Question for written answer E-003740/2014
to the Commission
Rule 117
Marie-Thérèse Sanchez-Schmid (PPE)

Subject: Intra-European imports of tobacco products

On 14 March 2013, the European Court of Justice ruled that France, by imposing strict quotas on purchases of cigarettes originating in other EU Member States, had failed to comply with the rules on the free movement of goods within the countries of the European Union. The French National Assembly subsequently amended the Tax Code in relation to these quotas in December 2013.

Consequently, since 1 January 2014 individuals have been permitted to bring 10 cartons of cigarettes and 1 000 cigars originating in another EU Member State into France. The regulations also allow these new quotas to be applied to cars with five occupants, i.e. up to 50 cartons (10 000 cigarettes) and 5 000 cigars per vehicle.

This is a matter of great concern for tobacconists in border regions: cross-border purchases already account for between 15 % and 20 % of the French market. Every year some 500 million packs are smoked in France after having being purchased in Belgium, Spain, Italy or Luxembourg, the countries with the cheapest cigarettes in Europe.

Purchases of this type correspond to an annual loss of some 2.5 billion euros in tax revenue.

1. Does the Commission not believe that raising quotas to 10 cartons of cigarettes per person risks benefiting the black market above all else?

2. Could France reduce these quotas without infringing the ruling of the European Court of Justice, so that it may continue to fight against smoking and smuggling?

3. Does the Commission intend in the near future to propose a bill on harmonising excise duties on tobacco products in the Union in order to combat tax tourism?