WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY 2017
TOBACCO: A THREAT TO
DEVELOPMENT

European Parliament, Brussels, 31 May 2017
Policy recommendations and event summary
Background and objectives

The policy debate on “Tobacco: A threat to development” was held on the 31 May 2017 in the European Parliament. The event was organised by the Smoke free Partnership in cooperation with the European CanCer Organisation (ECCO), the European COPD Coalition (ECC), the Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL), The European Public Health Alliance (EPHA), EuroHealthNet, and the Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME).

The debate was hosted by MEP Linda McAvan, Chair of the European Parliament Development Committee. It was a key event in advancing the awareness of the political debate regarding the threats that the tobacco industry poses to the sustainable development of all countries, including the health and economic well-being of their citizens. The event also outlined the contribution that the European Union already plays in development policies and highlighted how it could further ease the burden of tobacco in developing countries.

The debate benefitted from the participation of high level speakers who brought a diverse practical experience in the implementation of tobacco control within development policies, at the governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental level:

- Dr. Vytenis Andriukaitis, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety
- Kristina Mauer-Stender, Program Manager for Tobacco Control, World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe
- Aida Liha Matejicke, Head of Unit DEVCO B4 – Education, Health, Research, Culture, DG for International Cooperation and Development
- Patricio Marquez, Lead Health Specialist, Health, Nutrition and Population Global Practice, World Bank
- Tih Ntiabang, Framework Convention Alliance Regional Coordinator for the AFRO Region
- Laura Graen, Journalist and tobacco control expert, Unfairtobacco
- Prof. Martin Raw, Director, International Centre for Tobacco Cessation

Key questions for the debate

- Why is it important to connect development policy and tobacco control policy?
- Which examples of best practice on development policy can be identified to enhance tobacco control policies?
- What can be done to bridge the gap between development and health policy makers?
- What are the short, medium and long term measures that could be put into place in the EU in order to meet the Sustainable Development agenda?
- How can the EU and its Member States make sure that the FCTC is embedded into SDG 3?
- What can the EU do to exchange knowledge and share lessons learned, both between development and health governmental ministries within EU member states and with countries outside the EU?

Background

The FCTC is the world’s first international, legally binding health treaty. Its gold standard tobacco control interventions are based on the latest scientific evidence. In order to maximize the success of the FCTC and ensure its implementation and impact, tobacco control multisectoral policies should be strengthened. The FCTC constitutes a science-based approach to tobacco control and public health policy. It has considerably helped to advance tobacco control across the globe in the past and is continuing to do so.

Much has been achieved during the last decade — smoke free laws, increased tobacco taxes, graphic health warnings and plain tobacco packaging now protect many people around the world.
Three major themes emerged during discussion:

• Firstly, implementing the WHO FCTC, an inter-sectoral effort, should be an urgent priority for governments. As the FCTC enters its second decade, many Parties still face high rates of disease and mortality from tobacco use. It has also been shown that those Parties that implement the FCTC comprehensively see the highest health gains envisaged in the treaty.

• Secondly, through the implementation of tobacco control measures, such as raising taxes, government create win-win situations in which public health is improved, the tobacco costs to the society are reduced, all while supporting the financing of priority development programs.

• Thirdly, the main obstacle to the implementation of the FCTC measures remains the tobacco industry, with health advocates denouncing its power and resources particularly in developing countries. Moreover, more should be done to help those trying to quit.

Highlights from keynote speakers:

Dr. Vytenis Andriukaitis, European Commissioner for Health and Food safety

Tobacco consumption – one of the biggest public health problems of our time

Commissioner Andriukaitis recalled that tobacco is the primary preventable cause of death at the global level. Tobacco consumption is estimated to cause one billion deaths in this century, with cumulative deaths between 1950 and 2050 being expected to accrue to 520 million. It causes 700,000 deaths in the EU every year and contributes to health inequalities. Despite considerable progress made in recent years, the number of smokers in the EU is still high. More than every fourth European smokes. Large inequalities exist within the EU with regard to tobacco prevalence and the level of tobacco control policy. More action is needed to implement effective policies, improve existing initiatives, and share practice across the EU and beyond.

The Commissioner emphasised that the WHO FCTC is our most important tool to tackle tobacco use worldwide, particularly in low- or middle- income countries, where as much as 80% of premature deaths from tobacco occur. He stressed that The Commission is committed to continue supporting the implementation of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in Member States, and also to support them towards the swift ratification of the Illicit Trade Protocol.

