



PRESS RELEASE

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The tobacco industry- NOT just another industry.

Tobacco control experts met with European Union Health Commissioner Mrs Androulla Vassiliou and prominent Members of the European Parliament today (July 15) to urge for the tobacco industry to be excluded from influencing public health policies.

Tobacco kills around five million smokers worldwide, annually - more people than AIDS, legal and illegal drugs, road accidents, murder and suicide combined. The World Health Organisation (WHO) predicts that more than 8 million people will die from tobacco every year by 2030, if current smoking rates persist, and that 80% of these deaths will be in developing countries.

Participants heard from leading tobacco control experts about their experience of tobacco industry interference with tobacco control policies.

Health advocates and public officials around the world agree that the tobacco industry should have no influence on public health policies as its business interests directly conflict with the goals of public health. The World Health Organisation's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) enshrines this concept in international law for the first time. Countries that have signed and ratified the FCTC are required to reflect its principles in their national legislation and policies.

Avril Doyle MEP, hosting the event, stressed:

“The tobacco industry is a potent enemy for those who want to support smoke free environment and the importance of implementing Article 5.3 of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Treaty cannot be overemphasized.”

Commissioner Vassiliou was presented with the third edition in the 'Spotlight on the FCTC' series prepared by the Smoke Free Partnership. This latest edition looks at the reasoning behind Article 5.3 of the FCTC - which obliges parties to 'act to protect (public health) policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry' - and its implications for policy making at national, EU and International level.

Commissioner Vassiliou said:

"We should not base our actions on the way the tobacco industry acted in the past, acts now or will act in the future. The deadly nature of the product remains the same and this should be our driving force. This means we have to protect public health policies from commercial and vested interests regardless of the actions of the tobacco industry. Again, strong and transparent institutions and processes are essential for that purpose. Ensuring a broad scope of the obligation and guaranteeing the strictest possible transparency rules in all Parties to the FCTC would constitute the strongest, most realistic and effective way to reach our goal'.

Speaking on behalf of Smoke Free Partnership, Jean King of Cancer Research UK told the audience:

“The tobacco industry makes a product that causes more than a quarter of cancer deaths, all of them entirely preventable. It has a track record of seeking to mislead the public and policy makers, for example, by concerted efforts to distort established scientific findings and processes. It cannot be treated as just any other industry.”

Mr David Byrne, former European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection who supports the work of the Smoke Free Partnership, said :

“I value and support the work being undertaken by the Smoke Free Partnership in its aim to promote tobacco control advocacy and in particular its determination to achieve an effective implementation of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). While in office as the Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection I refused to meet the tobacco industry. Any such meetings tend to legitimise the activities of this industry which manufactures and sells the only consumer product that kills half of its consumers when used as recommended by the manufacturers. I urge the only worthwhile interpretation of Article 5.3 of the FCTC as excluding the tobacco industry from any consultation process involving the setting and implementation of public health policies related to tobacco control. We should not invite the fox into the hen house.”

UK entrepreneur, Duncan Ballantyne, who supports the aims of Smoke Free Partnership, said of floating the idea of a ‘business against tobacco’ campaign:

"I would love to set up a business against tobacco campaign: In all my business life I have never met such ignorant & arrogant people than the Directors of BAT. I would rather swim in shark infested waters with my left arm hanging off than invest or work in this abysmal and uncaring industry."

The meeting was particularly timely as the third Conference of the Parties of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control will take place in South Africa in November. Parties, including 25 of the EU Member States, will be debating draft guidelines on interaction with the tobacco industry. It is paramount that that the strongest possible guidelines are adopted and that Europe maintains its leadership position in the FCTC process.

ENDS

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

BACKGROUND

The FCTC is the world's first international public health treaty. It recognises the harm that tobacco products and the companies that produce them can cause. The Treaty sets out legally binding objectives and principles that countries or regional economic integration organisations (such as the European Community) who ratified and thus agreed to implement the Treaty must follow.

'Tobacco is the single largest cause of avoidable death in the European Union', a fact propagated by the EU, whose Member States (with the exception of Italy and the Czech Republic) have signed and ratified the FCTC. The principles of the Treaty must therefore be reflected in their national legislation and policies.

The aim of Article 5.3 is to ensure that policies can be put into practice without interference from the vested interests of the tobacco industry, whose very survival depends on keeping people smoking.

The solution does not require the discovery of a breakthrough cure or vaccination. The key to solving the problem is in the implementation of public policies. **Government leaders hold the cure for the tobacco epidemic.**

The 'Spotlight on the FCTC' is a series of briefing papers on the FCTC and EU's associated obligations prepared by the Smoke Free Partnership. The third edition looks at Article 5.3 of the FCTC.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION SEE:

For the full text of the FCTC: http://www.who.int/fctc/text_download/en/index.html

The Framework Convention Alliance for Tobacco Control (FCA): <http://www.fctc.org/>

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The **Smoke Free Partnership** is a strategic, independent and flexible partnership between the **European Respiratory Society** (ERS at www.ersnet.org), **Cancer Research UK** (CR-UK at www.cancerresearchuk.org), the **Institut National du Cancer** (INCa at www.e-cancer.fr) and the **European Heart Network** (EHN at www.ehnheart.org). It aims to promote tobacco control advocacy and policy research at EU and national levels in collaboration with other EU health organisations and EU tobacco control networks.