

Pirate Party MEP tells the truth about smokeless tobacco... grown up politics

Christian Engström, the Swedish Pirate Party MEP, makes the case for unbanning snus to the European Parliament's Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee ([IMCO](#)) - also [here on his blog](#). He is a shadow rapporteur to that committee, and they will provide an opinion to the Parliament on the European Commission's proposal for the revised [Tobacco Products Directive](#).

Is a halving of smoking likely? I agree with everything Engström says... almost... but I don't think it is realistic to expect snus penetration to reach Swedish levels in the rest of Europe that quickly or maybe at all. However, if you combine the snus option with the [rapid growth and future potential of e-cigarettes](#), the [novel 'heat not burn' tobacco products](#) thought to be in the labs, and [new devices for taking recreational nicotine in the pipeline](#), it is not at all unreasonable to imagine a halving of the smoking rate in the European Union quite quickly. The Commission's [claim](#) is that the Tobacco Products Directive will reduce smoking by 2%. By the way that's not two percentage points off smoking prevalence ([ie from 28% to 26% EU adults](#)), but a 2% reduction in *consumption* over 5 years (ie. equivalent to approximately a half percent fall in prevalence). In return for this nugatory result, it bans the technologies that have been so successful in Sweden and Norway at achieving much deeper cuts and over-regulates the new technologies that could work to reduce smoking all over Europe.

A thought about politics. It is good to see an approach political business with this degree of honesty, compassion and respect for liberty. It prompts me to reflect on what politics is for and what European Parliamentarians think they are there to do? There are influential MEPs who still favour a ban on snus despite a powerful case to lift the ban and regulate the toxicity of the ingredients. They support the ban despite [the overwhelming scientific, ethical and legal case against it](#): high-powered [expert advice](#) to the contrary, an [informed and politically pragmatic alternative policy](#), plenty of [easy-to-understand data](#), an [elegant one-page summary](#), and to cap it all, [a brutal critique of the Commission's](#)

[case for a ban](#). Who are they protecting and from what? No health groups have so far made a case for ban - other than just asserting it should be banned - of course it won't be them that gets the cancer and emphysema.