

Brussels, 1 March 2005

The EU and its fight against tobacco: Questions and Answers

Markos Kyprianou, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection, today launched a € 72 million EU funded publicity campaign to promote tobacco free lifestyles of young people, help existing smokers quit and promote tobacco free public places (see [IP/05/225](#)). The publicity campaign, "HELP: For a Life Without Tobacco", forms part of a wider EU strategy to fight tobacco. Smoking is the leading cause of avoidable disease in the EU: tobacco related diseases kill 650,000 EU citizens every year.

1) What is the EU doing on the issue of tobacco control?

The EU has adopted two major pieces of anti-tobacco legislation:

- 1. Tobacco Products Directive 2002** (see [IP/02/1383](#)). This EU law requires high visibility, hard-hitting health warnings on all tobacco products sold in the EU (compulsory EU-wide since September 2003); bans misleading descriptors such as "light", "ultra light" and "mild" that give an impression certain types of cigarette are less dangerous; regulates maximum levels of tar, nicotine and carbon monoxide in cigarettes
- 2. Tobacco Advertising Directive 2003** (see: [IP/02/1788](#)). All tobacco advertising on the radio, on the internet and in the print media in EU countries will be prohibited as from 31 July 2005. The directive also prohibits tobacco sponsorship of cross-border events (i.e. those involving more than one Member State). Tobacco advertising is already banned EU-wide under the TV Without Frontiers Directive of 1989.

The EU has funded **anti-smoking publicity campaigns**. Between 2002 and 2004 it spent € 18 million backing the "Feel Free to Say No" campaign, which achieved more than a billion contacts with its target audience of EU teenagers (see [IP/04/1284](#)). The EU has pledged to spend even more on its next publicity campaign "HELP: For a Life Without Tobacco", for which it has earmarked € 72 million between 2005 and 2008.

The EU's anti-fraud office OLAF has worked with Member State law enforcement agencies to **fight smuggling**. This has produced some important successes, such as "Operation Zeus" in 2004, which broke up an international gang smuggling cigarettes into Italy (see [OLAF/04/11](#)).

In December 2002 EU health ministers adopted a **Recommendation on the prevention of smoking and on initiatives to improve tobacco control** (see [IP/02/1788](#)).

This calls on Member States to make it more difficult for children and teenagers to buy cigarettes, for example by banning tobacco vending machines in public places to which children have access and restricting internet sales, to ban or restrict tobacco promotions such as billboards and branded merchandising and to protect their citizens from the dangers of passive smoking.

2) What new EU measures are planned?

The main new initiatives are:

1. **“HELP: For a Life Without Tobacco”.** The EU’s new publicity campaign will promote tobacco free lifestyles to young people, encourage existing smokers to quit and promote tobacco free public places (see [IP/05/225](#))
2. **Picture warnings on cigarette packs.** The Commission will soon finalise its database of graphic images designed to illustrate the health warnings introduced by the Tobacco Products Directive (see above). Those Member States that wish to will then be able to introduce these: Belgium, Ireland and the UK have already expressed an interest in doing so. Commissioner David Byrne presented the Commission’s initial ideas on this subject in October (see [IP/04/1284](#)).
3. **Scrutiny of the use of additives in cigarettes.** The Tobacco Products Directive required tobacco companies to give Member State authorities details of any chemical additives they used to manufacture their products. This has yielded a lot of information, which the Commission and the Member State authorities are now examining.
4. **Bans on smoking in public places.** The Recommendation on the prevention of smoking adopted by the Council in 2002 (see [IP/02/1788](#)) calls on Member States to protect their citizens from the dangers of passive smoking. Ireland, Italy and Malta have decided to opt for the highest possible level of protection by banning smoking in bars, restaurants and other public places. Other EU countries, including Scotland and Sweden are in the process of introducing similar bans. The Commission strongly supports the move towards smoke free public places.

3) How do the EU’s plans relate to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)?

The EU played a leading role in negotiating the FCTC, so many of the key elements of the Convention reflect the existing *acquis* of the EU and its Member States. For example, the Convention calls for bans on the advertising of tobacco, high visibility health warnings on tobacco products, measures to protect people from passive smoking and international cooperation against smuggling.

The EU and all its Member States are signatories to the Convention and, to date, 13 out of the 25 Member States have ratified it. The Commission wants all Member States to have ratified by February 2006. This will enable the EU to field a “full team” at the first Conference of the Parties to the FCTC and ensure its continuing leadership role in the international fight against tobacco. The FCTC came into force on 27 February (see EXME05 / 25.2).

4) Have the EU's anti-tobacco policies succeeded in stopping people smoking?

Over the past two decades the prevalence of smoking among men has fallen in 22 out of the 25 EU Member States. The decline in the number of men who smoke has been dramatic in many countries: in 1996 54% of Polish men smoked, but by 2003 this had fallen to 39%; in 1985 51% of Danish men smoked but in 2003 only 30% did; over the same period the percentage of men who smoked also dropped from 50% to 36% in France, from 35% to 26% in the UK and from 30% to 16% in Sweden. The prevalence of smoking among women has also fallen in most Member States, with big decreases seen in some countries. The biggest drops in the percentage of people smoking has tended to be seen in those Member States with the toughest anti-tobacco policies. These were the findings of a report on tobacco policy in the EU prepared for the Commission by a consortium of health experts and published in October (the ASPECT Report). Full details of these findings are at pages 144 to 149 of the report, which can be viewed online at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_determinants/life_style/Tobacco/Documents/tobacco_fr_en.pdf

5) How much does tobacco related disease cost EU countries?

In 2003-2004 a team of health experts reviewed the cost of smoking related diseases in the 25 EU Member States, in terms of the cost of treating these diseases, working days lost and the economic costs associated with people dying prematurely. Their conclusion, published in the ASPECT Report, was that smoking related disease cost EU countries between € 98 billion and € 130 billion per year, the equivalent of between 1% and 1.4% of GDP. Full details of their analysis are at pages 69 to 98 of the report, which can be viewed online at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_determinants/life_style/Tobacco/Documents/tobacco_fr_en.pdf

6) Why does the EU campaign against smoking yet at the same give subsidies to tobacco farmers?

The European Commission's Strategy for Sustainable Development foresees the phasing out of subsidies for tobacco production (see [IP/01/710](#)). However, there are several hundred thousand tobacco farmers and their families who currently depend on these subsidies. Both the European Parliament and the EU Member States where these farmers live have indicated to the Commission that a rapid end to EU support would be unacceptable. Nonetheless, the Commission's most recent reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy include a "de-coupling" between production and subsidies for tobacco growers (see [IP/04/521](#)).

Further information available from:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_determinants/life_style/Tobacco/tobacco_en.htm