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Press release | 09.03.2016

Public health/tobacco

EU tobacco agreement must not be renewed say MEPs

The European Parliament today adopted a resolution setting out its position on the agreement between the EU and tobacco companies. A clear majority of MEPs called for the controversial Philip Morris International agreement not to be renewed. The Greens/EFA group, which has led calls for the agreement to be discontinued, welcomed the vote and called on the European Commission to heed the call by MEPs, and not to begin negotiations with tobacco companies, with Green health and transparency spokesperson **Bart Staes** stating:

"The European Parliament has today sent a clear political message against renewing the PMI agreement. This vote should serve as a shot across the bow to the elements within the EU Commission pushing for negotiations to begin.

"Regardless of how the Commission tried to spin it, there are major doubts about the effectiveness of the agreement in reducing the illicit trade in tobacco products. Beyond this, the agreement is superfluous, having been superseded by provisions in the EU's tobacco products directive and the WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (1). In addition, the convention itself explicitly states that such agreements with the tobacco industry are in conflict with the aims of the convention and threaten progress in tobacco control (2).

"It would be grossly inappropriate to conclude a parallel new bilateral agreement with the industry, even more so in a situation when one of the main firms (Philip Morris) is taking a legal challenge against the EU legislation agreed in 2014. Fully implementing and upholding the provisions of this legal framework should be the priority of the Commission and the fundamental guiding principle should be to protect public health and tackle the major health implications of tobacco. The Commission needs to stop kowtowing to the industry and abandon its poacher-turned-gamekeeper approach to regulating the sector."

(1) The Philip Morris International agreement was first signed in 2004 and extended to include other tobacco firms following legal action brought against them for smuggling and money laundering. Ostensibly aimed at tackling the illicit trade in tobacco, it has been superseded by provisions in the EU's tobacco products directive and the WHO's international Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. In spite of this, and the fact that Philip Morris has launched a legal challenge of the EU tobacco directive, the Commission has engaged in exploratory meetings with a view to considering whether or not to renew the agreement, when it expires this summer.

(2) See the explanatory document on the WHO FCTC http://www.who.int/fctc/protocol/faq/en/

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Responsible MEPs

Bart Staes

Member

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