

Regulatory briefing

'Beating Cancer' report becomes official EU policy with huge Parliament backing

Written by [Antonia di Lorenzo](#) | 21st February 2022 | [Regulatory briefing](#) | [Policy and Politics](#) | [Regulation and Legislation](#) | Geographies:

The European Parliament has overwhelmingly adopted the Special Committee on Beating Cancer (BECA) report in a move that marks the first time a European institution has formally acknowledged reduced risk products could play a role in smoking cessation – with some caveats.

The parliament voted 652 in favour, 15 against and 27 abstaining during last week's plenary session. The approved plan included "compromise amendments" on alternatives **approved by 29 of 34 committee members** in December.



"This is the first time Europe has a plan that has €4bn allotted to it for its actions. A plan that looks at the whole picture – first of all prevention. This is the most effective way to tackle cancer," said health and food safety commissioner Stella Kyriakides.

This included attaining a Europe free of tobacco among a range of other goals that were determined to be achievable as well as able to improve people's lives and health in tangible and concrete ways, she added.

The vast majority of European Parliament members (MEPs) wholeheartedly welcomed the report and its suggestions. Aldo Patriciello from the European People's Party applauded the report, **highlighting** it as a "call from the Parliament that it wants the Commission to adopt harm reduction across all future policies in the fight against cancer".

The precautionary principle

The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) also **welcomed** the report. The S&D coordinator on the BECA, Alessandra Moretti (pictured), said the report aimed to ensure best practices such as emphasising prevention but that it was just the first step of a long journey. The party said it now expects that the precautionary principle, scientific evidence and World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations on tobacco and e-cigarettes will be respected when the EU reviews legislation in this area.

"After months of work, hearings and research, this report represents a concrete hope from which to build a renewed and common fight against cancer in the whole of Europe," said S&D MEP Nicolás González Casares.

Casares added that he was, overall, satisfied with the report. Although he might want to change some lifestyle prevention aspects – for example with regard to tobacco and alcohol – he said that could be achieved at a later point.

“But what never changes is science,” he said. “And when I finish this report and when we finish this resolution, if someone changes science, science will continue to knock on the door, because we are working on something very important, which is the fight against cancer.”

BECA rapporteur Véronique Trillet-Lenoir added: “We need a high level of research together with the European Commission. That research needs to be independent, multi-disciplined and based in European universities as well as the European health data space.”

However, there was some dissension and criticism from those addressing Parliament during the vote preceding initial debate. The vast majority of these revolved around alcohol. But a number of MEPs also addressed tobacco control.

Taxation ‘the wrong plan’

Kateřina Konečná, a Czech MEP, said the plan was wrong to focus on **higher tobacco taxes** as the solution to preventing tobacco use. “We have not been able to reduce the level of risky behaviour in our population for a long time, and the committee’s report stubbornly adheres to the solution of [attempting to do so through] higher tobacco taxation,” she said. “This is despite the fact that it is clear that smoking is a social problem in some parts of our society and no high tax discourages this group from smoking.”

Pietro Fiocchi, speaking on behalf of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group, also criticised the report’s taxation-based approach and said more emphasis should have been placed on the use of tobacco alternatives as tools for smoking cessation. Neither taxation nor the banning of advertising and marketing of products has demonstrated a positive outcome in reducing bad behaviour, he said.

“The increase in taxation and limitation for alcohol and cigarettes has always been a counter-productive approach, potentially causing illegal and criminal activity but also really bad behaviour, especially in the poor sector of the population,” he said. “I strongly believe that alternatives to traditional smoking products are an important tool to reduce smoking in Europe.”

Other MEPs criticised the report from the opposite perspective. Tilly Metz, an MEP with the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, said the report was late in dealing with flavours in vaping. “The current report calls on the commission to evaluate which flavours in e-cigarettes are particularly attractive to minors and non-smokers, and to propose to ban these,” she said. “There are thousands of flavours in e-cigarettes that are trying to make them unduly attractive, and it is overdue that regulatory action has to be taken against them.”

In the **compromises reached by representatives last year**, MEPs said that alternatives “could allow some smokers to quit smoking progressively” but that these products “should not be attractive to minors and non-smokers”.

Further action will be taken by the Commission to analyse which flavours are particularly attractive to minors and non-smokers and propose a ban on those in the **upcoming revision of the Tobacco Products Directive (TPD)**.

Rejected amendments

Support for vaping might have not made it to the final report. On 9th February S&D representatives Heléne Fritzon, Alessandra Moretti and Nicolás González Casares submitted **amendments** before the plenary vote. They wanted to remove the passage recognising the role vaping could play in smoking cessation and instead reference a **WHO report** and the **opinion** of the Commission's Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks (SCHEER) that found evidence of aiding smoking cessation was weak.

The MEPs also suggested a general ban on all flavourings as a method for reducing the attractiveness of such products. However, their proposals did not win a majority and were rejected.

The report was largely welcomed by industry organisations. Michael Landl, director of the World Vapers' Alliance (WVA), said the report showed the "power of the voice of individual consumers coming together".

He added: "Now it is the Commission's turn to no longer ignore science and the experience of millions of consumers."

Carmine Canino, president of the Italian National Association of e-cigarette consumers (ANPVU) and WVA advisory board member, said he hoped the Commission's future proposals would acknowledge harm reduction.

"Scientists, harm reduction experts, as well as consumers have been clear about the negative consequences of banning or even restricting flavours," he said. "Again, research has shown that flavours are essential to reducing smoking among adults. We need our policymakers to listen and act."

What This Means: The final BECA report now represents the official position of the European Parliament. The European Commission is therefore expected to consider the report when designing upcoming regulations, including the forthcoming revision of the TPD.

For example, the report's final version also included a recommendation that the Commission fund programmes that promote smoking cessation and impose an increase in minimum excise duties on all tobacco products.

– Antonia Di Lorenzo and Freddie Dawson *ECigIntelligence staff*