

**Unprecedented breach of international agreements' obligations on tobacco control by Serbia and Croatia's
high-level authorities: Open Letter to the President and Government of the Republic of Croatia and the
President and Government of the Republic of Serbia**

25th August, 2016

Dear Sir/Madam,

We are writing to express our very deep concern regarding the attempts by the tobacco industry to subvert tobacco control and public health policies in Serbia and Croatia, which can have an impact in the whole South-East European region in general.

In recent months, local and regional media have reported extensively about interactions between the Serbian and Croatian governments with British American Tobacco (BAT), which create perception of a partnership between the two governments and the tobacco giant. On May 10th, the Prime Minister of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic visited BAT's plant in Vranje (southern Serbia) where he announced the state will "explore ways to assist the BAT company even more to increase their earnings.

Few days later, on June 2nd, the Prime Minister of Croatia Tihomir Oreskovic also met with a BAT delegation. During the meeting, Mr. Oreskovic expressed satisfaction that BAT would create additional jobs with its newest investment and expanding production capacity.

While Prime Ministers convey their acknowledgments, tobacco industry continue killing citizens in their countries. Serbia and Croatia are on the top of world charts on tobacco related deaths and the human cost of tobacco is tragic. Every year, more than 8300 Croatians and 20500 Serbians die of tobacco-caused diseases and in both countries smoking is one of the main health risk factors.

Though the heads of the Serbian and Croatian governments appreciate the "great economic impact" of the tobacco industry to national budgets, we remind them that tobacco not only kills people, it also saps national treasuries. The economic impact of tobacco has been analysed in many countries, confirming that the alleged economic benefits of tobacco are illusory and misleading. [The World Health Organization states](#): "The economic costs of tobacco use are equally devastating as the public health costs. Though the tobacco industry routinely cites the economic contribution of tobacco, the reality is that tobacco use puts an enormous financial burden on countries, in addition to the fact that tobacco and poverty are inextricably linked at the individual level. Nationally, the costs of tobacco use encompass increased health-care costs, lost productivity due to illness, premature death, and widespread environmental damage. Thus, as tobacco consumption rates and tobacco-related illnesses increase in developing countries, so do tobacco-related health care costs."

Unnecessary interactions of government officials with the tobacco industry constitute a serious violation of the World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) which was ratified by Serbia in 2006 and by Croatia in 2008. FCTC Article 5.3 is geared towards safeguarding public health policy-making from tobacco industry interference and recognises the fundamental conflict between the tobacco industry's interests and public health policy-making. It also recognises that the tobacco industry has, for decades, been working tirelessly to block, weaken and delay the life-saving health measures enshrined in the FCTC.

[The FCTC Article 5.3 guidelines](#), adopted unanimously in 2008 by FCTC parties, require all Parties to "... not give preferential treatment to the tobacco industry". The guidelines state that "because their products are lethal, the tobacco industry should not be granted incentives to establish or run their businesses. Any preferential treatment of the tobacco industry would be in conflict with tobacco control policy."

Under the story of big investments to national economies and contribution to creation of new workplaces, the tobacco industry tries to distance its image from the lethal nature of the product it sells and to appear as socially responsible corporations. In accordance to FCTC Article 5.3 guidelines, "Parties should ensure that all branches of government and the public are informed and made aware of the true purpose and scope of

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activities described as socially responsible performed by the tobacco industry. Parties should not endorse, support, form partnerships with or participate in activities of the tobacco industry described as socially responsible."

We are deeply concerned about the astounding level of access to the heads of governments by tobacco lobbyists which are eager to undermine tobacco control efforts in Serbia, Croatia and the whole region of South-Eastern Europe. We appeal to the prime minister of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic and the prime minister of Croatia Tihomir Oreskovic to avoid encouraging of tobacco industry and further its interests. We seek leadership from Presidents and Governments of the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Serbia with bold and decisive action to ensure proper implementation of Article 5.3 of the FCTC in their countries and in the region. This is crucial in order to protect public health through strong tobacco regulation and for the States to fulfil their UN obligations.

We look forward to your urgent response and action.

Respectfully,

1. Advocacy Centre Life, Ukraine
2. Association "Eko zeleni", Bosnia and Herzegovina
3. Association for malignant breast diseases and other malignant diseases with women "Novi Pogled", Bosnia and Herzegovina
4. Association of women suffering from breast cancer "Nijemi Krik", Bosnia and Herzegovina
5. Association "Progressive Reinforcement of Organizations and Individuals" (PROI), Bosnia and Herzegovina
6. Austrian Council on Smoking & Health, Austria
7. Center for Health Policies and Studies, Moldova
8. Clearpoint Communication Associates, Romania
9. Association youth and tobacco, Slovenia
10. European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations
11. European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention
12. European Respiratory Society
13. Finland's ASH (Action on Smoking and Health), Finland
14. French National Committee for Tobacco Control, France
15. Institute for Youth Participation, Health and Sustainable Development, Slovenia
16. Kosovo Advocacy and Development Centre, Kosovo
17. NGO Tobacco-free Estonia, Estonia
18. NGO Preporod, Montenegro
19. Partnership for Public Health, Bosnia and Herzegovina
20. Romanian Association for Health Promotion (ARPS), Romania
21. Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth, Slovenia
22. Slovenian Coalition for Tobacco Control, Slovenia
23. The European Law Student's Association ELSA Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
24. The Smoke Free Partnership
25. The Smoke-free Life Coalition of Bulgaria, Bulgaria
26. Università del Terzo Settore, Italy
27. UTRIP – institute for research and development, Slovenia
28. XQNS! - Grassroots Movement for Public Health and the advancement of the smoke free law, Spain
29. Youth Network No Excuse, Slovenia