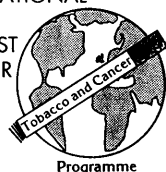


From the International Union Against Cancer

INTERNATIONAL
UNION
AGAINST
CANCER



European Community tobacco control lobby

Andrew J Hayes

There are 345 million people living in the twelve member states of the European Community (EC). Approximately two-thirds of the population is non-smoking, but tobacco continues to take its toll, accounting for some 450 000 deaths each year.

In June 1985, European Heads of State or Government decided to tackle the overall problem of cancer within the Community, and launched a major initiative which became known as "Europe Against Cancer". A 15% reduction in cancer mortality by the year 2000 was set as the original, somewhat ambitious, target for the project.

About 30% of all cancer deaths (85–90% of deaths from lung cancer) are due to smoking – a cause of morbidity and mortality that is wholly avoidable, if only people were to live smoke-free. So tobacco control inevitably became a focus of the "Europe Against Cancer" programme, leading to a range of legislative proposals, such as:

- Harmonising health warnings on cigarettes and other tobacco products
- Limiting the tar yield of cigarettes
- Restricting tobacco advertising
- Banning the sale of moist snuff

There have also been attempts to harmonise tobacco taxation, and a Resolution (not quite as tough as legislation) to ban smoking in all enclosed places open to the public and on all forms of public transport.

All these proposals have been initiated by the EC within the context of the "Europe Against Cancer" programme. There is therefore a sense in which they have "official" backing. They also have political backing, in principle, because they flow from the original, political, decision to set up the "Europe Against Cancer" programme itself.

None of this authority has guaranteed any individual proposal an easy passage through the system. The tobacco industry, inevitably, has fought hard on every issue, trying to prevent, limit, or delay their introduction.

For the past five years, member organisations of the Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL) have worked individually and together to campaign in support of the EC's legislative proposals. This has involved letters, resolutions, petitions, and delegations to

- Members of national Parliaments
- Members of the European Parliament.
- officers of the European Commission
- national Health Ministers
- national Governments, etc.

One by one, most of the legislative proposals have been enacted. A major weapon in the tobacco control arsenal remains outstanding, however. This is the proposal to restrict the advertising of all tobacco products, and the display of logos and trade marks, except at the point of sale, ie, close to a total ban.

On this issue, the twelve Member States remain divided. Seven countries support the proposed ban. Five are against or undecided – Denmark, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, and the UK. Some argued originally that advertising bans did not help to reduce cigarette consumption, but that argument has been undermined, even by their own advisers (eg, the recent publication of the "Smee Report" in the UK). So now they only have the so-called "freedom of expression" argument left, an argument that is also not valid. The very same Governments, for instance, impose restrictions on the advertising of certain drugs and fire-arms.

In reality, the pressure to oppose an ad ban comes not from the Health Ministry, but from those responsible for trade and finance – where health arguments are willingly sacrificed to the commercial interests of the tobacco industry.

The Cancer Leagues are determined to continue fighting for the introduction of a ban. They do so within the context of an EC proposal, intended for the twelve EC Member States, and with the backing of public support – 74% of EC citizens responded positively to a Eurobarometer survey, in favour of legislation to ban the advertising of tobacco products (see *Tobacco Control* 1992; 1: 57). This debate is taking place against the background of a wider Europe, where many other countries are struggling to control smoking epidemics and are doing so in the face of a vicious assault from the transnational tobacco industry. The EC countries need to set an example of enlightened health policy, openly and democratically agreed, which enhances rather than diminishes personal freedom.

"No man is an island unto himself". This is just as true of the "cancer community" as it is of each of us individually. The "Europe Against Cancer" programme has stimulated the cancer leagues of every European country to meet and work together – especially in support of the campaign for a tobacco-free Europe.



For further information contact: Mrs Isabel Mortara, Head, Education Department, 3 rue du Conseil-Général, 1205 Geneva, Switzerland. (Tel (41 22) 230 1811; fax (41 22) 320 18 10.)

UICC/ECL European Community Liaison Officer, Brussels, Belgium
Andrew J Hayes