



Press release: World Heart Day - Sunday 29 September 2013

Embargoed until 00:01 CET 26 September 2013

A heart-healthy environment is an environment free of smoke

Every year, over 1.9 million people die from cardiovascular diseases. Cardiovascular diseases are the most common cause of death in Europe. They are expensive too, estimated to cost the EU almost 196 billion € per year.¹

So do we have anything to celebrate on this year's World Heart Day? Yes we do – because death rates from cardiovascular diseases have come down steadily over the past 30 years. But complacency is not an option, as in some European countries death rates are going up, as shown in a recent study.²

Despite 50 years of clear evidence of the harms of tobacco smoking, it remains one of the main modifiable risk factors for premature mortality. In the EU, 28% of men between the age of 35 and 69 and 13% of women in the same age category die prematurely from cardiovascular diseases.³ Although smoking has declined in many European countries, the rate of decline is now slow and rates remain stable or are increasing in some countries, particularly among women. Women are now smoking nearly as much as men in many European countries and girls often smoke more than boys.⁴

Linda McAvan, rapporteur of the Tobacco Products Directive and co-chair of the MEP Heart Group, says: *“The European Parliament’s Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) adopted its report on the Tobacco Products Directive in July. The report notably supports large, mandatory pictorial health warnings on tobacco products covering 75% of the front*

¹ Nichols M, Townsend N, Scarborough P, Luengo-Fernandez R, Leal J, Gray A, Rayner M (2012). European Cardiovascular disease statistics 2012. European Heart Network, Brussels, European Society of Cardiology, Sophia Antipolis

² Trends in age-specific coronary heart disease mortality in the European Union over three decades: 1980–2009 <http://eurheartj.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2013/06/11/eurheartj.eht159.full.pdf+html>

³ Nichols M, Townsend N, Scarborough P, Luengo-Fernandez R, Leal J, Gray A, Rayner M (2012). European Cardiovascular disease statistics 2012. European Heart Network, Brussels, European Society of Cardiology, Sophia Antipolis

⁴ Nichols M, Townsend N, Scarborough P, Luengo-Fernandez R, Leal J, Gray A, Rayner M (2012). European Cardiovascular disease statistics 2012. European Heart Network, Brussels, European Society of Cardiology, Sophia Antipolis

and the back of tobacco packs. We hope that all MEPs will follow its expert committee adopting our report when they vote on 8 October 2013.”

Antonia Parvanova, co-chair of the MEP Heart Group, points out that *“70% of smokers in the European Union start before the age of 18, we must strive to make tobacco products and smoking less attractive to young people, especially girls. On the eve of this Parliamentary term, Members of the European Parliament have a major opportunity to leave the EU with a legacy that helps prevent unnecessary deaths from cardiovascular diseases by agreeing large health warnings on cigarette packs and prohibiting characterising flavours .”*

Susanne Løgstrup, Director of the European Heart Network, joins Linda McAvan in urging MEPs to support the report adopted in the ENVI committee in July this year. *“We worry that our elected representatives listen too much to arguments put forward by the tobacco industry. MEPs should acknowledge that the industry’s arguments do not stand up to scrutiny. Besides, what price do we put on a life?”* asks Ms Løgstrup.⁵

Note to editors:

About the European Heart Network

The European Heart Network (EHN) is a Brussels-based alliance of heart foundations and likeminded non-governmental organisations throughout Europe, with member organisations in 24 countries. The EHN plays a leading role in the prevention and reduction of cardiovascular diseases, in particular heart disease and stroke, through advocacy, networking, capacity-building and patient support, so that they are no longer a major cause of premature death and disability throughout Europe.

For further information contact Susanne Løgstrup, Director European Heart Network, Brussels, Tel +32 2 512 91 74 or email: slogstrup@ehnheart.org

www.ehnheart.org

⁵ <http://www.ehnheart.org/media/news/704-tobacco-products-directive.html>