



MISLEADING AND MANIPULATING:

HOW BRUSSELS IS SABOTAGING
SMOKING CESSATION

The EU Commission's Failures in Brief

The European Commission is failing Europe's smokers by refusing to acknowledge one basic fact: **nicotine pouches and other smoke-free alternatives are not cigarettes**. They sit on completely different risk levels, yet Brussels insists on treating them as if they are equally harmful. This is not an oversight - it is policy built on misleading narratives that keep people stuck with the most dangerous product on the market.

We already know harm reduction works. **Sweden's near smoke-free success**, along with strong results in Greece and the Czech Republic, prove that when people have access to safer options, smoking rates collapse. Instead of learning from these examples, the Commission looks the other way.

At the same time, Brussels is quietly moving toward **centralised taxation powers** over tobacco and nicotine products. If successful, this will make safer alternatives more expensive and less accessible, especially for lower-income consumers - the very people who stand to benefit most.

This reckless direction risks undoing a decade of public-health progress. Europe needs clear science, honest communication, and respect for member states that have shown what real harm reduction looks like.

Tobacco Policy Revamp: More Taxes, More Restrictions

The EU is rolling out several major policies that could change how tobacco and nicotine alternatives are treated across Europe.

The [EU Cardiovascular Plan](#) builds on the Beating Cancer Plan. Tobacco control is one pillar within

the prevention part of this new strategy. The Plan says there are 1.7 million cardiovascular deaths each year in the EU, costing 280 billion euros in healthcare. The European Commission wants to focus on prevention, early detection, and care, but this almost always means more restrictions and not a fair look at harm reduction.

The [Tobacco Excise Directive](#) is back. Brussels wants to set minimum taxes on nicotine pouches and vaping across all countries, taking away national control. According to the [draft](#) presented last July nicotine pouches and heated tobacco would face new minimum taxes of over half their retail price. This draft would make e-liquid much more expensive - for example, a 10ml bottle could cost at least 3.60 euros more within four years.

The [Tobacco Products Directive](#) will be reviewed next year. This law regulates all tobacco and nicotine products and will have a big impact on harm reduction in Europe. Whatever the EU decides will shape not just Europe, but other regions and countries too, as they watch what happens here.

Misinformation as Official EU Policy

The European Commission has a familiar pattern: when a safer alternative emerges, their first instinct is to regulate it into the ground. Tobacco harm reduction has been no different. During the last TPD negotiations, the Commission even tried to classify vaping as a medical product - a move consumers fought back against and won. That fight prevented Europe from ending up with an Australian-style prescription regime, which has since fuelled illegal markets, violence, and a collapse in consumer trust.

Today, we see the same reflex aimed at **nicotine pouches**. Instead of recognising them as a low-risk, smoke-free alternative that has already helped countries like Sweden slash smoking rates, Brussels treats them as a threat to be tightly controlled.

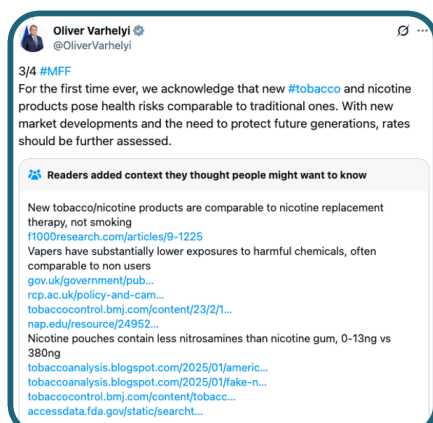
Innovation keeps offering people safer choices; the Commission keeps trying to shut the door.

Smoking Kills. Vaping Kills.

The Commission tries again. Since spring 2025, Commissioners Wopke Hoekstra and Olivér Várhelyi have become the loudest voices pushing less harmful nicotine alternatives out of existence, unafraid to spread misinformation. Hoekstra shocked consumers and public health experts by **declaring** in front of the European Parliament, “Smoking kills. Vaping kills.” Beginning in October 2025, he doubled down and said when talking about vaping: “it is a killer”. Those statements are not only false; they risk public health by scaring smokers away from less harmful alternatives.



Around the same time, Várhelyi **told** the Environment Committee and posted on X (and got community noted) that alternative nicotine products have created completely new health risks that are comparable to, or even greater than, smoking itself. He even cited the now-disproved “popcorn lung” myth as evidence.

