

Malta's Comments on a Green Paper entitled 'Towards a Europe free from Tobacco Smoke: policy options at EU level' (COM (2007) 27 final)

Malta welcomes the Commission Green Paper which lays out policy options at the EU level in moving *Towards a Europe free from tobacco smoke*. This Green Paper is a follow-up from Council Recommendation 2003/54/EC of 2 December 2002 on the prevention of smoking and on initiatives to improve tobacco control. The 2002 Recommendation called on Member States to adopt appropriate legislative and / or administrative measures:

- to prevent tobacco sales to children and adolescents;
- to prohibit various forms of advertising and promotion connected with tobacco;
- which require manufacturers, importers and traders in tobacco products to provide Member States with information concerning the expenditure they incur on promotion campaigns; and
- that provide protection from exposure to environmental tobacco smoke in indoor workplaces, enclosed public places, and public transport.

The Council Recommendation further calls on Member States to continue to develop the necessary strategies and measures in order to reduce smoking by promoting overall health education and encouraging contributions by young people towards health policies and actions, and through the adoption of price measures which discourage further tobacco consumption.

Malta has been at the forefront in the initiatives it has taken in recent years in order to protect persons from environmental tobacco smoke. It should be emphasised that public support for such initiatives is very high. In fact, during a health interview survey conducted in 2002, legislation prohibiting smoking in public places was deemed as the second most important tool to assist people to stop smoking following taxes imposed on tobacco.

Malta's Replies

Q1: Which of the two approaches suggested in Section IV would be more desirable in terms of its scope for smoke-free initiative: a total ban on smoking in all enclosed public spaces and workplaces or a ban with exemptions granted to selected categories of venues? Please indicate the reason(s) for your choice.

In Malta, the tobacco smoking ban was issued in April 2004. Due to resistance from some stakeholders, certain parts of the ban came into effect in September 2004. From the experience gained, Malta would contend that a total ban on smoking in all enclosed public spaces and workplaces would in fact be more effective.

There is sufficient evidence to show the level of economic and social burden which exposure to environmental tobacco smoke is causing, in particular its effect on the health sector. Malta believes that a total ban is the most effective way forward in order to decrease the level of tobacco smoke released into the environment. Since workers in all venues have a right to a

clean air supply, Malta does not support a ban with exemptions granted to selected categories of venues.

Q2: Which of the policy options described in Section V would be the most desirable and appropriate for promoting smoke-free environments? What form of EU intervention do you consider necessary to achieve the smoke-free objectives?

Malta agrees that flanking initiatives is important and on this basis has for years sought to carry out smoking cessation programmes. However, there should also be an EU-wide policy specifically targeted towards smokers in order to help them kick the habit, especially in view of growing concerns that whilst a number older people are quitting smoking, the rate of young smokers, especially women, has not effectively started to decrease.

It is important that any future initiatives at the EU level continue to target young people. More concrete data should be compiled in order to determine the factors which influence youngsters to take up smoking, including those factors tied to places of entertainment, home and school environments, etc. This in turn would help to determine whether or not the ban on smoking is influencing young people in refraining from take up this habit.

More needs to be done to limit the access children have to buying tobacco products. Information campaigns about the harmful effects of passive smoking on children in their homes needs to be carried out. More can be done to educate children from a very young age on the negative effects of smoking, and educational message enforcement could be a means to further discourage smoking. Though this is not considered to be enough on its own, it may well have a positive effect especially if targeted towards the right groups within society, such as school children.

In the long term, binding legislation at the EU level would be the optimum way forward to achieve a smoke-free Europe. Member States who have already implemented smoking bans in indoor public and work places have reported positive results, which should encourage other Member States to follow suit.

Considering that the successful implementation of smoking bans needs to reflect the social and cultural background of each Member State, Malta believes it is best that a total smoking ban in enclosed places continues to be implemented at a national level at this stage.

Q3: Are there any further quantitative or qualitative data on the health, social or economic impact of smoke-free policies which should be taken into account?

Controlled studies on the effects of different policies already in place on the health of the population and those who are occupationally exposed could be undertaken, for example, by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).

Research on smoking as a cause or a result of socio-economic inequalities and research on the effects of exposure to second-hand smoke in the workplace would also provide valuable data. Furthermore, one should also highlight the economic burden brought about by smoking. This data needs to be quantified to be compared with the 'unintended consequences' of loss of revenue from taxes.

Q4: Do you have any other comments or suggestions on the Green Paper?

One of the main concerns for Malta at the time of the introduction of the ban was the negative implications which such a decision could have had on the tourism industry. Whilst this has not proved to be the case, it is still felt that some degree of consultation across the European Union may be helpful in order to deter such instances.

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