



MEPs debate proposals to make smoking tobacco less attractive

Committees Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety [25-02-2013 - 19:15]

Draft rules on tobacco additives and labelling, and the likely effect of updating the EU Tobacco Products Directive on public health, business and tax revenues were examined in an Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee debate with Ireland's Health Minister James Reilly and Health and Consumer Policy Commissioner Tonio Borg on Monday.

Health Minister James Reilly, who currently chairs the Council of Health Ministers, gave a personal pledge to “tackle the smoking problem” and called for combined measures to this end: “regulation of tobacco products, comprehensive assistance to smokers who want to quit and media information campaigns”.

Commissioner Borg justified the proposal by saying that “tobacco should look like tobacco and taste like tobacco as well, not like vanilla or other sweets. These products are produced in this way to be attractive to the young. Let's not forget that most people start smoking below the age of 25 and the majority when they are still minors”.

EP rapporteur Linda McAvan (S&D, UK) stressed her commitment to the proposed update, noting that the key aim “is to help recruit fewer and fewer smokers”. Karl-Heinz Florenz (EPP, DE) stressed that many chemical ingredients of cigarettes are highly toxic, and called for a ban on all toxic additives.

Frédérique Ries (ALDE, BE) also stressed the need to be more “radical on toxic additives”. She asked Mr Reilly about the proposal's prospects in the Council, given the “reluctance of some member states” to accept it. Carl Schlyter (Greens/EFA, SE) said plain package warnings should be compulsory. On ingredients, he said he “would be even happier if we would get rid of all flavours”. Mr Schlyter also pointed out that “nicotine is an extremely powerful drug in terms of dependency, so any kind of product containing it should be regulated in a strict way”.

"Any smoker we can persuade to stop is a good investment"

Anna Rosbach (ECR, DK) offered to “play devil's advocate” by raising questions about the revenues generated by tobacco and freedom to choose whether or not to smoke. “Everyone needs to be protected, but let's not forget that governments need the revenues generated by tobacco. The fiscal impact is something we have to bear in mind”, she said. “Any smoker who stops is a good investment. Economically, it's a no-brainer” replied Mr Reilly, highlighting the heavy costs that smoking imposes on health systems and on the economy, through absenteeism from work.

Oreste Rossi (EFD, IT) worried that “if too many limits are placed upon people, we might end up promoting trade in illegal cigarettes. 60% of our cigarettes in EU today are illegal and who's guaranteeing their quality?” he asked. Mr Borg replied by highlighting the security and tracking provisions proposed in the directive.

Martina Anderson (GUE, UK) stressed her determination to strengthen the proposal, adding that she concurred with “comments made on 100% coverage of the package with

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warnings".

Snus

"Snus is the least harmful tobacco product but the only one which is banned" outside Sweden," noted Christopher Fjellner (EPP, SE). "Imagine if we were to ban French wine but allow vodka ?" he said. "If you look at Sweden and Norway, you will see the world's best performance in reducing smoking. And they didn't ban snus".

Next steps

A report will be drafted by EP rapporteur Linda McAvan (S&D, UK) and put to an Environment Committee vote on 10-11 July.

Background

This proposal to revise the 2001 Tobacco Products Directive focuses on smokeless tobacco products, packaging and labelling, ingredients/additives, cross-border distance sales and traceability and security issues. It also aims to harmonise the implementation of international obligations under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

In the chair: Matthias Groote (S&D, DE)

Contact

Baptiste CHATAIN

BXL: (+32) 2 28 40992

STR: (+33) 3 881 74151

PORT: (+32) 498 98 13 37

EMAIL: envi-press@europarl.europa.eu

Christopher COAKLEY

BXL: (+32) 2 28 44859

STR: (+33) 3 881 76853

PORT: (+32) 498 98 33 26

EMAIL: envi-press@europarl.europa.eu