

Czech Republic enforces smoking ban after years of debate

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The Czech Republic on Wednesday enforced a smoking ban in bars, restaurants and cafes, putting to an end to the country's status as one of the last havens for tobacco smokers in Europe.

The ban, which applies to inside areas of bars and restaurants as well as public places like cinemas, theaters and sports venues, was approved by Parliament following years of heated debate and signed by President Milos Zeman, a chain smoker.

Unlike most of Europe, Czechs had remained tolerant of [smoking](#) up till now—and it was up to [restaurant](#) owners to decide whether to allow it in their establishments.

According to data from the European Union, 17 member states have comprehensive smoke-free laws in place. But some, including Austria, Portugal, Romania and Serbia, only have partial bans on [indoor smoking](#) in restaurants and bars.

Others, like Greece, have official bans but the rules are flouted—even by government ministers.

After the Czech ban, Slovakia appeared to be the only EU country left with no official ban in place inside bars.

The Czech Health Ministry said it estimated 18,000 Czechs die of smoking every year and another two thousand non-smokers die due to

exposure to [second-hand smoke](#).

From Wednesday, which is World No Tobacco Day, violating the ban would incur a fine of up to 5,000 koruna (\$190).

Most Czechs approve the ban, but a group of lawmakers have challenged it at the Constitutional Court.

Jakub Storek, owner of the Cafe Liberal in Prague—a popular hangout among local smokers—said he opposed the ban.

"It's hard to predict the impact at the moment," he said. "But I guess it would be different clients coming here in the future."

Stepan Ourecky said he would still come, but may have a smoke outside the cafe.

"Or perhaps, I will smoke less," the 18-year old student said.

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