

Dear President von der Leyen,

Dear Commissioner,

We write as independent scientists and public health researchers because we are increasingly concerned that the European Commission's emerging approach to tobacco and nicotine regulation risks being built on a scientifically false premise: that fundamentally different nicotine products can be treated as though they carry the same public health risks as combustible cigarettes.

That is not supported by the evidence.

No serious scientist would claim that e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products, nicotine pouches, snus, or other smoke-free nicotine products are harmless. They are not. They should not be used by minors, and they should remain subject to strict regulation. But it is equally wrong to imply that they are as dangerous as smoking, or to regulate them as though they were.

Cigarettes are uniquely deadly because they burn tobacco. It is the toxic products of combustion—not nicotine itself—that drive the overwhelming burden of smoking-related cancer, cardiovascular disease, lung disease, and premature death. That is the central scientific distinction in this debate, and it appears at risk of being ignored.

The key public health question is therefore not whether these products are risk-free. It is whether they are more or less harmful than continued smoking.

That is also the comparison the European Parliament has already asked the Commission to make. In its 2022 resolution on strengthening Europe in the fight against cancer, the Parliament explicitly called for scientific evaluations of e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products and novel tobacco products, including comparison with other tobacco products. If the Commission now evaluates these products mainly against non-use, rather than against continued smoking, it would be ignoring the very comparative framework the Parliament itself requested.

That matters because for many adult users the real-world alternative is not abstinence. It is continued smoking.

If Brussels assesses smoke-free products only against "not using anything," it asks the wrong policy question. The relevant question is whether smokers who switch reduce their exposure to the toxicants that make smoking deadly, whether these products help reduce smoking, and whether—on balance—they can lower smoking-related disease compared with continued cigarette use.

We are also concerned by repeated public claims that blur the distinction between nicotine and smoke. Nicotine is addictive and not risk-free. But it is not the primary cause of smoking-related cancer, chronic lung disease, or most smoking-attributable cardiovascular harm. Those harms are overwhelmingly caused by inhaling the toxic products of combustion. Conflating nicotine with smoke is not a minor technical mistake. It misleads the public and risks enacting bad policy.

The same is true of blanket claims that newer nicotine products are “equally harmful” as smoking. That is not what the totality of the evidence shows. Independent evidence reviews in the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Germany have repeatedly distinguished vaping from smoking while emphasising that vaping is not risk-free.

Youth protection is essential. Underage use of any nicotine product should be prevented. But youth concerns cannot be used as a substitute for scientific accuracy. Nor is prohibition automatically the answer. Evidence from countries like the United States, New Zealand or the United Kingdom shows that youth smoking has continued to decline sharply even where smoke-free nicotine products are available under strict regulation and enforcement. The policy challenge is to prevent youth uptake without denying adult smokers access to lower-risk alternatives to cigarettes.

This matters because Europe says it wants a “tobacco-free generation,” defined by the Commission as less than 5% tobacco use by 2040. Yet, smoking remains widespread across the European Union. If Brussels now legislates on the fiction that all nicotine products are materially the same, it risks protecting the cigarette market rather than shrinking it.

That would be a profound public health mistake.

We therefore urge the Commission to ensure that any forthcoming legislative proposal:

- compares non-combustible nicotine products against continued smoking, not only against non-use;
- reflects the continuum of risk across products rather than assuming equivalence with cigarettes;
- clearly distinguishes the harms of combustion from the effects of nicotine;
- addresses youth use and illicit-market risks with proportionate regulation, not false equivalence; and
- follows the comparative scientific approach explicitly requested by the European Parliament.

