

Brussels, 28 May 2015

Mr Othmar Karas,
Member of the European Parliament

Re: Your participation in the Eurasia Tax Forum, 30 June-2 July 2015

Dear Mr Karas,

We are writing as representatives of European and international tobacco control and public health organisations to draw to your attention our serious concerns related to your announced participation to the Eurasia Tax Forum 2015 organised by the International Tax and Investment Center (ITIC)¹ in Brussels, on 1 July 2015.

The European Union as a Party to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) is legally bound to protect its policies from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry. The guidelines to Article 6 of the WHO FCTC on tobacco taxation clearly state that tax policies are included in the obligations set out in Article 5.3.² The ITIC is an organisation funded and steered by the tobacco industry, indeed four of the major transnational tobacco companies (PMI, BAT, JTI, and ITG) are listed as sponsors³ and three of them are listed as represented on the Board of Directors⁴ of ITIC.

Since its establishment, ITIC has produced many publications on areas related to tobacco taxes and prices, investment and illicit trade in tobacco products and attempted to weaken the provisions of the Guidelines on article 6 of the FCTC⁵, as well as those of the current Tobacco Tax Directive⁶ and Tobacco Products Directive⁷. There is further evidence of a long history of ITIC activities on behalf of the tobacco industry documented by researchers on the Tobacco Tactics site⁸. This history was also referred to in a *Note Verbale* by the FCTC Secretariat ahead of the Sixth Conference of the Parties for the FCTC in Moscow⁹, discouraging Parties from attending ITIC-sponsored events. Recently, concerns about the role played by the tobacco industry in ITIC led to the

¹ <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:iticnet.org/images/ETF2015webagenda.pdf> (agenda last accessed 28 May 2015)

² [Guidelines for the implementation of Article 6 of the FCTC](#) (last accessed 18 May 2015)

³ http://iticnet.org/Sponsors_Roster (last accessed 13 May 2015)

⁴ http://iticnet.org/Sponsors_BoardOfDirectors (last accessed 13 May 2015)

⁵ For example, see <http://www.iticnet.org/file/document/watch/3835>

⁶ For example, see “The Illicit trade on Tobacco Products and How to Combat it, 2011,

<http://iticnet.org/file/document/download/2759> (last accessed 13 May 2015);

⁷ ITIC presentation to Kangaroo Group Meeting on 30 May 2011,

<http://iticnet.org/file/document/download/2839> (last accessed 13 May 2015); and

http://www.tobaccojournal.com/ITIC_warns_on_growing_illicit_tobacco_trade.50570.0.html

⁸ http://www.tobaccotactics.org/index.php/International_Tax_and_Investment_Center (last accessed 13 May 2015)

⁹ CSF/NB/14/25, as distributed in hard copy to all Delegations at COP5, Moscow, November 2014



withdrawal of the World Bank from the ITIC-sponsored 2015 Asia-Pacific Tax Forum¹⁰. Finally, in a statement of 16 May 2015, the WHO urged all governments to *“follow a non-engagement policy with ITIC”*.¹¹

Recommendation 2.1 of the guidelines to Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC specifically states that *“Parties should interact with the tobacco industry only when and to the extent strictly necessary to enable them to effectively regulate the tobacco industry and tobacco products”*. Your participation in such a conference as a Member of the European Parliament and indeed as a member of the ECON and TAXE Committees is not “strictly necessary”, as the work of these committees gives ample opportunity for the tobacco industry to make its voice heard on the subject of tobacco taxation.

We urge you, as the leading MEP supporting this conference, to withdraw from the 2015 Eurasia Tax Forum, and to encourage other colleagues in the EP to decline their attendance. This would send a very strong signal that the European Parliament is taking its legal obligations under the FCTC seriously.

Please note that a similar letter was sent to the European Commission’s Director General for Tax and Customs Union who was also indicated as a speaker, urging him to withdraw from this conference; and to the European Parliament’s Bureau.

We look forward to your response and remain at your disposal for any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Florence Berteletti
Director, Smoke Free Partnership

Archie Turnbull
President, Smoke Free Partnership



¹⁰ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/World-Bank-exits-event-funded-by-tobacco-companies/articleshow/47127313.cms> (last accessed 13 May 2015)

¹¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/may/16/uk-tax-chief-smoking-health-dave-hartnett-tobacco-hmrc> (last accessed 18 May 2015)



D. Arnott

Deborah Arnott
Chief Executive, Action on Smoking and Health (UK)
Board Member, Smoke Free Partnership



Alison Cox

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Director of Cancer Prevention, Cancer Research UK
Board Member, Smoke Free Partnership



Susanne Logstrup

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Director, European Heart Network
Treasurer, Smoke Free Partnership



John McCormack

John McCormack
Chief Executive Officer, Irish



Cancer Society

Anne Lise Ryel

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Secretary General, Norwegian Cancer Society



NORWEGIAN CANCER SOCIETY



Luk Joossens

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Tobacco Control Advocacy Officer, European Cancer Leagues



Katrín Fjeldsted

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President, Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME)



COMITÉ PERMANENT DES MÉDECINS EUROPÉENS
STANDING COMMITTEE OF EUROPEAN DOCTORS

Nina Renshaw

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Secretary General, European Public Health Alliance



Dr. Francisco Rodriguez Lozano

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President, European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention



ENSP

European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention

Peggy Maguire

Peggy Maguire
Director General, European Institute of Women's Health



Prof Johan de Sutter
Acting Chairman, European Chronic Disease Alliance

ecda

United to reverse the rise in chronic disease

European chronic disease alliance





Dr Gergana Geshanova
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Yves Martinet
President, Comité National Contre le Tabagisme



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Antanas Goštautas
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Nijolė Goštautaitė-Midttun
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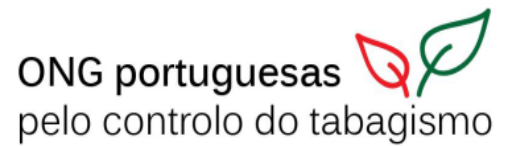
Floris Italianer
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Dr Sofia Belo Ravara
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Jan Peloza
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