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STRATEGIC FORUM OF THE SLOVENIAN BEVERAGES SECTOR 2021 ALL ABOUT FUTURE CHALLENGES

Press release

Portorož, Slovenia, 19 October 2021: The Strategic Forum took place in Portorož, bringing together soft drinks and natural mineral waters producers, winemakers, and brewers. Together with representatives of ministries and European associations, they sought answers to the challenges of the sectors. The common concern of all is cohesive, sustainable, responsible, and competitive business, imposed by the constraints of new legislative frameworks. The frameworks focus on creating a predictable, stimulating, and competitive business environment, sustainable water management, management of plastic and other packaging, and the development of nutrition and alcoholic policy and the green transition to a circular economy.

The Strategic Forum of the Slovenian Beverages Sector, organized in Portorož by the Slovenian Beverages Association, the Slovenian Association of Brewers, and the Slovenian Association of Winemakers, all operating within the Chamber of Agricultural and Food Enterprises at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia, highlighted the main achievements, topics, and challenges of the sectors. The beverage sector is a very important sector within the Slovenian food processing industry and consequently the Slovenian economy. In Slovenia, over a hundred companies are operating in the beverage industry throughout the country, employing over 1,200 workers, and creating above-average added value. The business of the sectors was severely affected by the COVID-19 epidemic, which connected the sectors even more.

In the introductory part, **dr. Jože Podgoršek**, Slovenian Minister for agriculture, forestry and food emphasized the importance of joint activities and cooperation and search for solutions along the entire food chain. He emphasized the importance of the participating sectors for local self-sufficiency.

Dr. Metka Gorišek, State Secretary at the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, presented the ministry's plans in the field of amendments to the Environmental Protection Act and the regulation regarding concessions and water duties. The ministry wants to set equal rules for all water users for commercial purposes. She presented the ministry's plans about packaging and waste packaging.

The Slovenian Beverages Association has 11 members. The association is a member of the European Soft Drinks Association (UNESDA) and the Natural Mineral Waters Association (NMWE). In 2015, the Slovenian Beverages Association was the first sector to commit itself to socially responsible behaviour in the field of advertising, labelling, and changing the nutritional composition of soft drinks. By signing an additional commitment just a month ago, they committed to reduce added sugar content by an additional 5% by the end of 2025.

Significant challenges await the sector in the field of packaging. The Single Use Plastics Directive (SUP) requires each Member States to take the necessary measures to ensure the separate collection of waste beverage bottles for recycling equal to 77% by weight by 2025 and 90% by weight by 2029. However, as far as beverage bottles are concerned, each Member State must ensure that PET beverage bottles contain at least 25% recycled plastic from 2025, and at least 30% recycled plastic from 2030. The most important thing is to create a closed system that ensures the return of bottles and reuse within the sector. "Another important segment is the availability of water resources, which should be planned long term. The solution should promote sustainable water uptake and supply (in line with UN Sustainable Development Goal 6) and the economic use of water resources in all sectors (in accordance with Directive 2000/60/EC). It should encourage competitiveness and eliminate discrimination between water rights holders based on concession and a water permit. It should ensure transparency in the field



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of charging for water rights: from the point of view of equal treatment of all water users for economic purposes, from the point of view of lower administrative burden on the state and economy, and equal treatment of all types of beverages," said **Marian Šefčovič**, president of the Slovenian Beverages Association.

Nicholas Hodac, Director General of UNESDA Soft Drinks Europe pointed out: "It is truly a privilege to attend the Strategic Forum of the Slovenian Beverage Sector and contribute to the discussion on the future of the Slovenian drink system. This event takes place at a crucial time in Europe's soft drinks industry's cooperation with policymakers as we drive our sustainability and health and nutrition initiatives forward. The time is now to create a supportive legal framework that helps us achieve a fully circular economy for our packaging and deliver on our sugar reduction commitments. Our consumers and our planet expect and deserve that our sector continues to drive major transformational changes to become more sustainable and further promote healthier drink experiences. Together with our Slovenian colleagues and policymakers, we can shape a better future for our sector with a greater positive impact on people's lives."

