

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2247/09
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to the Commission

Subject: Minimum prices for tobacco products

Health policy objectives have caused some Member States (France, Italy, Austria, Ireland) to introduce minimum prices for tobacco products. These set the prices – calculated as a percentage of the average market price – below which cigarettes may not be sold. Based on the Community's guidelines on excise duty on tobacco, the Commission has launched infringement procedures against these Member States, arguing that Member States should limit the consumption of cigarettes by increasing tobacco duties and through minimum duty rates and specific taxes.

Some other Member States have recently signalled their intention of examining the statutory introduction of minimum prices for alcoholic beverages. When asked by the Scottish Government about the compatibility of this kind of minimum price with European law, a spokesperson for the Commission said that 'there are European tax laws for tobacco products which do not allow minimum prices, but there is no such legal restriction for alcohol'.

Can the Commission explain why such different procedures are applied in the case of two products, the consumption of each of which gives rise to great concern from the point of view of health care in Member States, particularly in view of increasing consumption by minors, against which price measures have been proven to have the most effect in terms of reducing consumption?

Since the Commission is clearly prepared to accept minimum prices for alcohol (which is subject only to specific excise duty), would it also be willing to accept a similar excise duty model for tobacco products comprising only specific tax rates tied to a national mechanism in order to set minimum prices in Europe, the aim being a unified, coherent health policy in accordance with Article 152 of the TEC?