

Some really very simple arguments for the EU on snus

written by Clive Bates | 9 October 2013



It's good the European Parliament avoided regulating e-cigs as medicines, but for me the excitement is qualified. They did this because thousands of vapers filled their inboxes and spoke truth to power, not because it was the right thing to do (though it was that as well). If they were doing the right thing - *really doing it*, not just trying to look good or keep angry citizens at a safe distance, they would have lifted also the ban on snus. So I wrote to

MEPs to make some points about snus - hardly for the first time - and we wrote to the FT ([Safer than cigarettes, but still banned, 7 Oct](#)) to underline the point. I just want you to know that it isn't evidence, argument or simply doing the right thing that determines policy in the EU. Here's the letter...

To: Group Chairs and Co-Chairs

CC: Members

7 October 2013

Dear Chairs and Co-chairs

Why is snus banned? *Can anyone voting on this directive answer this question?*

There is certainly no scientific case for banning snus:

- *The decision to ban snus in 1992 is a 21 year error. It was not justified at the time, but it certainly is not justified now given what we have since seen in Sweden and Norway.*
- *It has led to the lowest rate of smoking in the EU, by far... 13% in Sweden compared to 28% EU average (Eurobarometer 2012). Norway has smoking rates almost as low and both countries stand out in Europe.*
- *Sweden has also had one of the 2nd greatest falls in smoking prevalence in the last decade, despite starting from a lower base (OECD 2013)*
- *Smoking related disease is much lower in Sweden - for example lung cancer mortality is about half its neighbour Denmark (WHO/IARC data)*
- *The idea that it would be a gateway has proved completely false. It is a gateway out of smoking - diverting young people away from cigarettes*

- and helping older people quit.*
- *Snus is popular as alternative to smoking for people who wish to continue using nicotine*
 - *Snus is popular as smoking cessation aid – it gives another way out of smoking*
 - *Member States like UK and Ireland score high on tobacco policy activity, but Sweden scores high on smoking and health outcomes [see [here](#)]*

But the heart of this issue is ethical. *There is simply no justification for using the force of law to deny even a single European citizen access to this much safer product when cigarettes are freely available throughout the European Union. Nor is there any justification for protecting cigarettes from competition from much less dangerous tobacco products. In this case, public health will be best served if Europe's politicians lift their prohibition, stand aside and let the internal market work as intended.*

Experts think the ban is wrong. *This view is shared by numerous experts in nicotine science and public health. Despite being carefully argued and evidence based, their views have been ignored in favour of political expediency.*

- [*Letter to Commissioner Dalli May 2011*](#)
- [*Letter to UK Secretary of State October 2013*](#)

We expect many MEPs to make speeches and statements declaring their determination to do everything possible to reduce smoking on October 8th. But do they really mean that? Sadly, it will not be possible to vote to lift the ban on snus – there is no amendment that allows for that. However, it is possible to create flexibility for a government to allow snus to be sold where use has been traditional. This is exactly the problem now confronting Denmark, which will be required to force loose snus users back to smoking or the black market if it has to enforce the letter of the Tobacco Products Directive.

*Any government should be able to permit the use of snus where it is not a novel product: ***to secure this modest gain for public health please vote for amendments 131 and 134 on 8 October.****

Disclosure: *no competing interests.*