

The Battle Against Tobacco, Cancer and Heart Disease

The adoption of the Tobacco Products Directive

19th February 12:30h to 14:15h

Summary of the meeting

Mr Busoi MEP (Chair of the MEP Heart Group, ALDE, Rom) and Mr Peterle (Chair of MAC, EPP, SI) opened the meeting. Mr Busoi stressed that in the European Union, cancer and cardiovascular diseases (CVD) account for 65% of mortality. CVD accounts for 40% and cancer for 26%. Tobacco is a major risk factor for these diseases; it is in fact the most important modifiable risk factor. 16% of deaths from CVD in men and 5% of deaths in women, in the European Union, are due to smoking. A higher proportion of premature deaths from CVD are due to smoking: in the age group 35-69 years, smoking causes 28% of CVD deaths in men and 13% in women.

Mr Peterle stressed the importance of prevention, especially in view of the shocking figures about girls smoking, and the rise this gives in lung cancer among women. A recent study showed that across eight European and Scandinavian countries, 270,000 people are diagnosed every year with cancers caused by smoking. Smoking is known to be a major contributor to a variety of cancers, including lung, colon and bladder cancers. In addition, current smokers are 2.6 times as likely as never smokers to develop a tobacco-related cancer and ex-smokers have 1.5 times the risk.¹ Tobacco use is the most important risk factor for cancer causing 22% of global cancer deaths and 71% of global lung cancer deaths. Deaths from cancer worldwide are projected to continue rising, with an estimated 13.1 million deaths in 2030.²

Florence Berteletti Kemp, Director of the Smoke Free Partnership presented the challenges of the Commission's proposal. She highlighted that the main priority for the public health community is standardised packaging and pictorial warnings covering 80% of the front and back of pack. She showed a video demonstrating that children find cigarette packs attractive and underlining the importance of not allowing the package to be a marketing tool that makes cigarette attractive for children and young people but rather to present stark information about the consequences of

¹ Impact of Cigarette Smoking on Cancer Risk in the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition Study, 2012

² International Agency for Research on Cancer, 2012

smoking that will deter uptake of smoking. The video can be downloaded here:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_z-4S8iicc

Other challenges with regard to the proposal are:

- Ingredients, flavourings and additives. Prohibition of certain flavourings and additives is mentioned in the proposal, but it does not go far enough.
- Not including a ban on display of cigarette packs at points of sale.

Mr Tonio Borg, EU Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection, informed the audience that the main aim of the proposal is to prevent youngsters from picking up the habit of smoking. The overall objective is to reduce the number of smokers by 2% over 5 years. “We don’t prohibit smoking”, the Commissioner said, “we make it less attractive to the young. That is why tobacco must look like tobacco and must taste like tobacco.” The Commissioner also stressed the fact that health is a strong value in itself and it also has an economic value. He stressed that the Directive is unlikely to have net negative economic consequences not least because money not spend on tobacco would be spent in other sectors.

The Commissioner emphasised that pictorial warnings will help people take informed decisions by making it clear that using this product will damage their health.

As to Snus and smokeless tobacco, Commissioner Borg mentioned that people believe that when there is no smoke, there is no harm. But, the Commissioner pointed out smokeless tobacco is also harmful. The ban on Snus will remain in place: Sweden will be allowed to keep it in concession to sell Snus but in exchange must comply with its obligation not to bring Snus on the market in other European countries.

Some additives will be allowed, but not if they fall into the category of characterising flavours.

Rapporteur Linda McAvan (MEP, S&D, UK) spoke out in support of the proposal, because it will help prevent young people from starting smoking. “We have to look at why the smoking trends in young people are going up now and take adequate measures to help them not take up the habit.” She said agreeing with Commissioners Borg that tobacco should look and taste like tobacco, not something you want to be seen with.

Eugene Lennon, Health Permanent Representative for Ireland (Council Presidency from 1 January 2013 until 30 June 2013) mentioned that for Ireland, the focus would be on standardised packaging, tobacco as a public health issue, the prohibition of slim cigarettes. He also mentioned that at the informal Health Council in March 2013, Ireland will put the issue of smoke free environments on the agenda. Ireland was pleased to see the Commission adopted the proposal at the end of 2012 (as promised) and intends to move this dossier forward quickly.

During the **Question and answer session**, the Commissioner answered questions on smoker’s free will; Snus and other ingredients, e-cigarettes and marketing of tobacco. Commissioner Borg stated that free will is not an issue: the new proposal does not prohibit smoking; it just makes it less attractive for young people to start. He also said that it is important to consider who pays the bill for smoking-related diseases: the revenue of tobacco is less than the bill the state has to pay for taking care of people suffering from tobacco related diseases. He also indicated that Snus is but a small

part of the Directive. Member States had forbidden Snus when Sweden entered the EU, and the Commission sticks to status quo in the current proposal. He further stressed the fact that the Commission has tried to make tobacco look and taste like tobacco, in an attempt to present it (market it) in a way which does not make it more attractive to young people.

In her concluding remarks, **Nessa Childers MEP, Vice President of the MAC group (S&D, Ireland)** stressed the importance of policy makers in the EP to work together with the rapporteur to protect EU citizen's health from tobacco use. She invited all participants to come to the Exhibition on Tobacco Cessation organised by the MAC group in the European Parliament.