

The raise of alcoholic energy drinks in Europe

A first exploration of the availability of these drinks in Europe

The dangers of mixing alcohol with energy drink

Alcohol is a sedative, while ingredients of energy drinks such as caffeine, guarana and taurine have a stimulant effect. The effects of alcohol are masked which may lead to excessive alcohol consumption (O'Brien, 2008).

Research conducted in the United States revealed that adolescents who regularly drink alcohol mixed with energy drinks more often binge drink (more than 5 drinks in a short period of time) and are drunk twice as often (O'Brien, 2008; Ferreira, 2006). Also other alcohol-related consequences are more prevalent. There is a doubled risk of being taken advantage of sexually, riding with an intoxicated driver, being physically hurt or injured, and the need for medical treatment.

Availability of alcoholic and non-alcoholic energy drinks in the US

Nowadays, mixing alcohol with energy drinks is very popular among young people. In many Western countries outside Europe pre-mixed alcoholic energy drinks are available. An inventory of non-alcoholic energy drinks on the internet by EUCAM revealed that over 1000 energy drinks available on the US market. These drinks contain caffeine, taurine, ginseng or guarana and are marketed as energy drinks. Only a small minority of these energy drinks contains alcohol (23 alcoholic energy drinks compared to 1013 non-alcoholic energy drinks).

Availability of alcoholic energy drinks in Europe

In practice, European citizens can easily consume alcoholic energy drinks that are not available on the European market by purchasing them on the internet. The 23 drinks that were found in the United States can be imported by consumers in most European countries. To get an idea of the availability of alcoholic energy drinks in Europe, it is important to examine the availability in stores (supermarkets and/or monopolies) in European countries as well.

It is not clear from the literature how many alcoholic energy drinks are available in European stores. For this reason, EUCAM has made a brief inventory to get a first overview of the number of alcoholic energy drinks available in European stores. EUCAM contact persons have visited a number of stores in their area (an average of 4 stores in a large city).



Table 1. Overview availability of AEDs in Europe

Country	#of AED	Further information:
United States	23	An inventory on the internet found the following alcoholic energy drinks available in the US: 3SUM, B ^E , Bud Extra, Catalyst, Damzi Fuel, Everglo Liquor, Four Extra Malt Liquor, Joose Orange Malt Beverage alcopop, Liquid Charge, Rize Energy Drink Malt Alco-pop, Rockstar 21, Smirnoff Raw Tea, Sparks, Sparks Alcopop (original orange top), Sparks Alcopop Plus, Spike Shotgun, Spykes, T2 Caffeinated Tequila, Tilt Energy Drink Alco-pop, Torque, V2 Mint Vodka, V2 Vodka, Mickey's Stinger
Non Member States		
Iceland	1	Cult Shaker (5,4% VOL) was found in the monopolies. Its main ingredient is Ginseng and Guarana. (More than 150 mg caffeine per litre is not allowed in Iceland)
Norway	1	Kamasutra (16% VOL) was found in the monopolies (Vinmonopolet). Its main ingredient is Ginseng and it contains no caffeine. (More than 150 mg caffeine per litre is not allowed in Norway)
Member States		
Austria	1	Shark Up was found in train station shops. No AEDs were found in supermarkets. The alcoholic content of this drink was 5% and was produced by Osotspa, a producer in Thailand.
Czech Republic	4	Squash Energy, Boris Jelzin Power Gold, Amundsen Energy, Pushkin Time Warp were found in supermarkets (all had an alcohol volume of 16-18% and produced in eastern Europe).
Denmark	4	X-Ray Fire was found in supermakets and produced by the Danish Harboe and has guarana extract (0,03%) and caffein (0,011%) as its main ingredient. Cult Shaker is on the market in three different packages (glass bottle, metal bottle, can). All these AEDs have an alcohol volume of 5,4%. (More than 150 mg caffeine per litre is not allowed in Denmark)
Finland	1	Croc-tail (4,7% VOL) was found in supermarkets and not in monopolies is produced by the American company Mad Croc Brands, Inc.
Germany	2	Vodka+energy (10% VOL) and V+energy (2,4% VOL) were produced by resp. Zarewitsch and Veltins in Germany.
Italy	0	Not found
Ireland	0	Not found (health department expressed concerns on ED)
Latvia	1	Dlight (2,9% VOL) by the Latvian Aldaris was found in supermarkets with taurine and caffeine as main ingredients.
Lithuania	3	Utenos Dlight, Light Beer + Pomegranate, Light Beer + Kofeinas were found in supermarkets (all had an alcohol volume of 2,9 % and produced by Utenos Alus in Lithuania). These were found in supermarkets drinks are introduced on the market in 2007.
Netherlands	3	Veltins V+ Energy (2,4% VOL), Royalty Red (5% VOL), Eristoff Red Flash (7% VOL). The first two are enetered on the Dutch market in 2008, Eristoff Red Flash was introduced in 2005. These drinks are all produced by European producers (2 Dutch and 1 German).
Poland	0	Only non-alcoholic energy drinks found in supermarkets
Romania	0	Only non-alcoholic energy drinks found in supermarkets
Russia	3	Jaguar original (9% VOL), Jaguar light (5,5% VOL), Sextrim (9% VOL) were found in the supermarkets.
Slovenia	1	Bandidos Power was found in supermarkets (4% VOL.) by the Slovenian producer Pivovarna Lasko. The main ingredient of this drink is guarana.
Spain	0	Not found