Europe cannot claim to “follow the science” on cancer while ignoring one of the most basic scientific distinctions in tobacco control: the difference between smoke and smoke-free products. In this regard, we would like to share with you a series of studies that demonstrate the strong scientific evidence showing the differences between these. You can consult them at this link <https://prdtabaquismo.org/biblioteca-de-pdfs/>

Yours sincerely,

The undersigned independent scientists and public health experts

1. Vincent **Amble-Naess**, Medical doctor and public health podcaster based in Sweden

2. M.D. Fabio **Beatrice** Scientific Director of MOHRE. Emeritus Head of Otorhinolaryngology. Founder of No Smoking Center of S. Giovanni Bosco Hospital (Turin-Italy).
3. Fernando **Fernández Bueno**, Surgical Oncologist, Gómez Ulla Hospital (Madrid). Spokesperson, Platform for Tobacco Harm Reduction
4. Carmen **Escrig**, Cell and Molecular Biology PhD
5. Professor Sasa **Jevtovic**, MD PhD Psychiatrist-Psychotherapist. Head of Division. Department of Psychiatry and Psychological Medicine University Hospital Centre Zagreb
6. Dr Nikolina **Kastratovic**, Teaching assistant University of Kragujevac Serbia
7. Prof. Rossen **Kalpachki**. MD, PhD, Neurologist. Head of Neurology Clinic, University Hospital "St. Anna" Sofia, Bulgaria. Head of Stroke Center "St. Anna" Sofia Bulgaria. Founder and Secretary of Bulgarian Stroke Society
8. Prof. Giovanni **Li Volti**, MD, PhD. Professor of Biochemistry. Director of the Center of Excellence for the Acceleration of Harm Reduction (CoEHAR), University of Catania
9. Psychiatrist Martynas **Marcinkevičius**, Vilnius city mental health center
10. Dritan **Miloti**, Technical pharmacist manager
11. Viktor **Mravčík**. Assoc. Prof. Viktor Mravcik MD, PhD, vice-chairman of the board of the society for addictive diseases of the Czech Medical Association. Scientific advisor to national drug coordinator
12. Prof.dr. Gediminas **Navaitis**, Lithuania. Vilnius
13. Georgios **Panotopoulos**, MD PhD. Specialist in Internal Medicine, Obesity & Nutrition. President of HASOMED (Hellenic Association for The Study of Obesity, Metabolism & Eating Disorders)
14. Ioannis **Patrikios**, Professor, and the Deputy Dean of the School of Medicine of the European University of Cyprus
15. MUDr. Luboš **Petruželka**, CSc. Distinguished Professor of Medicine and Oncology at Charles University, Medical Faculty in Prague
16. Emilian Damian **Popovici**, MD, PhD Assoc. Professor of Epidemiology. University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Victor Babeş" Timișoara
17. Heidi B. **Ramstad**, Chief medical officer / Medical Director
18. Christos G. **Savopoulos**, Prof. of Internal Medicine. Director of 1st Medical Propedeutic Dept of Internal Medicine & Stroke Unit, Excellence Center of Hypertension AHEPA University Hospital
19. Roland **Shuperka**, Former National Counterpart for Tobacco Control in Albania. Representative at FCTC meetings. The winner of the World No Tobacco Day 2007 award. WHO Tobacco Laboratory Network (TobLabNet) Participant
20. Ranko **Stevanović**, President of the Croatian Society for the Harm Reduction in Public Health (HaRPH)
21. Dr. János **Szemelyácz**, Addiction Specialist – Psychiatrist – Psychotherapist. President of the Hungarian Association on Addictions
22. Athanasios **Symeonidis**, General practitioner. Hon. Secretary of Hippocrates Association of GP/FM of Greece

23. Philip **Tønnesen**, dr.med. Specialist in Pulmonary Medicine. Expert in smoking cessation. Chairman Tænketanken Røgfri
24. Eleftheria **Tzarnta**, Dentist and Implantologist
25. Bernd **Werse**, Professor for Social Work / Director of the Institute for Addiction Research. Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences
26. Dirk **Ziebolz**, Prof. Dr. (Department of Conservative Dentistry and Periodontology, Brandenburg Medical School Theodor Fontane (MHB), Brandenburg/Havel, Germany)