



The Secretary General

6812DIV

Brussels, 29 October 2012

For the attention of the Members of the European Parliament representing France

RE - Proposal by French authorities for a drastic increase in the excise duty on beer, or how to punish a good pupil

Dear Madam or Sir,

Along with the 3,500 brewers in Europe, who account, directly or indirectly, for more than two million jobs in the EU, and who contribute to the coffers of Member states in the order of 50 billion Euros¹, I would like to share with you our consternation at the prospect of a drastic increase in the excise duty on beer in France.

It is not my place to comment on the objectives of the Social Security funding bill in France. However, along with the entire European brewing community, I do have questions about the means, which are dire to say the least and consist of penalising a sector so heavily that its downfall is almost certain to follow.

Some people like beer, others do not. It is true that the French consume much less beer on average than their European counterparts. In recent years, though, the French have changed their consumption habits, discovering the immense variety of beers produced in France and throughout Europe by innovative entrepreneurs of all sizes.

For those who like beer, it is a matter of tradition, tastes and flavours, memories, sharing a friendly moment, refreshment... but also of colours, and landscapes, in France.

I could set out in detail the case against the irreparable damages that would be produced by the implementation of the announced measure, for both the French brewing sector and for French consumers. However, I prefer to append to this letter the excellent notes prepared by the French brewers' association, "Brasseurs de France": each paragraph demonstrates, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that if enacted, this proposal would sound the death knell for an entire industry.

The French brewing sector needs support. However, French brewers are not asking for subsidies². They ask for nothing more than fair treatment and the possibility of contributing in a responsible manner to the pleasure of those who consume in moderation, by offering them a

¹ Ernst & Young (2011) - [The Contribution made by Beer to the European Economy](#).

² In 2009, the French wine industry, which is not subject to excise duty at anywhere near the levels of the beer industry, received 260 million Euros in government support. (source: just-drinks)

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high-quality product that is both traditional and innovative, at an affordable price, including during times of economic crisis.

I could also present a detailed argument about the highly regrettable signal that France would be sending to the rest of Europe by implementing a measure that necessarily would disturb the balance within the EU market and which would stigmatise a product that is part of Europe's heritage.

However, as concerns the European dimension of this measure, I prefer to refer you to the Compact for Growth and Jobs that France signed on 29 June 2012 with its 26 partners, expressing with them its "determination to stimulate smart, sustainable, inclusive, resource-efficient and job-creating growth."

The European Union continues to be one of the world's leading beer-producing regions. However, the brewing sector has been greatly affected by the economic crisis since 2008. European beer production has fallen by 6%, and beer consumption has dropped 8%. More than 250,000 jobs have been lost, if we count not only the breweries themselves but also the cafés, and restaurants supported by beer. Still, the major companies in the sector have continued to invest, including in France, SMEs have fought bravely to stay afloat and the number of micro-entrepreneurs has increased.

The French measure, if it were adopted at the end of the parliamentary process currently underway, would not only deliver a fatal blow to the courageous dynamism of the French brewing sector but would also represent extremely bad news for the European economy and culture.

At a time when your colleagues in the French parliament are making their decisions, I would like to share with you these very strong concerns, which go well beyond the borders of France, about this measure, which to say the least is disproportionate in its impact, most certainly unfair and incontestably dire in its consequences.

I am at your disposal for any further information.

Yours faithfully,



Pierre-Olivier Bergeron

Attachment - The case against the proposed duty hike, by the 'Brasseurs de France'