Availability AEDs in non-Member States

A distinction can be made between restrictions on (alcoholic) energy drinks in Member States and non-Member States. Non-Member States have more opportunities to prohibit (alcoholic) energy drinks than EU Member States due to trade agreements. Iceland, Norway and Turkey have stringent restrictions on energy drinks with a high amount of caffeine/taurine (more than 150 mg caffeine per litre). Consequently, we can see that only a few alcoholic energy drinks are introduced in these countries. Interestingly, these alcoholic energy drinks available do not contain taurine or caffeine as a main ingredient, but alternative stimulant ingredients as guarana and ginseng. It seems that by using guarana and ginseng instead of caffeine and taurine, alcohol producers try to circumvent existing regulations. Guarana, however, contains caffeine and it is questionable whether this drink is in agreement with existing restrictions on energy drinks in these countries.

Availability AEDs in Member States

For national governments in EU Member States it is more difficult to have these stringent regulations. France, Sweden and Denmark had restricted the sale of the non-alcoholic energy drink Red Bull. France had to withdraw their ban on this energy drink due to a decision by the European Court of Justice. The French government was forced to legalize Red Bull because EU trade agreements state that a product sold in the EU can only be banned if a health risk is proven and the ban is perceived as an appropriate tool to protect public health. From July 2008, Red Bull is available in its original formula on the French market. To our knowledge, the restriction in Denmark is still in place. Sweden only permits energy drinks to be sold in pharmacies as medicinal products.

In Member States with restrictions on alcoholic energy drinks we also find alcoholic energy drinks such as Cult which circumvent existing regulations by using other stimulating and energizing ingredients than caffeine or taurine. Before the summer of 2008, Red Bull sold their product in France with arginine instead of taurine to avoid the ban made by the French government.

Other Member States have less restrictive regulations on energy drinks or no restrictions at all. Finland for example, has a required warning label system on energy drinks. The National Product Control Agency for Welfare and Health (controls the legality of alcoholic beverages and the commerce of alcoholic drinks) recommended in 2006 to avoid the co-use of alcohol and energy drinks on the bases of cautiousness since so far there is no solid scientific proof of the safety of energy drinks or interaction with alcohol. In 2007 a law came into force which forbids the addition of vitamins and minerals into alcohol drinks (over 1,2 % of alcohol) (1925/2006/EC). The Finnish food safety authority (EVIRA) stated in 2003 that in the packaging labels of energy drinks the recommendation of not to be used with alcohol is mentioned. At the moment, EVIRA states in its internet pages that it is recommended not to use energy drinks simultaneously with heavy use of alcohol. Despite of the regulation and recommendation by EVIRA, EVIRA has given Madcroc permission to sell Croctail by retailers. Consequently, Croctail can be purchased in Finnish supermarkets.

We can see that in most of these countries without a ban on energy drinks more alcoholic energy drinks can be found. However, these drinks are mostly produced by national or European producers. American alcoholic energy drinks have not yet been found in European supermarkets that were examined by EUCAM contact persons.

At this moment, most alcoholic energy drinks in European countries are produced by European producers. Nevertheless, we notice that an increasing number of American non-alcoholic energy drinks are introduced on the European market. It is expected that the number of alcoholic energy drinks will increase within the next few years in European countries with no or only 'soft' regulations on alcoholic energy drinks. Especially in mature markets in Western Europe, alcoholic energy drinks can be a way to increase profit.

Producers of alcoholic energy drinks often produce non-alcoholic energy drinks as well. A clear distinction in the name and packaging of the alcohol containing product is not made.



Left: Alcoholic energy drink (4,7% VOL)
Right: Non-Alcoholic energy drink

We have seen the marketing strategy in which alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks share the same brand name for other alcoholic energy drinks as well. A non-alcoholic counterpart is used in a campaign to fight against breast cancer which is called 'Cult-Foundation' (www.cult-fonden.dk). The non-alcoholic and alcoholic energy drink of Cult are brought on the market under the same brand name. In this way the alcoholic energy drink can be associated with the fight against breast cancer in the eyes of the public opinion. It seems that alcohol producers try to circumvent existing alcohol marketing regulations in this way.



A positive association between the alcoholic energy drink and breast cancer is made by branding. The brand name 'Cult' is used for the non-alcoholic as well as the alcoholic energy drink.

Conclusion

Non-Member States have more stringent regulations on (alcoholic) energy drinks compared to EU Member States. It is difficult for EU Member States to maintain a ban on these drinks due to possible conflicts with EU trade agreements. A first exploration of the availability of alcoholic energy drinks shows that alcohol producers try to circumvent bans on alcoholic energy drinks by using guarana and ginseng instead of caffeine and taurine as stimulating ingredient. In general, however, the number of alcoholic energy drinks in countries without such a ban is larger. The alcoholic energy drinks in these countries are mainly produced in Europe. The large number of American alcoholic energy drinks have not yet reached the European market.

Please contact for more information Ms Avalon de Bruijn MSc (adebruijn@eucam.info) or visit our website www.eucam.info for more information and a list of EUCAM contact persons.

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