rules, using language that distinguishes harmful drinking from overall consumption.

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European lawmakers have moved a revised cancer prevention text closer to a full parliamentary vote, backing language that keeps pressure on alcohol policy while drawing a clearer distinction between overall consumption and what it calls harmful consumption.

The European Parliament’s Public Health Committee approved the resolution in Strasbourg by 27 votes to 8, with 4 abstentions, as part of the review of the European Union’s Beating Cancer Plan. The measure will go to the full Parliament in the coming

weeks.

The text covers a wide range of health policy issues, from screening and treatment to tobacco, nicotine products, and food labeling. But one of the most closely watched parts concerns alcohol, including wine, because it calls for new labeling rules, stronger prevention measures, and tighter limits on advertising that reaches minors.

In the resolution, lawmakers recalled the European Commission’s stated intention under the cancer plan to require ingredient lists and nutrition declarations on the labels of all alcoholic beverages. The committee acknowledged what it described as progress by the alcohol sector on digital labeling and by the wine sector on adding ingredient information, but said progress remained limited on making ingredient lists, nutrition declarations, and health information mandatory across all alcoholic drinks.

The committee urged the Commission to bring forward legislation “without further delay” that would require clearly visible health information on all alcoholic beverages, with digital labeling used as a complement. It said any such measures should pay particular attention to protecting minors, young people, and other vulnerable groups.

Lawmakers also called for a revised EU alcohol strategy that would include a European approach aimed at eliminating alcohol consumption among minors. The resolution asks the Commission and member states to develop awareness campaigns, especially for younger audiences, to provide clear information on alcohol-related harm, support informed choices, and improve public understanding of the health effects of harmful alcohol use, particularly above levels indicated in evidence-based health recommendations.

Another section asks the Commission to propose EU-level measures to reduce exposure to alcohol advertising and other forms of promotion, especially among minors and in digital environments, as part of cancer prevention efforts. The text also calls for regulatory steps to prevent alcohol advertising and sponsorship in settings where minors could be reached.

The committee’s language reflects a debate that has divided public health groups and alcohol producers for years. Earlier drafts and earlier political fights around the cancer plan had raised fears in parts of the wine and broader beverage industry that the EU might treat any alcohol consumption in the same way, regardless of quantity or drinking pattern. In the current text, lawmakers use the term harmful consumption, a phrasing that industry groups have often argued is more accurate and less punitive than broader wording aimed at consumption as such.

Even so, the practical effect of the proposed measures could be significant for producers, importers, retailers, and advertisers. Mandatory health messaging on labels, broader ingredient and nutrition disclosure, and new restrictions on marketing could increase compliance costs and change how alcohol products are presented to consumers across the single market.

The resolution ties those proposals to the EU’s broader cancer prevention strategy. It states that prevention is the most cost-effective long-term cancer control strategy and calls for dedicated funding to strengthen preventive policies as well as access to screening, diagnosis, and treatment. Lawmakers said the next multiannual EU budget should allocate at least €10.05 billion to health, including €2.5 billion for cancer-related actions.

The text also repeats scientific and public health arguments that have shaped the alcohol debate in Europe. It notes that ethanol in alcoholic beverages and acetaldehyde produced through ethanol metabolism are classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer as carcinogenic to humans. It also cites estimates from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development that up to 1 million additional cancer cases could be prevented between 2023 and 2050 if the plan’s targets are met.

The committee report was led by Romanian lawmaker Vlad Voiculescu, who framed the measure as a public health response to a major burden across the bloc. In a statement released with the vote, he said cancer kills 1.3 million Europeans each year and that 40% of those deaths are avoidable. He said the revised cancer plan could save up to half a million lives annually if backed by stronger prevention, stable funding, shared responsibility, and patient-centered monitoring.

Beyond alcohol, the resolution also supports restrictions affecting alternative electronic tobacco devices, higher excise taxes on tobacco and nicotine products, and a mandatory, harmonized nutrition label for food sold in the EU. Those provisions place the alcohol debate inside a larger effort by lawmakers to use labeling, taxation, and advertising limits as tools to reduce preventable disease.

The wine sector and other alcohol producers have for years argued that public policy should distinguish between abuse and moderate consumption and should take into account cultural and agricultural traditions in many member states. Public health advocates, by contrast, have pushed for clearer warnings and tighter marketing rules, arguing that consumers often underestimate alcohol-related cancer risk and that current labels do not provide enough information.

The coming plenary vote will show whether the broader Parliament is prepared to endorse the committee’s position or soften some of its language. If the chamber approves the text, pressure will increase on the European Commission to decide whether and how to translate the recommendations into legislation that would apply across the 27-member bloc.