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Comment on the article „Life expectancy and alcohol use health burden in Poland after 2002”

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Among the significant reasons for the increase in mortality due to alcoholism, the authors of the article „Life expectancy and alcohol use health burden in Poland after 2002” [1] draw particular attention to the 30% reduction in excise duty on spirits instituted in October 2022. Both the then Prime Minister Leszek Miller and Minister of Finance G. Kolodko to this day remain proud of that decision. Naturally, the spirits industry and consumers – voters – were likewise delighted. Although the reduction itself may be defended with arguments claiming that it limited the shadow economy, which resulted in increased tax revenues (although in reality, this increase only became obvious later), I most definitely view the wholly passive subsequent excise policy adversely. Above all, annual increases in excise duty were abandoned; ideally, they should be aligned with increases in average earnings or at the very least, the inflation rate, which was not high at the time. With the consequences mentioned by Zatoński *et al.*, the economic availability of alcohol has increased significantly over the past 20 years. What’s worse, this bad practice will be continued in the years to come, because

the 5% yearly hikes in excise duty through 2026 are already considerably less than the inflation rate, which in 2022 may amount to as much as 20%. And that implies a further notable increase in the economic availability of alcohol as well as probably a rise in the number of alcohol-related fatalities. The excise duty on alcohol should be increased by at least a dozen or so percent in light of the current reality, which includes the conflict in the Ukraine, high inflation, the energy crisis, and the impending slowdown or even crisis in the economy. In the years to come, excise rates should be correlated to the average wage. The argument put out by the spirits industry, namely the danger of a significant growth in the shadow economy, is unfounded. Since the country’s Inland Revenue Service is quite capable of managing the shadow economies in fuel and tobacco, it will also cope perfectly well with the shadow economy in alcohol.

References

1. Zatoński WA, Janik-Koncewicz K, Zatoński M. Life expectancy and alcohol use health burden in Poland after 2002. *J Health Inequal* 2022; 8(1): 4-16.