The European Association of Natural Mineral Waters (NMWE) also presented its views at the Forum. "NMWE's members have a long history of sustainable resource management, environment protection and recyclable packaging. Natural mineral and spring waters are natural and healthy products, with a diversity in taste and mineral composition reflecting their terroir. They have a key role to play in supporting health and well-being", said **Patricia Fosselard**, Secretary General at NMWE. "The specificities of natural mineral waters, and our members' sustainability credentials, make our sector a natural partner towards reaching the EU's carbon-neutrality goal. NMWE will continue to be fully committed to supporting all our members on their ambitious journey."

Water rights and duties are also important for brewers, members of the Slovenian Brewers Association. Brewers want a fair excise duties policy. They are committed to a comprehensive approach to sustainable, green, and responsible action, which will also be marked in the commitments of the brewing sector. "The aim of the association is to place beer on the gastronomic map of Slovenia as a local, high-quality treasure offer for domestic and foreign guests with high added value. Beer is recognized as a natural, low-alcohol beverage that, when consumed responsibly, can become a part of a balanced diet and is indisputably part of the cultural heritage," emphasized **Andrej Sluga**, vice-president of the association.

At the EU level, the European Brewers' Association, which connects over 11,000 breweries and creates over 2.6 million jobs, draws attention to the necessary changes in national tax legislation, especially for beers containing less than 3.5% alcohol. It emphasizes the importance of labelling energy value and ingredients in beer. According to **Pierre-Olivier Bergeron**, Secretary General at the Brewers of Europe, brewers pay special attention to the sustainability of their business, their attitude towards the environment and packaging, and its reuse. He also pointed out the large decline in the sector's revenues due to the COVID-19 epidemic and praised Slovenian brewers and their contribution to European culture and economy. "I would like to commend the brewers of Slovenia for not only brewing great beers that cater for people's responsible enjoyment but also for their contribution to European culture and the economy. Sustainability is part of brewers' DNA and The Brewers of Europe supports its members in ensuring that the beer sector, together with the other beverage families, contributes to the EU Green Deal through concrete actions and commitments towards consumers and the society at large," he concluded.

The Association of Slovenian Winemakers, established this year, connects 10 wine cellars. **Borut Fakin**, president of the association, pointed out: "The association's goals are to develop the potential of Slovenian viticulture and winemaking in domestic and foreign markets, to formulate a strategic plan for the sector and to eliminate unfair



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business practices with wine. The formation of the Wine Promotion Agency is actively in progression.” The association is part of the European CEEV association. Winegrowers and winemakers are primarily focused on restructuring and reorienting vineyards. It is estimated that at least 400 ha of vineyards would need to be restored per year, which would amount to up to 22 million euro per year, and the funds available for this purpose under the future strategic plan of the CAP are just over 4 million euro per year, which is significantly too low. Modernization of production hardware, purchase of special machinery, and support for the introduction of more environmentally friendly production and processing technologies are necessary to improve the competitiveness of the sector. It is especially important for winemakers to uniformly promote wine in domestic and foreign markets, by promoting local stories and green destinations. It is unacceptable for vineyards across Europe to move to the lowlands and replace agricultural land intended for primary cereal production.

New policies, in particular alcohol policy and a cancer strategy, bring many restrictions for winegrowers and winemakers. European policies for viticulture and winemaking are increasingly focusing on sustainable production and changing communication with consumers, who are increasingly striving for a responsible diet. Therefore, the labelling of nutritional value and ingredients is becoming increasingly important. At the same time, the requirements of the World Health Organization in the field of alcohol policy are increasingly interfering with the free movement of goods and services on the EU market and significantly changing business models and requiring increasing innovation in the sector. **Dr. Ignacio Sánchez Recarte**, Secretary General of the European Committee of Wine Enterprises (CEEV), pointed out in his presentation: *“Wine is undeniably a solid pillar of the socio-economic and environmental sustainability of EU rural areas and agricultural economy. However, our sector is at serious risk: firstly, because some policymakers are overlooking science and do not acknowledge that wine can be part of a healthy and balanced diet and lifestyle. Secondly because as producers, we must take our responsibility and adapt in time to the climate challenge while meeting new consumer expectations. Fortunately, in this journey, we can count on a new asset: e-labels or digital labelling. A multilingual tool to harmonise and boost information to consumers, from the list of ingredients to responsible consumption messages or sustainable information of our wines. And all of it while preserving the EU Single Market for wine products.”*

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Naložbo sofinancirata Republika Slovenija in Evropska unija iz Evropskega sklada za regionalni razvoj.