

Public health experts oppose reckless timetable for Tobacco Products Directive

written by Clive Bates | 5 September 2013

Today 5th September, the leaders of the main political group in the European Parliament, (a group known as the Conference of Presidents) will meet to decide on the timing of debate and vote on the tobacco products directive. The proposed text for debate, amendment and vote was only published on Friday 30 Aug and not in most languages. The deadline for amendments was on Wednesday 4th Sept.

On current timetable, the debate and vote would be on 9th and 10th, we think this is a ridiculous reckless rush for something so complex, so poorly understood (not least by its main supporters) and but with so many lives at stake. It needs MEPs to have time to consider properly. A delay to October is reasonable, feasible and necessary.

Here's the letter...

Martin Schulz

Joseph Daul

Hannes Swoboda

Guy Verhofstadt

Rebecca Harms

Daniel Cohn-Bendit

Nigel Farage

Martin Callanan

Francescoenrico Speroni

Gabriele Zimmer

Dear Members of the Conference of Presidents,

As public health experts, we urge you to delay the debate and vote on the Tobacco Products Directive and hold it in October. We applaud members of the EPP, ALDE and ECR groups for already having declared their intention of doing so and hope that the Conference of Presidents will see fit to do the same.

The Directive is complex and far reaching, but is likely in its current form to obstruct the progress of an important new class of products, e-cigarettes, by misclassifying them as medicines. Goldman Sachs describes e-cigarettes as one of eight globally disruptive technologies. Some analysts see e-cigarettes overtaking cigarettes with a decade. The impact of that on public health will vastly overshadow all other measures in the directive, and it is critical that we get the regulatory regime right – thousands of lives are at stake. Taking an extra few weeks to do this properly is a sound investment in the lives of millions of Europeans.

The likely effect of the directive in its current form is to take the vast majority of the products off the market, to cause users to revert to smoking, to close hundreds of sound small businesses and to provide regulatory protection to pharmaceutical and tobacco companies. It is clear from debates and public statements that Members still have little awareness of what medicines regulation would mean for the e-cigarette market. Further concerns arise from dissent in the opinion committees – for example Legal Affairs found no acceptable legal base for this regulation. Further afield, there are four cases in which medicines regulation has been struck down by the courts in member states. The Commission has failed to consult properly on its proposal and the Impact Assessment is far from an adequate account of the impacts. For all these reasons we urge you to give Members more time to understand this critical technology and the regulatory options.

It has been widely reported that it is the major tobacco firms that want a delay. We have no brief for them or any interest in their objectives. But many public health experts, consumers and small businesses also want a delay so the directive can be scrutinised and revised carefully. A legislature should conduct its business with great care and transparency, and it should not matter whether tobacco companies agree or disagree with its chosen timetable.

We think it is essential that Members have adequate time to understand and scrutinise these proposals thoroughly, and we therefore urge you to support holding the debate and vote on this important directive in October.

Yours sincerely

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