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PRO SMOKING MEPS FAIL CONSTITUENTS AFTER REVERSING BAN

A straw poll has today (Wednesday) revealed that nearly half of respondent MEPs back building smoking-rooms in the European Parliament's buildings at the tax-payers' expense – according to the Smokefree Partnership (SFP).

Forty-five per cent of those questioned disagreed with the widely-held belief that building smoking rooms provided no public health benefit and was a waste of tax payers' money. And 17 per cent had no opinion on the matter.

Asked whether they thought that all workplaces, including private offices, should be smoke free, an alarmingly high number of MEPs from the UK and Ireland (45 per cent) disagreed.

Among MEPs in the new member states 21 per cent disagreed with smokefree workplaces; this rose to 29 per cent among the old EU states excluding the UK and Ireland.

The poll's results were announced today in Brussels at a press conference designed to shame MEPs into thinking again. The results suggest that MEPs are out of touch with their constituents and national colleagues as more and more EU countries introduce national smokefree laws.

Such a pro-smoking stance from some MEPs is in direct opposition to the wishes of their constituents. Last month (May) a Eurobarometer survey showed that 88 per cent of EU citizens support smokefree offices, indoor workplaces and public spaces.

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The poll, commissioned by the SFP, received replies from 107 MEPs from 23 countries. It was conducted after members had reversed a new year's decision to make the European Parliament buildings in Brussels and Strasbourg smokefree.

Within weeks of agreeing to ban smoking in the buildings, members lit up in public and ignored the earlier decision.

In the straw poll MEPs overwhelmingly agreed that passive smoking is a direct cause of fatal disease – with only four per cent disagreeing with medical expertise; among the new member states 25 per cent had no opinion.

Jean King, director of tobacco control at Cancer Research UK – a member of the SFP - said: *‘It’s bad enough that a proportion of MEPs believe they should spend tax-payers’ money on building smoking-rooms despite the fact they believe smoking can cause fatal disease. But it’s even worse that democratically elected members should go against the wishes of the people they represent. The alarming decision for MEPs to flout an agreed smoking ban in the European Parliament buildings highlights a dangerous disregard some MEPs have for the health of those workers affected by this u-turn.*

Their original commitment to a smokefree European Parliament showed they understood the dangers of second hand smoke. They still have a chance to lead by example and reverse this disastrous setback for the future of a healthy Europe.’

Green MEP Gérard Onesta, Vice-President of the European Parliament said *“At a time when the negative effects of passive smoking have been irrefutably established by scientific research and when one Member State after the other is adopting more and more stringent national legislation in this regard, I do not wish to see parliamentary immunity for tobacco”.*

EPP-ED MEP Karl-Heinz Florenz, EP Rapporteur of the Draft Report on the Green Paper “Towards a Europe free from tobacco smoke” released on 31st May, World No Tobacco Day said: *“Extensive research has shown that even the most modern ventilation systems cannot fully remove the dangerous ingredients from the air and cannot protect against the harmful effects of passive smoking. I do not want to forbid smoking, but introducing sealed smoking rooms in the European Parliament is a waste of EU funds which could be better spent in further investing in sports facilities so that MEPs can get healthy. In the light of the recent debate on my report on the Commission's Green Paper on 'Towards a Europe Free from Tobacco Smoke', I am confident that many of my colleagues will support my call to the Bureau to adopt a smoking ban in all parts of the European Parliament with effect from 1 August 2007”.*

Prof. John Britton, Chair of the Tobacco Control Committee of the European Respiratory Society, another member of the SFP, welcomed Mr Florenz's words saying, *“We are heartened by the strong support shown in recent days for the reinstatement of the total smoking ban in the European Parliament. If these MEPs won't listen to their constituents on this issue, perhaps they will listen to their MEP colleagues who, like millions of other EU citizens, also want to work in a smokefree workplace.”*

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Notes to Editor:

Country breakdown

UK and Ireland

EU 15 Member States (excluding UK and Ireland): Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden

EU 12 Member States: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia

Countries not represented: Malta, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Latvia

The fieldwork was conducted by Communicate Research in London between 20th April and 30th May. The questionnaires were completed online and by self-completion postal questionnaire. Data was weighted to reflect the exact composition of the European Parliament in terms of regions and political grouping.

The **Smoke Free Partnership** is a strategic, independent and flexible partnership between the **European Respiratory Society** (ERS at www.ersnet.org), **Cancer Research UK** (CR-UK at www.cancerresearchuk.org) and the **Institut National du Cancer** (INCa at www.e-cancer.fr). It aims to promote tobacco control advocacy and policy research at EU and national levels in collaboration with other EU health organisations and EU tobacco control networks.