

MEPs call for tougher rules on smoking in public places

by Henri Caruana

On 12 September, the European Parliament's Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety called for increased restrictions on smoking in public places in response to the Commission's Green Paper entitled *Towards a Europe free from tobacco smoke: policy options at EU level* which was published on 30 January 2007. By means of this document, the Commission wanted to contribute to the current momentum in favour of smoke-free zones and proposed a number of policy options which range from voluntary measures to binding legislation. While welcoming the Green Paper, the EP's Committee regarded this document as only a starting point.

In a motion for an EP Resolution, the Committee's document states that at least 650, 000 people die in the EU each year as a consequence of smoking. These include 80,000 passive smokers. Furthermore, the motion recalls some of the results of a Eurobarometer survey issued in January 2006, namely, that 70% of the EU population are non-smokers whilst 86% of EU citizens are in favour of a ban on smoking in offices and other workplaces, 84% in other indoor public places, 61% in bars and pubs and 77% in restaurants.

MEPs are calling on the Commission to present a proposal by 2008 for an unrestricted smoking ban in all enclosed workplaces, including catering establishments and in all enclosed public buildings and transport in the EU. The Committee is also requesting a report from the Commission on the costs incurred by national health systems and the EU economy as a result of smoking.

Amongst the EU-wide measures proposed in the report, MEPs are calling for a ban on the sale of tobacco products to young people under 18. Furthermore, permits for the installation of cigarette machines should be only provided if the machines will be inaccessible to young people.

A plenary vote on the report will be taken by the European Parliament on 11 October 2007.

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