

# Research uncovers tobacco companies' tactics to undermine tobacco control in Czech Republic

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(Medical Xpress) -- The University's Tobacco Control Research Group uncovered ongoing interference from British American Tobacco and Philip Morris to influence tobacco tax policies, which are one of the most effective means of reducing tobacco consumption. They found the corporations collaborated with broader tobacco interests to keep tobacco taxes low and lobbied competitively for tobacco tax structures that would favor their brands.

They also found evidence that Philip Morris ignored, overturned and weakened the Czech policymakers' attempts to restrict [tobacco](#) advertising, promoting voluntary restrictions as an alternative to binding legislation.

The research comes from the first study to examine [tobacco industry](#) influence in the [Czech Republic](#), which is published in PLoS Medicine this week.

The findings demonstrate that major tobacco companies were quick to enter the Czech tobacco market, following a decision to privatise state-controlled tobacco interests in the early 1990s, and immediately worked to shape policies in their favor.

The research, led by Risako Shirane and Professor Anna Gilmore at Bath, is based on an analysis of internal tobacco company documents (released through litigation in the US) and key informant interviews.

First author of the paper, Risako Shirane said: “Tobacco excise policy is perhaps one of the most complicated and least understood areas of [tobacco control](#), and this makes policymakers particularly susceptible to tobacco industry influence.

“Our research builds on a wealth of previous studies demonstrating that tobacco companies are primarily driven by the pursuit of increased profits, which means their ability to influence policy usually has devastating consequences for public health.”

According to the World Health Organization, smoking causes approximately 18,000 premature deaths per year – equivalent to 50 deaths per day – in the Czech Republic. Overall, 26 per cent of all male deaths and 10 per cent of all female deaths are attributable to tobacco use.

Tobacco control has remained extremely weak in the Czech Republic, with the country's policies recently being ranked the fourth least effective in Europe

The Czech Republic is also the only European Union Member State not yet to have approved a World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control – a widely embraced international treaty that sets out concrete steps for governments to curb tobacco use. Cigarettes have become increasingly affordable in the Czech Republic since 1991, and cigarette sales remain high without a strong tobacco control policy.

Dr. Hana Ross, of American Cancer Society, conducted key-informant interviews which confirmed the findings and suggested that policy interference by tobacco companies remains ongoing in the Czech Republic, with [tobacco companies](#) continuing to enjoy high-level political support.

Principal Investigator, Professor Gilmore, argues the results highlight that officials in the Czech Republic need to work harder to ensure tobacco control policies are informed by independent advice and protected from undue tobacco industry interference.

The full paper can be viewed [here](#).

Provided by University of Bath

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