Press release | 08.10.2013

EU tobacco rules

Centre-right MEPs do work of tobacco lobby and vote to stub-out plans for ambitious rules

The European Parliament today voted on proposals to revise EU legislation on tobacco products. The Greens expressed regret at the outcome, which would weaken the proposals made by the European Commission, and hit out at the intense industry lobby behind the result. Commenting after the vote, Green public health spokesperson **Carl Schlyter** stated:

"This is a shameful day for the European Parliament, as a centre-right majority, led by the EPP group, has done the bidding of the tobacco industry and voted for weaker rules, which are totally at odds with citizens' interests and public health. It is scandalous that the centre-right in this house seems to be more concerned about the profits of the tobacco industry than the health of EU citizens.

"The EP's public health committee voted for robust legislation, with a view to tackling the number one killer in the EU - smoking kills 700,000 Europeans every year - but the core proposals have been scaled back in today's vote. The only real victors from today's vote are big tobacco firms, whose aggressive and expensive lobbying campaigns have paid off.

"MEPs voted to reduce the combined picture and health warnings from 75% of the pack size to 65%, but at least they managed to resist the lobby pressure from Big Tobacco and kept them at the top edge of the pack. This is important to ensure their visibility and effectiveness, especially on shop shelves.

"Cynically, centre-right MEPs also voted to weaken core provisions aimed at preventing youth addiction to tobacco products. They voted for a temporary exemption for menthol from the ban on characterising flavours. Menthol flavouring is directly designed to make cigarettes easier to smoke and more attractive to younger consumers, by reducing cough-reflex and pain from inhaling smoke. It should clearly be banned. MEPs also voted to continue to allow slim cigarettes, which are misleadingly marketed as better for your health, and designed to appeal to young women in particular. The only silver lining is that MEPs voted to limit the possibilities for the tobacco industry to add new additives to cigarettes by adopting a positive list approach to additive authorisation.

"We are now in the sad situation that Parliament is scaling back public health protection. This is totally at odds with its ostensible role of representing the citizens' interests. The new rules will be a big improvement on the status quo, hence our group's final vote in favour, but it is seriously regrettable that MEPs have voted to weaken the original proposals on this vital issue."

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