



CP 1999/129

Comité Permanent des Médecins Européens
Standing Committee of European Doctors

Subject

Open letter to David BYRNE, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection concerning tobacco control

Sujet

Lettre ouverte à David BYRNE, Commissaire européen pour la santé et la protection du consommateur concernant le contrôle de la consommation du tabac

Concerning / Concerne

All Delegations
Toutes les délégations

Purpose / Objet

Information

Key word / Mot clé

Tabacco
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OPEN LETTER TO:

<p>Mr. David Byrne Member Responsible for Health Policy EUROPEAN COMMISSION Rue de la Loi 200 B-1049 Brussels</p> <p>Fax: 00 32.2.296.68.31</p>	<p>Ms. Eva Biaudet President-in-Office of the Council C/o Permanent Representation of Finland to the EU Rue de Treves 100 B-1040 Brussels</p> <p>Fax: 00 32.2.287.84.04</p>
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13 November 1999

Your Excellencies,

The Standing Committee of European Doctors (CP) has on 12 November learned of the intention of the Finnish Presidency to hold an open debate at the 18 November 1999 Health Council on EU level actions to counter the health threats caused by tobacco consumption. Our General Assembly meeting in The Hague on 12 and 13 November mandated us to write to you to reiterating the strong support of the European medical profession for a vigorous and wide-ranging EU anti-tobacco policy.

Every day, Europe's doctors come face to face with the suffering and death caused by tobacco. In the EU in 1990, more than half a million people died as a result of their tobacco use. Of these, almost half died in middle age – the prime of life in both social and wealth generation terms for most people - and lost, on average, 22 years of life. Tobacco-related illness represents the single biggest avoidable cause of death in the EU. Far from this situation improving, there is evidence that it may in fact be getting worse, with worrying increases in the number of young people, and in particular young women, smoking being seen across the EU.

The CP warmly welcomed the Council and European Parliament Directive banning tobacco advertising and sponsorship in the EU. We and our member associations are greatly heartened by the identification of anti-tobacco measures as a priority by Dr. Bruntland of the WHO, and we look forward to working with EU governments, the Commission and the WHO in the negotiations leading to a comprehensive International Convention on Combating Tobacco.

Nonetheless, we believe that given the scale of the health problems caused by the tobacco in the EU, there is an urgent need for immediate action at EU level on a number of fronts.

We believe that immediate priorities for EU level action against tobacco consumption should include:

1. Comprehensive EU level regulation of the composition of tobacco products. This would include measures to decrease tar, carbon monoxide and nicotine yields of tobacco products, and to mandate accurate independent product testing for these substances. It would also include disclosure of all additives used in tobacco products.
2. EU legislation to mandate more prominent health warnings on tobacco products and an end to misleading branding and labelling (e.g. cigarettes being described as "light", "mild" or "ultra-low tar").
3. A progressive leveling upwards of EU minimum rates of excise duty and taxation on tobacco products. This should be accompanied by a change in EU and Member State statistical rules to exclude the price of cigarettes and other tobacco products from indices used to calculate official inflation rates.
4. An end to Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) subsidies to tobacco growers, accompanied by appropriate compensation and measures to promote alternative crops.
5. A requirement for Member States to use their best endeavors to combat tobacco smuggling including compulsory use of unique identifiers of tobacco products (e.g. serial numbers on batches).
6. A major EU wide anti-smoking education campaign aimed, in particular at young people and women.

The CP will be sending a representative to observe the open debate in Council on 18 November 1999. We make an open offer to work with the Finnish Presidency, and all future Council Presidencies, the Commission and the European Parliament on EU any initiatives they may seek to launch on combating the scourge of tobacco consumption.

Yours faithfully,

Professor J. Van Londen
 President
 Standing Committee of European
 Doctors

Dr. M. Violaki
 President
**Preventive and Environment
 Subcommittee,**
 Standing Committee of European
 Doctors

Copies: Deputy Permanent Representatives of all EU Member States