



## EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT WANTS EU-WIDE BAN ON INDOOR SMOKING

BY RONALD MIZZI

The European Commission is being urged by the European Parliament to propose an unrestricted smoking ban across the EU-27, in all enclosed workplaces including catering establishments, public buildings and transport, as soon as possible.

In January this year, the European Commission published a Green Paper entitled *Towards a Europe free from tobacco smoke: policy options at EU level*, because exposure to environmental tobacco smoke or second-hand smoke and passive smoking remain a widespread source of excess morbidity and mortality in the EU, imposing significant costs on society as a whole.

In fact, a coordinated effort towards "smoke-free Europe" is one of the priorities of the Commission's public health, environment, employment and research policy. In its Environment and Health Action Plan (2004-2010), the Commission committed itself to "develop work on improving indoor air quality, in particular by encouraging the restriction of smoking in all workplaces by exploring both legal mechanisms and health promotion initiatives at both European and Member State level".

However, the European Parliament's Committee on Health and the Environment, - despite acknowledging the Green Paper as a good starting point - wants far more stringent and tougher measures to protect citizens against the dangers of passive smoking. This is based on arguments that given that 70% of the EU population is non-smoking, they should have every chance to work in a smoke-free environment both indoors and in public buildings. The Committee also said that since all voluntary arrangements have repeatedly proven to be ineffective, legislative measures are now needed.

Above all, the report prepared by the Parliamentary Committee urges the Commission to designate environmental tobacco smoke a Class 1 carcinogen, given that tobacco smoke is the most significant and dangerous avoidable indoor pollutant and is also the main cause of indoor air pollution, as it contains thousands of chemicals including 250 carcinogenic and toxic substances.

MEPs are therefore calling on the Commission to propose an unrestricted smoking ban in all enclosed workplaces by 2008, and also to produce a report on the cost incurred by national health systems and the EU economy, as a result of smoking and the effects of tobacco smoke. Additionally, the Commission was asked to present an amendment to Directive 2001/37/EC on tobacco products, which would oblige tobacco manufacturers to allow public access to existing toxicological documents relating to the additives and ingredients in tobacco smoke.

Complimentary measures also include an EU-wide ban on the sale of tobacco products to people under 18 and prohibiting cigarette machines in places accessible to minors.

Malta has been banning indoor smoking since 2004 though smoking in closed-off, separate ventilated areas is still permitted. It is also an offence to sell, supply or distribute smoking requisites to minors under 16. ☺

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