Patricio V. Marquez, Lead Public Health Specialist, Coordinator Global Tobacco Control Program World Bank Group

Mr Marquez recalled World Bank work in analysing the economic and development impact of tobacco use. As the largest cause of preventable disease and death in the world, tobacco use also translates into high health care spending. But we know what to do: tobacco control works. Tobacco control, and tobacco taxation in particular, is a win-win policy measure that generates public health benefits by reducing consumption among smokers and preventing addiction among the youth; as well as additional tax revenue to fund priority investments and programs that benefit the entire population.
Ms Liha-Matejicek stressed that the EU remains committed to fight the tobacco epidemic, both within and outside its borders. To this purpose, the EU supports the FCTC Secretariat in its work to strengthen anti-tobacco legislation, to foster south-south and triangular cooperation networks and to reduce the influence of the tobacco industry on national processes and legislation. At the same time EU funding to the FCTC helps identifying alternative sources of livelihoods for tobacco farmers.

Laura Graen, Journalist and tobacco control advocate, Unfairtobacco

Ms Graen emphasised that tobacco control is a very important tool to achieving the sustainable development goals. She gave some examples of how tobacco control policies could be used around the world:

- **Health (SDG3)**, where tobacco control - The Philippines more than doubled the number of beneficiaries for health insurance subsidies, using money raised by tobacco taxes
- **Zero Hunger (SDG2)** - 10 million people could be fed if food was grown instead of tobacco.
- **No Poverty (SDG1)** - In India alone, an additional 15 million people fall below the poverty line, once the effects of tobacco consumption within the family are taken into account.

In particular, tobacco taxation could raise funds for government policies – currently governments allocate USD 1bn to tobacco control; if all countries raised tobacco taxes by 80% a total of USD 141bn could be raised worldwide, at least some of which could be allocated to further tobacco control measures. Finally she called on governments and civil society to ensure that tobacco industry does not hijack the sustainable development goals. Tobacco companies are not legitimate stakeholders in any political process.

Tih Ntiabang, Regional Coordinator for the AFRO Region, Framework Convention Alliance

Mr Ntiabang recalled that tobacco use in the African region is very prominent, and in the region the FCTC has been ratified by 43 parties, along with one signatory and 3 non-signatories. Implementation of the FCTC measures is however slow, and tobacco control is still hugely under-resourced partly because it is framed as only a health issue. To date only 15 countries in AFRO have pictorial warnings that cover 30% or more of cigarette packs, 12 countries have comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, 8 countries have smoke-free policies for all indoor public places, workplaces and public places, and 2 countries have tobacco taxes of 75% or more of the price of the most widely sold cigarette brands.

Mr Ntiabang stressed that the burden of tobacco is a development issue that must be addressed through global action to ensure a sustainable future. This can only be done if our governments incorporate strong tobacco control policies into existing health and development strategies, and development aid agencies invest in strategies to enhance national tobacco control efforts.
Martin Raw, Director, International Centre for Tobacco Cessation

Prof. Raw recalled that over 60% of current smokers who do not stop smoking will die of a tobacco-caused disease. Treatment is however not taken seriously or considered as a policy: implementation is slow, and the perceived costs are seen as problematic. But as 62 million days of life are lost each day for the approximately 500 million current adult smokers, more should be done to help those trying to quit.

World No Tobacco Day Award ceremony

Kristina Mauer-Stender, Program Manager for Tobacco Control, World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe, presented the World No Tobacco Day Award to two of the 2017 recipients from the WHO Europe region. She stressed that tobacco control is the most effective means to reduce by one third the premature deaths from non-communicable diseases (NCDs) globally by 2030, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Full implementation of the WHO FCTC is therefore integral to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. She warned that nothing will happen automatically just because implementation of the WHO FCTC is included in the SDGs. This decision certainly gives the WHO FCTC a higher profile but it is up to countries to take action.

Accepting the WNTD Award on behalf of the Irish department of Health, Fenton Howell, National Tobacco Control Advisor, stated that the Department of Health in Ireland is honoured that its work in the area of tobacco control has been recognised by the WHO. He accepted the award on behalf of the numerous public servants, politicians, non-governmental organisations and other key stakeholders who have worked closely together to reduce the impact of smoking on the health of our population in Ireland. He also expressed the commitment of the Department of Health to continuing to implement the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in the future and to offer support to other countries wishing to follow suit.

Accepting the WNTD Award, Sonja von Eichborn, Director of Unfairtobacco thanked the WHO for its recognition and acknowledgment of Unfairtobacco’s work with this award. As a project run by a small development NGO, Unfairtobacco looks at tobacco control with a holistic approach, covering issues from child labour to deforestation to poverty and health. It was encouraged by this award to keep working with international partners who supported Unfairtobacco in the past years.
Selected photos from the event