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EU tobacco rules

New EU law confirmed by MEPs a step forward for public health but outcome bitter-sweet

The European Parliament today voted to confirm a final agreement revising EU legislation on tobacco products. The revised legislation is a clear improvement over the current situation, according to the Greens, but the group has expressed regret that it falls behind original proposals from the European Commission in some aspects. Commenting after the final vote, Green public health spokesperson **Carl Schlyter** stated:

“The new EU tobacco rules will undoubtedly improve the current situation and help tackle the enormous social and health problems of tobacco products. However, the final outcome is definitely a bitter-sweet end to this controversial legislative process, as it falls short of what the Commission had proposed in key areas and will leave the EU behind other countries in the battle to reduce smoking-related illnesses. With smoking the number one killer in the EU – leading to 700,000 premature deaths a year – strong rules are vital for the health of EU citizens but also for taxpayers, who foot the bill for these avoidable illnesses.

“From now on, cigarette packs will have combined health warnings including picture warnings 65% of pack size, at the top edge of the pack. Characterising flavours in cigarettes, including menthol, will be prohibited. This is crucial for preventing youth addiction, as flavours are used to deliberately target the youth market. Unfortunately, the ban on menthol will be delayed for 4 years.

“Testing requirements for the most commonly used and most problematic tobacco additives will be strengthened. This will hopefully be a step towards eliminating additives that enhance the carcinogenic properties of tobacco smoke.

"E-cigarettes will finally be regulated in the near future. Member states will be free to decide whether they want to subject them to authorisation as medicines or apply new rules that should ensure the quality and safety of these products. Either way should ensure that e-cigarettes can be used safely to help smokers stop smoking, and not act as a gateway product for non-smokers. As the new rules do not regulate the use of flavours in e-cigarettes, it is important that member states that will not apply pharmaceutical legislation act quickly to ban the current range of flavours that deliberately target younger users.

"While today's outcome is a clear improvement over the status quo, it is very regrettable that the lobbying of the tobacco industry was successful in reducing the original ambition. Clearly, we should be aiming for plain packaging and the clarification that front-running member states, like Ireland, can push ahead

individually on this is very welcome.”

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