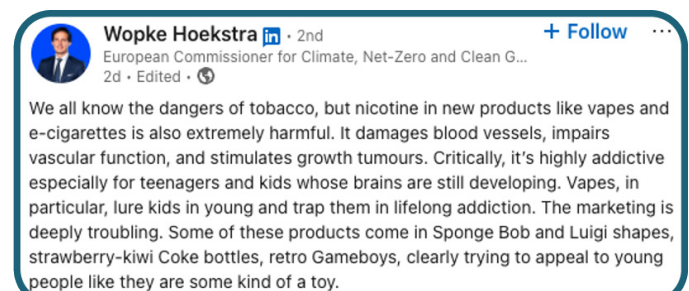


In November 2025, Várhelyi **escalated** further, claiming that “e-cigarettes and tobacco pouches generate substances known to cause cancer” and that they “are associated with an increased risk of cancer” - a statement published in EUNews and widely criticised by experts for echoing misinformation rather than evidence. Such claims directly contradict the scientific **consensus** that the overwhelming majority of cancer risk comes from combustion, not nicotine or smoke-free products.

Varhely: “Electronic cigarettes and tobacco pouches promote cancer, WHO says so”

The Health Commissioner responds to a question on the reform of EU rules, and seems to suggest the strict way forward. “Our assessment follows a structured and evidence-based approach”

More recently, Hoekstra **claims** nicotine in new products like vapes damages blood vessels, impairs vascular function, and stimulates tumour growth. He also insists vaping traps young people in lifelong addiction through toy-like marketing, citing products resembling Sponge Bob or retro Gameboys.



Várhelyi **echoes** this, insisting that nicotine is addictive and even claiming it harms the heart and causes cancer - statements long contradicted by scientific evidence. After criticism from experts and consumers, he edited his post, softening the wording, but even the revised version remains misleading.



Oliver Várhelyi @olivervarhelyi
X | BE | Sep 30, 5:27 PM



Nicotine is addictive, damages the heart and causes cancer. After the Tobacco Taxation Directive, we will move forward with ambitious revisions of the Tobacco Products and Tobacco Advertising Directives to curb the **Nicotine** epidemic and protect young generations.

While nicotine is addictive, it does not cause cancer or many other diseases linked to smoking. The vast majority of the harm comes from the combustion when smoking cigarettes.

Myth 2: Nicotine is very harmful to health

Fact

While nicotine is a highly addictive drug, it does not contain toxic chemicals found in cigarettes, including tar and tobacco.

Source: www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/ready-to-quit-smoking/vaping-to-quit-smoking/vaping-myths-and-the-facts

The worst part: the Commission stated these false statements are not personal opinions but official policy. By treating reduced-risk products as equally harmful as smoking, despite decades of contrary evidence, the Commission embeds misinformation into its institutional messaging - discouraging smokers from switching to safer alternatives and endangering public health.

This stance contradicts leading health authorities



and many public health experts who recognise those products as far less harmful than smoking and found that nicotine pouches, vaping, and heated tobacco help smokers quit cigarettes. Meanwhile, countries that embraced harm reduction, like Sweden and the Czech Republic, have seen significant drops in smoking. The EU's refusal to follow evidence risks denying millions the chance to quit smoking for good.

Tobacco Policy Without Consent

The European Commission's approach to tobacco harm reduction ignores clear public support, expert advice, and democratic process. Its leadership repeatedly sidelines the voices of consumers and scientists, while pushing predetermined policies that favour prohibition over evidence.

An AI-analysis of the Commission's cardiovascular health consultation revealed strong backing for low-risk nicotine products. More than 76% of respondents who mentioned harm reduction supported policies to include nicotine pouches, vaping, and similar alternatives in the EU's Cardiovascular Plan, seeing them as crucial tools to reduce smoking and improve health. Yet this widespread support is overlooked.

In October 2025, Commissioners Hoekstra and Várhelyi met only with Commission-funded anti-nicotine groups, excluding consumers and independent experts. This one-sided engagement stifles debate and marginalises important voices.

In a troubling example of dismissing democratic input, Commissioner Várhelyi publicly announced plans to tax pouches and vapes like cigarettes, citing rising youth nicotine usage rates as justification. His opinion seems already to be made, even while a public consultation on these tax proposals remained open later that month of the statement. By taking a public stance before the consultation concluded, the Commission undermines the value of citizens' opinions and makes the exercise hollow.

A letter signed by 83 public health experts in September warned that the Commission's punitive tax plans ignore scientific evidence and risk reversing progress in smoking reduction. They urged fair taxation based on relative risk, highlighting successes in the UK and Sweden

using harm reduction. The Commission has so far disregarded this expert guidance.

