Brussels, 27 June 2013 – As the Irish and Lithuanian Ministers of Health point out, a bold TPD would go a long way to reduce the 700,000 people dying from tobacco related diseases every year. As the Ministers emphasise, a key objective of the revised TPD is to relieve EU Member States from the massive economic burden linked with smoking – particularly in terms of health expenditure and work related absenteeism.

Yet Poland is emerging as one of the leading EU Member States resisting the materialization of a coherent tobacco policy. In the final negotiations around the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the Polish government is stepping up its efforts to secure tobacco subsidies for Polish tobacco farmers (2) by negotiating bilaterally with other European countries. By insisting to keep tobacco subsidies fuelling a crop (3) that kills hundreds of thousands of people every year and ruins the health of millions, Poland is putting the tobacco industry before the well-being of both Poles and Europeans.

Tobacco is a major preventable risk factor for several non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and so the new CAP can make a difference to the everyday lives of millions by refraining from subsidising tobacco and supporting farmers to replace it with other, equally profitable crops as fruit and vegetables, particularly given Poland’s poor performance in increasing consumption of fruit and vegetables amongst its population (4).

The new CAP, a scheme that takes almost 40 percent of the taxpayers-supplied EU budget, must be designed in a way that supports the fight against smoking - one of the greatest threats to public health in Europe (5).

The EU’s agricultural policy counts with the instruments, capability, budget and scope to start displacing this poisonous crop from Europe’s fields as it provides European farmers with alternative ways to make a conformable living. It is time Poland joined progressive Europeans and took steps towards moving farmers away from their tobacco addiction and towards sustainable, healthy crops that benefit Poles and Europeans.

The leadership for a strong TPD shown by the Irish and Lithuanian Presidencies is demonstration of the commitment Member States can show towards increasing the health of their populations and should be applauded. It is time our tobacco policies moved into the 21st Century.
Note for editors

(1) Joint Statement by the Irish and the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

(2) Poland pushes for EU tobacco subsidies – Polskie radio, 25 June

(3) Poland is one of the biggest cigarettes producing countries in the EU, and the biggest one in a field of menthol and slim products.

Measures to support tobacco growing in the EU in a form of agricultural subsidies were phased out in 2010. However, in March 2013 Members of the European Parliament voted to re-introduce such subsidies - a move announced as outdated and discarded poor policy making by public health community. Subsidising tobacco growing goes against the revision of the EU Tobacco Products Directive and a spirit of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), to which the EU and its Members States are signatories.

(4) Social inequalities in health in Poland (2102) - World Health Organisation: Regional Office for Europe.

(5) As an example, the total deaths from Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a life-threatening lung disease, are projected to increase by more than 30% in the next 10 years without interventions to cut risks, particularly exposure to tobacco smoke. COPD is expected to be the third leading cause of death worldwide by 2030 (exceeded only by heart diseases and stroke).

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