



Tobacco directive: MEPs reach agreement with Council of Ministers

Committees Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety [18-12-2013 - 12:15]

An agreement on draft legislation to make tobacco products less attractive to young people was reached on Wednesday by MEPs and the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of Ministers. This legislation would require all packs to carry a health warning covering 65% of their surface. E-cigarettes should be regulated, either as medicinal products, if they are presented as having curative or preventive properties, or as tobacco products..

"We know that it is children, not adults, who start smoking. And despite the downward trend in adult smoker numbers in most member states, World Health Organization figures show worrying upward trends in young smoker numbers in some member states. We need to stop tobacco companies targeting young people with an array of gimmicky products" said rapporteur Linda McAvan (S&D, UK).

"The next step is for this preliminary agreement to be formally approved in Council, and in Parliament. It is close to our original position voted in October. We have a balanced text, which can deliver on its key objective: banning misleading flavours and products, and deter young people from smoking. Member states may of course go further and implement plain packaging if they so wish", said Health Committee chair Matthias Groote (S&D, DE).

Health warnings: two-thirds of the pack, front and back

Current legislation requires that health warnings cover at least 30% of the area of the front of the pack and 40% of the back. The proposed text would increase this to 65%. Packs of fewer than 20 cigarettes would be banned.

Dual route for E-cigarettes

As proposed by MEPs, e-cigarettes should be regulated either as medicinal products, if they are presented as having curative or preventive properties, or alternatively as tobacco products.. In the latter case, they should not contain nicotine in a concentration of more than 20 mg/ml. Refillable cartridges would be allowed, albeit with a clause enabling the Commission to extend the ban if such cartridges are prohibited in at least three member states.

A single cartridge should contain the equivalent in nicotine of a pack of cigarettes. Electronic cigarettes should be childproof and should carry health warnings. They would be subject to the same advertising restrictions as tobacco products.

Additives listed, flavours banned

The draft text would ban flavourings in cigarettes and roll-your-own tobacco that would make the product more attractive by giving it a "characterising flavour". Menthol would be banned from 2020. Flavours would be allowed for water pipes.

A "priority list" list of additives allowed in cigarettes and roll-your-own tobacco would be laid down by the European Commission. Additives essential to produce tobacco, such as sugar, would be authorised.

700,000 deaths per year in the EU

Twelve years after the current directive entered into force, smoking remains the principal preventable cause of death and about 700,000 people die of it each year. Over the years, measures taken to discourage smoking have helped to reduce the proportion of EU citizens who smoke from 40% in the EU15 in 2002 to 28% in the EU 27 in 2012.

Press release

Next steps

The agreed text will be debated and put to votes in the Health Committee and the plenary early next year.

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