The Commission also ignores the results of its own [Eurobarometer](#). Their latest data shows two things clearly: **over 90%** of Europeans do not find alternatives like pouches or vaping appealing, and **around 97%** of users are former smokers. In other words, these products are functioning exactly as harm-reduction tools - not attracting non-smokers, but helping smokers move away from cigarettes. Instead of acknowledging this, the Commission selectively sidesteps its own evidence. When policymakers refuse to accept the data they themselves collect, it raises a blunt question: how serious is their commitment to evidence-based policy?

The EU Commission clearly has a pattern of sidelining citizens, experts, and democratic processes. Its dismissive approach risks public health setbacks and erodes faith in European governance.

The Price of Ignoring Harm Reduction

The Commission's approach to tobacco harm reduction is not just misguided, it threatens public health, ignores scientific evidence, and undermines European sovereignty. Understanding why this matters requires looking at the real-world consequences of treating all nicotine products as equally harmful.

Science shows that [nicotine pouches](#) and [vaping](#) are fundamentally different from smoking. Because pouches involve no inhalation and both products avoid combustion, they eliminate tar, carbon monoxide, and hundreds of combustion-related toxins - and users show markedly lower exposure to those harmful chemicals compared to cigarette smokers. For adults who smoke, switching completely to pouches or e-cigarettes

can substantially reduce exposure to smoke-related toxicants. While no nicotine product is risk-free, this harm-reduction pathway deserves recognition - not equal treatment with cigarettes.

The success stories from Sweden, the Czech Republic, and Greece prove harm reduction works in practice. Sweden's embrace of safer nicotine alternatives like nicotine pouches snus and vaping has made it the closest EU country to becoming smoke-free. Looking at Swedish-born adults only, it is already below the 5% smoke-free goal. This achievement came through encouraging smokers to switch to less harmful products, not through prohibition. The Czech Republic has recorded a 23% reduction in smoking rates over three years, while Greece achieved a 14% drop after adopting harm reduction strategies. These countries show what happens when policy follows evidence rather than ideology.

Beyond public health failures, the Commission's tax proposals represent a concerning power grab. The Commission's own documents acknowledge this shift, proposing "own resources" that would give Brussels direct access to tax revenue from Member States - a change that legally requires unanimity, yet is being pursued through secondary tobacco policy.

Swedish Finance Minister Elisabeth Svantesson has already [called](#) EU-wide tax hikes on tobacco products "completely unacceptable," warning that Brussels wants to divert revenues to the EU rather than national treasuries. This constitutional overreach threatens the principle that Member States retain fiscal sovereignty, using public health as cover for centralising power in Brussels.

The Commission's failure matters because it blocks proven harm reduction strategies, ignores scientific evidence, and erodes democratic governance. While countries following evidence-based policies see dramatic improvements in public health, the EU pushes ideology over science, harming the very citizens it claims to protect.

Restoring Science and Sovereignty

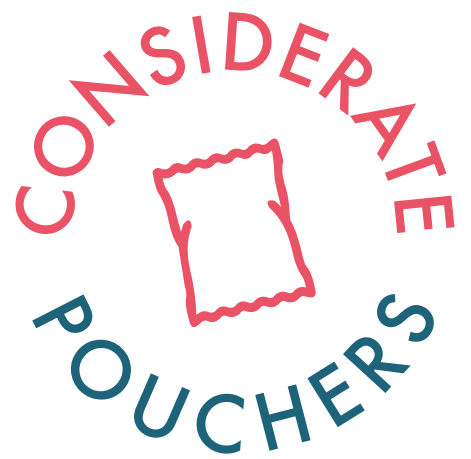
The EU must start by recognising the fundamental difference between combustible tobacco and reduced-risk alternatives like nicotine pouches, snus, and vaping. These products offer smokers safer options and save lives when used as substitutes.

Citizens, consumers, and independent experts must be involved in policy discussions from the start. Their real-world experience, health data, and switching patterns provide essential balance - and

guard against one-sided ideology dominating EU decision-making.

Above all, future policies should be built on solid scientific evidence and proven success stories, not outdated beliefs. The EU should follow countries like Sweden, the Czech Republic and Greece, which show how harm reduction works in practice and helps people quit smoking for good.

This pragmatic, evidence-based approach can protect public health and restore trust in European institutions.



hello@consideratepouchers.org
www.consideratepouchers.org
