EASL welcomes UK Government plans to set minimum pricing per unit for alcohol sold in England and Wales

Geneva, 28th March 2012 – On Friday, the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL), welcomed the news that the UK Government announced its plans for an alcohol strategy. The alcohol strategy would aim, among other measures, to set a minimum pricing per unit and to ban the sale of multi-buy discount deals.

Prof. Mark Thursz, EASL Secretary General, speaking shortly the announcement was made by the UK’s Home Secretary Mrs Theresa May, noted that “The UK’s alcohol strategy is only the starting point. We, together with all other stakeholders, now need to focus on ensuring that all other EU countries follow suit and implement measures to tackle the European epidemic of harmful alcohol consumption”.

People in Europe consume more alcohol – 12.5 litres of pure alcohol equivalent per year on average – than in any other part of the world. Policies such as regulating alcohol pricing, targeting drink–driving and restricting alcohol marketing are known to be effective in reducing the harmful consumption of alcohol.

“In order to ensure the effectiveness of the measures being considered, we would encourage the UK government to consider raising the minimum price to 50p per unit” said Prof. Thursz. “Harmful alcohol consumption is now recognised as the 3rd largest cause of early deaths and illness in the EU, just behind tobacco and high blood pressure. Action must be taken to ensure the burden of disease is kept to a minimum. As recently highlighted by a question/answer in the European Parliament, Council Directive 92/83/EEC of 19 October 1992 gives Member States the option of setting minimum retail prices for alcoholic beverages. This is a choice which needs to be made in order to ensure a better quality of life for all European citizens.”

EASL’s position on EU alcohol policy clearly highlights the importance of actions effectively reducing alcohol-related morbidity and mortality through an appropriate reduction in alcohol consumption.

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Notes to Editor:
The European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL)

EASL is the leading liver association in Europe. EASL attracts the foremost hepatology experts as members and has an impressive track record in promoting research in liver disease, supporting wider education, and promoting changes in European liver policy.

EASL believes the EU has a key role to play in raising awareness of liver disease in Europe, increasing additional funding for research, setting standards and guidelines for the prevention, diagnosis,
treatment and care of liver disease across the EU and encouraging member states to make liver
disease a public health and research priority.

For more information please visit www.easl.eu

About Liver Disease

Liver disease, estimated to affect 6% of the EU population (approx. 29 million people), is reported to
be the EU's 5th biggest killer, accounting for at least one in six deaths. In 2004, the mortality rate for
chronic liver diseases was estimated at 14.3 per 100,000 in the EU-25. This means that more than
70,000 Europeans are dying from chronic liver disease every year. Even more worrying is the fact
that the EU statistics do not cover all diseases of the liver in one category, e.g. alcohol abuse related
deaths and liver cancer are treated separately. Therefore, the actual rate of deaths from liver
disease is certainly much higher than the statistics suggest.

Reference

1 World Health Organization, “Alcohol in the European Union” produced by the WHO Regional Office
   for Europe and the European Commission, March 2012
2 EASL Position paper on EU Alcohol Policy, 2010