



Brussels, 19 February - Today the chairs of two prominent health groups in the European Parliament (EP) have renewed their support for a strong Directive on Tobacco Products. Representing the largest political groups in the EP, the European Parliament's MEP Heart Group and the MEPs against Cancer (MAC) have joined forces in the battle against tobacco, cancer and heart disease **(1)**.

"Tobacco products should look and taste like tobacco products – and not be masked by designs or disguised by flavours. This is why the Commission proposal focuses on two key aspects: first, packaging and labelling; and second, flavours," said Tonio Borg, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy.

"Smoking is the biggest avoidable health threat in the EU. We know that it is children - not adults - who start smoking. If we can stop children and young people from starting before the age of 25 then we will have gone a long way to solving the problem - and that is why we need to take measures to stop companies marketing cigarettes at the young," said Linda McAvan MEP (S&D, UK) and Rapporteur for the proposed Tobacco Products Directive.

Tobacco is a major preventable risk factor for cancer **(2)** and cardiovascular diseases (CVD). Accounting for over 65% of total mortality in the EU, both diseases cause more than 1.2 **(3)** and 1.9 million **(4)** annual deaths respectively. *"The incidence of cancer and heart disease among smokers is reaching pandemic proportions. This is saddening and shameful and the EU should put an end to it. We must be vigilant against the massive negative industry lobbying campaign which is now moving out of the shadows and trying to delay, block and defeat this legislation,"* said Nessa Childers MEP (S&D, IE), Vice President of MAC.

"The proposed Tobacco Products Directive (TPD) was born out of concern. Concern, in particular, about young people who pick up smoking at a time when they have little understanding of the impact this habit has on their future lives and health," stated Cristian Silviu Buşoi MEP (ALDE, RO), Co-Chair of the MEP Heart Group.

It is now up to the European Parliament to show that it is able and willing to make a difference in people's lives. The previous Directive, adopted back in 2001, has been outpaced by the tobacco industry's fertile imagination. As a result, the EU is today ill-equipped to prevent Europe's youth, in particular girls, from becoming addicted to smoking. **(5)** A number of countries in the EU, notably Italy and the Czech Republic, have seen large increases in smoking among 15-year old boys and girls. Latvia, Hungary, Estonia and Slovakia have seen increases particularly among girls. **(6)**

*Smoking is a merciless adversary. It takes the lives of 700,000 people in the EU every year, far more than other major cause of death, like car accidents, drugs or murder **(7)**.* Despite 50 years of clear evidence that tobacco use is lethal, smoking remains prevalent **(8)** in many countries across the EU. *"The Commission-proposed TPD demonstrates the EU's commitment to cancer control and complements prevention actions within the European Partnership for Action Against Cancer, but we need to ensure that the Directive is not watered down in any way,"* pointed out Alojz Peterle MEP (EPP, SLO) and MAC President.

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- **Notes to editors**

- (1) Hosted by the [European Parliament's MEP Heart Group](#) and the [Group of MEPs against Cancer \(MAC\)](#), the [lunch debate](#) was co-organised by the [European Heart Network \(EHN\)](#), the [European Society of Cardiology](#), the [Association of European Cancer Leagues \(ECL\)](#), the [Smokefree Partnership](#), the [European Public Health Alliance \(EPHA\)](#), and the [Royal College of Physicians \(RCP\)](#).
- (2) Lung cancer has already become the main cause of cancer death among women in the UK and Poland, overtaking breast cancer. In fact, according to research carried out by investigators from King's College London, over the next thirty years lung cancer among females will rise thirty times faster than males.
- (3) [Eurostat: Causes of death statistics](#) (Data from September 2012)
- (4) [2012 European Cardiovascular Disease Statistics](#)
- (5) [Women are now smoking nearly as much as men in many European countries and girls often smoke more than boys.](#) - The European Heart Network (EHN)
- (6) Health at a Glance: Europe 2012 - [Smoking and alcohol consumption among children.](#) The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
- (7) [Tobacco in the EU: Why we care](#) – The European Commission
- (8) [World Heart Day Press Campaign 'United for Heart Health'](#) - MEP Heart Group

- **About**

- The [MEP Heart Group](#)

The main objective of the MEP Heart Group is to promote measures that will help reduce the burden of CVD in the European Union and to raise awareness of the disease among target audiences by a series of dedicated activities. The MEP Heart Group is led by two Co-Chairs, Linda McAvan, MEP and Cristian Silviu Buşoi, MEP. The European Heart Network and the European Society of Cardiology provide support to the MEP Heart Group by running its secretariat. For more information.

- The [MEPs Against Cancer \(MAC\)](#)

The MAC group is an informal all-party informal group of MEPs at the European Parliament committed to actions against cancer as an EU priority and to harnessing European health policy to that end.

- **Contact information**

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