

Europe's tobacconists march against EU smoking crackdown

January 22 2013

Thousands of tobacconists from across Europe marched on European Union headquarters on Tuesday to protest against a planned EU crackdown on smoking that includes gruesome health warnings placarded on packets.

From Austria, Germany and Poland, but most largely from France and Italy, 2,200 marchers according to police, 3,500 according to organisers, protested against measures they say harm small retailers and encourage cigarette smuggling.

"Brussels is hitting at official distribution networks while nothing is done against smuggling", said the deputy head of the European Confederation of Tobacco Retailers (CEDT), Pascal Montredon, who heads the French branch.

He said the EU should ban [cigarette sales](#) on the internet and stop the continual increase in the price of packets in some countries.

He said 6,000 of France's 33,000 tobacconists had closed since 2004.

In December, the European Commission released new proposals notably aimed at dissuading young people from taking up smoking that included a ban on [menthol cigarettes](#) and large [health warnings](#) covering 75 percent of packets.

Almost 700,000 Europeans die from tobacco-related illnesses each

year—equal to the population of a Frankfurt or Palermo—with associated [health costs](#) running at more than 25 billion euros, the EU executive said.

A key measure would be a ban on cigarettes, roll-your-own, or [smokeless tobacco products](#) that have strong—or "characterising"—flavours, such as menthol, chocolate or vanilla, often popular with young people.

Packs of fewer than 20 cigarettes would also be banned as well as 'slims,' while electronic cigarettes, which contain some nicotine, would only be authorised as medicinal products.

But the new rules must be approved by member states as well as the [European Parliament](#), meaning legislation would come into effect in only about three years.

"Smoking is part of the culture of Europe,' said the head of Austria's VCPO tobacconists, Klaus W. Fischer. ""This will end up like prohibition in the US in the 1920s."

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Citation: Europe's tobacconists march against EU smoking crackdown (2013, January 22) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-01-europe-tobacconists-eu-crackdown.html>

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