



INTERVIEW WITH ANDRÉ BRUNNSBERG, CHAIRMAN OF THE EUROPEAN BEER CONSUMER UNION (EBCU)

BY THE EDITOR.

THE INTERVIEW TOOK PLACE AT THE BREWERS OF EUROPE (BRUSSELS, BELGIUM), ON THE 09TH OF MARCH 2023.

Hi André, can you introduce yourself?

André Brunnsberg (AB): My name is André, I'm from Helsinki, Finland. I have been active within EBCU since 2009, when I attended my first meeting in Liverpool as a delegate from Finland (every member organisation has two delegates who can attend the bi-annual meetings organised in Spring and Autumn). I was then elected to the Executive Committee in 2017 (composed of five members) and last year elected as Chairman. My main job is in software development in supply chain management and in addition to that, I also been working on beer-related themes for the last 20 years (beer journalist, international beer judge and consultant for breweries in recipe development).

Can you tell us more about the EBCU?

AB: The EBCU, which today represents close to 180 000 beer consumers across Europe, was founded in 1990 by three national member organisations: CAMRA (United Kingdom), Objectieve Bierproevers (Belgium, now Zythos) and PINT (Netherlands). Then, in 2008, a formal constitution was signed and since then the organisation is run with a professional secretariat. Except for the secretariat, all the other activities are run on a volunteer basis.

The latest step in developing the EBCU from a formal point of view has been to register it officially in Belgium as a non-profit international NGO. We had checked the different options in different countries to register our association and concluded that the two international options were Belgium or Switzerland. We opted for Belgium, because of our love for Belgian beers and also due to our activities towards the European Union and the Commission. To register the EBCU, we worked together with a law firm to help us with the administration and the Belgian bureaucracy. Luckily, the process is now almost complete: it is only missing King Philippe's signature. And then, we will officially exist, and we can formalise our relationships with partners like The Brewers of Europe and BEUC (the European Consumer Union).

You told us you will be developing activities towards the European Union. What are currently EBCU's policy priorities?

AB: One of EBCU's priorities is to support and protect beer consumers, to protect and promote European beer styles (we have our Manifesto on our website: <https://www.ebcu.org/manifesto/>) and also fight for fair beer pricing. When it comes to prices and taxes, the Member States themselves are responsible, as the European Union does not have much power on the matter. We are also working on our long-term strategy and future goals and aims. Environmental issues will increasingly become a priority, for example with the Commission's proposal on the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation where we currently are collecting our national members' views. It is very interesting to see the diversity of systems in place in all the Member States and this Regulation will change a lot of things. We need to see what our position on the matter is.

Another important environmental consideration is obviously to support local beers. However, it needs to be reconciled with the desire to also discover and taste non-local beers. During the pandemic, we witnessed a clear movement to support the local brewery and this needs to be continued, from the smaller to the larger breweries.

"WE WILL SPEAK ABOUT GENDER EQUALITY IN THE BREWING INDUSTRY AND PUBS."

We will have our annual Spring meeting this coming Friday and Saturday (10 and 11 March 2023, Editor's note) where, among other topics, we will also speak about gender equality in the brewing industry and pubs. We have observed issues in some beer competitions where beers with offensive labels have won awards. As a beer consumer organisation, we like to endorse beer judging competitions that comply with our recommendations on the matter, including on the topic of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). We do not want to point fingers at the competitions we do not support, but rather emphasise positively the ones we support because they adhere to our standards (The guidance on beer competitions is available on our website: <https://www.ebcu.org/beer-competitions/>).

"ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES WILL INCREASINGLY BECOME A PRIORITY."

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EBCU's new Executive Committee

In addition to being involved in policy discussions, you also offer activities for your members. Can you elaborate on them?

AB: EBCU is also a networking organisation for our members, and we help them through information and best-practices sharing. A concrete example is in member retention and attracting new members. Many of our organisations lost members during the pandemic and getting them back and attracting new ones is financially important for many of them. In contrast, some national homebrewing associations have gained a lot of members. We offer practical information on how to run associations; for example, with the use of more effective digital tools, and how to organise beer festivals and beer competitions, some of which are even organised by our member organisations.

"WE DO ORGANISE WEBINARS WHICH ARE FREE FOR ANYONE TO JOIN. THE RANGE OF COVERED TOPICS RANGE WIDELY."

We do not organise direct gatherings of all our members. However, we do organise webinars which are free for anyone to join. The topics covered are diverse, including beer and food pairing, environmental issues, traditional beer styles (like Sahti...), and these webinars are gaining more and more attraction. This is part of the beer education that we want to promote. Additionally, homebrewing is growing a lot in many countries because there is an increasing interest in beer, the brewing process and the ingredients involved in it. We are working to help connecting national homebrewing organizations on an international level.

In general, we are trying to grow the organisation and gain more member organisations. The latest one to join is Iceland and we are now looking into Luxembourg. However, it is difficult to find members in Eastern Europe (apart from Poland and the Czech Republic, where national associations are well-organised). The biggest achievement in the last decade was creating an association in Germany (the GBCU) and having them joining EBCU. Currently, we have nineteen member associations in seventeen countries. With more members, we gain a better insight what is happening around Europe in the brewing sector and beer culture!



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