



Mme Sabine Oberhauser
Minister for Health
Federal Ministry of Health

Radetzkystraße 2
1030 Vienna
Austria
Brussels, 30 April 2015

Open letter for the attention of Sabine Oberhauser, Minister for Health
Reinhold Mitterlehner, Vice Chancellor of Austria, Federal Minister of Science, Research and the Economy

Subject: EPHA contribution to the draft Austrian tobacco legislation in progress

Dear Mme Oberhauser,

I am writing to you in response to the draft tobacco legislation that is currently in progress. On behalf of the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA), I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Austria for its willingness to take this bold step forward in the fight against tobacco related harm.

In Austria the prevalence of smoking is still increasing while the habit is imposing an enormous health and economic burden on the country's society. Tobacco consumption causes several cancers and cardiovascular diseases (CVD), including heart disease and stroke, as well as different respiratory and lung diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Austria is one of the last EU countries where the minimum age for purchasing tobacco is 16 years old while in most countries it is 18 years old. The Eurobarometer found an **increase of smoking prevalence in Austria** from 31% (2006) to 33% (2012). In addition to this, a WHO 2009/2010 study showed that **Austria had one of the highest rates of 15-year-olds who smoke at least once a week in Europe** (29% of girls, 25% of boys)¹. In 2006 state revenues from the cigarette consumption of minors in Austria amounted to 60.5 million Euro². In 2005, the percentage of undiagnosed chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) was 88,5%. For the years 2010, 2015 and 2020 GOLD stage I-IV COPD was projected to rise by 7.8%, 16.1% and 24%, respectively³⁴.

Measures to prevent tobacco related harm, such as strong anti-tobacco legislation, are absolutely necessary to forestall the projected burden of tobacco related diseases in Austria. **The new Austrian tobacco law** under preparation is a unique opportunity to raise standards of tobacco legislation, and therefore to protect the health of every Austrian citizen, including non-smokers who suffer from passive smoking.

Recalling the recent call of the European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention (ENSP)⁵, we would like urge you to consider the following elements in the new Austrian anti-tobacco law

¹ World Health Organization (2012). Social determinants of health and well-being among young people. Available at: http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/163857/Social-determinants-of-health-and-well-being-among-young-people.pdf

² Neuberger M & Pock M (2009). Government earnings from cigarette smoking of adolescents in Austria. Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19787321>

³ Lamprecht B. et al (2007). The prevalence of COPD in Austria--the expected change over the next decade. Available at: http://www.researchgate.net/publication/5903005_The_prevalence_of_COPD_in_Austria--the_expected_change_over_the_next_decade

⁴ Schirnhofner L. et al (2007). COPD prevalence in Salzburg, Austria: results from the Burden of Obstructive Lung Disease (BOLD) Study. Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17218553>

⁵ <http://www.ensp.org/node/1136>

european public health alliance a.i.s.b.l.

49-51 rue de Trèves – Box 6 1040 Brussels, Belgium - Tel +32 2 230 3056 Fax +32 2 233 3880

E-mail : epha@epha.org Web-site : www.epha.org

- **More restrictions on advertising and display of tobacco for young people** is strongly recommended in order to decrease the number of adolescent smokers as evidence shows that smoke-free policies reduce tobacco use among youth⁶.
- There is evidence **that raising the minimum age of tobacco sale** is an efficient policy measure⁷.
- The **proper enforcement of the new anti-tobacco law** is essential.

In addition, based on the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control guidelines⁸, **the European public health community strongly recommends the introduction of plain standardised packaging.** Increasing the size of warning messages enhances the effectiveness of the warning amongst both young and adult smokers and non-smokers. In 2010, Uruguay implemented health warnings covering 80% of both the front and back of tobacco packaging. Since then, cigarette consumption has **decreased by an average of 4.3% per year**, while in its neighbouring country, **Argentina**, it has **decreased by 0.6%**. Similarly, the prevalence of tobacco use in Uruguay has **decreased by 3.3%** a year; more than twice as much as Argentina.⁹ Other countries like Canada¹⁰ and Australia,¹¹ with comprehensive tobacco control strategies in place including large pictorial health warnings, have seen significant annual decreases in youth smoking.¹²

As you know, Ireland became the first country in Europe to ban branded cigarette packets on 3rd March, when the legislation to introduce standardised packaging of tobacco has passed all stages in Parliament while both France and the United Kingdom are in the process of adopting similar legislation. **Austria** could follow these examples by introducing plain packaging as this is **fully in line with article 24.2 of the revised Tobacco Products Directive (TPD)**: *“This Directive shall not affect the right of a Member State to maintain or introduce further requirements, applicable to all products placed on its market, in relation to the standardisation of the packaging of tobacco products, where it is justified on grounds of public health, taking into account the high level of protection of human health achieved through this Directive.”*¹³

In light of the alarming increases in smoking prevalence in Austria, strong anti-tobacco measures cannot wait until 2018. Therefore, **the European Public Health community strongly recommends** the adoption of strong anti-smoking measures as of May 2016 in line with the implementation deadline of the revised TPD.

Yours sincerely,



Peggy Maguire

EPHA President

⁶ <http://www.who.int/tobacco/mpower/protect/en/index3.html>

⁷ Fidler JA, West R. Changes in smoking prevalence in 16 & 17-year-old versus older adults following a rise in legal age of sale: findings from an English population study. *Addiction* 2010;105:1984-1988.

⁸ Parties should consider adopting plain packaging requirements to eliminate the effects of advertising and promotion on packaging⁷. (GL Article 13)

⁹ Tobacco control campaign in Uruguay: a population-based trend analysis, Abascal W et al., *Lancet* 2012 Nov, 380(9853):1575-82

¹⁰ Health Canada. Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey (CTUMS) 2011. http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/tobac-tabac/research-recherche/stat/ctums-esutc_2011-eng.php Accessed 3 March 2013.

¹¹ White, V, Bariola, E. Australian secondary school students' use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the counter and illicit substances in 2011. Report prepared for: Drug Strategy Branch Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. December 2012. [http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/Publishing.nsf/content/BCBF6B2C638E1202CA257ACD0020E35C/\\$File/National%20Report_FINAL_ASSAD_7.12.pdf](http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/Publishing.nsf/content/BCBF6B2C638E1202CA257ACD0020E35C/$File/National%20Report_FINAL_ASSAD_7.12.pdf) Accessed 15 March 2013

¹² Smoke Free Partnership Mythbusting Briefing –

<http://www.smokefreepartnership.eu/sites/sfp.ttp.eu/files/SFP%20Mythbusting%20Briefing%20FINAL.pdf>

¹³ DIRECTIVE 2014/40/EU: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.127.01.0001.01.ENG

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