

French give nod to plain cigarette packaging

November 26 2015

Cigarettes will have to be sold in plain packaging in France from next year after the French parliament narrowly voted through a proposal which has drawn the ire of tobacconists.

The measure narrowly made it through parliament late Wednesday after an amendment which drew the support of 17 lawmakers from the ruling Socialist Party failed by just two votes.

Lawmakers had passed a package of wide-ranging public health reforms on a first reading seven months ago as Health Minister Marisol Touraine embarked on a bid to cut smoking-related deaths in a country where around a quarter of adults indulge in the habit, according to World Health Organization figures.

Around one third of teenagers also smoke.

Touraine's goal is to cut the rate to one in five adults over a decade as France progressively ramps up legislation against the habit.

Nine years ago, France controversially banned smoking in enclosed public spaces, including bars and restaurants.

And only last month, Paris authorities doubled fines for dropping cigarette butts to 68 euros (\$75) in a city where some 350 tonnes of [cigarette butts](#) are collected annually.

Last year, Touraine estimated some 13 million people still light up in

France and that smoking accounts for around 78,000 deaths, the leading cause of premature death in the country.

Following Wednesday's vote, all cigarettes will from May next year have to be sold in neutral packaging of uniform size and colour in a move which notably takes a leaf out of Australia's book, that country having adopted similar legislation three years ago.

The United Kingdom and Ireland have since followed suit.

The brand name will appear but in a small, uniform typeface and packets will be shorn of logos.

The French senate had previously excised the neutral packaging clause from the draft legislation, proposing instead that France follow an EU directive proposing larger government health warnings on packaging.

Tobacconists have protested loudly against the latest measures, threatening legal challenges while indicating they favour "prevention, not punishment" for smokers.

Several lawmakers, notably conservatives representing [rural areas](#), complained the crackdown goes beyond European legislation while also defending the "social link" which they say tobacconists have with local communities.

Gille Lurton from the right-wing opposition Republicans said that in passing the legislation on neutral packing, parliament was "only inciting consumers to obtain their supplies on the parallel market," while other colleagues warned it could sound a death knell to commerce in rural areas.

Several Socialist lawmakers also warned the move could in border

regions foster trade in foreign brands not subject to the new regulations.

But Green Party members swung behind the bulk of the ruling Socialists in stressing their view that the new policy would help dissuade young people and women from buying cigarettes.

"The neutral packaging cuts a youngster's desire to smoke. It's less sexy, it increases the perception of danger," said Socialist Gerard Sebaoun.

Fellow Socialist Michele Delaunay slammed "pressure" from the pro-smoking lobby as a tool "which works better as elections draw near."

But Touraine said the statistics spoke for themselves with "78,000 tobacco-related deaths a year—more than 200 per day."

She concluded: "Whereas tobacco consumption is going down in all other European countries it is rising in France."

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