

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1329/04
by Brice Hortefeux (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: Harmonisation of tobacco taxes

It has to be noted that as far as the campaign against smoking is concerned, there is a certain amount of duplicity at Community level: even though advertising tobacco on television is banned, tobacco production is subsidised in the context of the Common Agricultural Policy. Each Member State has varying and badly-matched policies in the fight against tobacco. The gap in terms of price is still considerable: a packet of twenty cigarettes costs on average €2 in Spain, €5 in France and €7.20 in the United Kingdom.

Despite recent modest attempts to harmonise these prices, they remain dependent on the taxes levied on tobacco. Thus, far from fostering a coherent Community-wide harmonisation in terms of either free movement and opening of markets or public health, the existing mechanisms promote the distorting effects of competition by means of taxes and prices between Member States, thus creating 'tourist circuits for European smokers'.

With this in mind, does the Commission plan to raise the minimum tax rate, which currently stands at €1.20, so as to prevent the disparities between Member States from widening?