

## Open for business

**Maroš Šefčovič on why the new joint transparency register heralds a more credible era of EU decision making and cooperation**



### **Financial, pensions and insurance reform**

Michel Barnier, Pervenche Berès, Arlene McCarthy, Anne-Sophie Parent

**Plus:** The Parliament Magazine's sustainability of palm oil production roundtable



### **Transparency and openness**

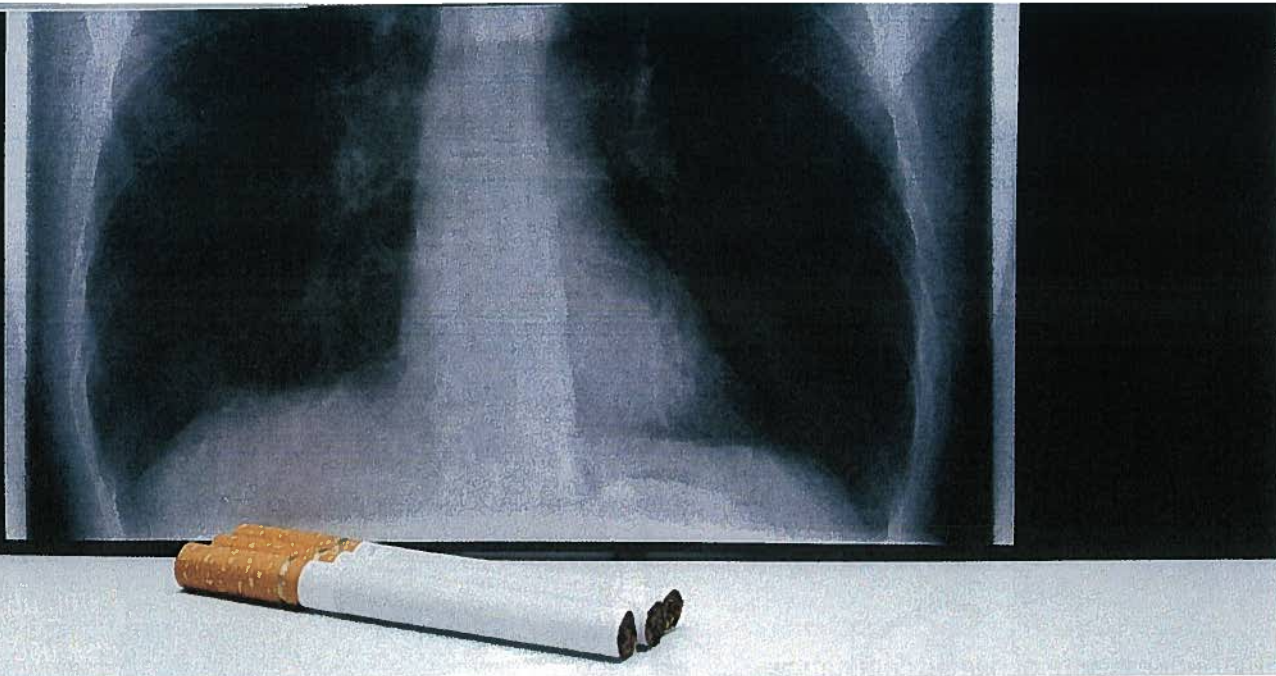
Diana Wallis on the joint register

**Plus:** Alter-EU reaction, Galvin report release

**Inside:** Spain and Portugal look back on 25 years of EU membership, EU-South Korea FTA, Tajikistan







# COP what?

Seán Kelly is putting his weight behind a campaign to highlight one of Europe's forgotten diseases

**C**OP what? – Even for acronym-savvy Europeans, COPD is a difficult one to remember. The full version does not help much either: 'Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease'. A chronic disease which makes breathing difficult? Sounds somewhat familiar to all of us who have experienced breathlessness when walking up the stairs, or running after a bus. At the same time, it sounds far from terrifying. Terrified, however, we should be, in light of predictions from the World Health Organisation (WHO), according to which COPD is set to become the third leading cause of death by 2030, and according to which COPD related disability will leapfrog from ninth to fifth place in terms of disability-adjusted-life years by 2020.

Currently ranked number four in the WHO's 'causes of death' list, the true mortality figure is likely to be much higher, since many COPD-related deaths are wrongly classified as heart or kidney failure, even when COPD has been significantly implicated. As such, COPD presents a rising burden to society, aggravated by the fact that most COPD patients are between 40 to 65 years old, an age group which is normally at the peak of its economic and social productivity.

As tobacco smoking is the most important risk factor for COPD, the disease prevalence is currently higher among men than women. However, in line with consistently rising

numbers of female smokers, a rise in prevalence among women is expected. COPD is frequently confused with asthma. Yet contrary to asthma, COPD is not reversible: it worsens over time and gradually limits the patient's ability to breathe. As a result, daily activities become increasingly difficult – the patient's organs and muscles receive less and less oxygen and they slowly but steadily suffocate. While COPD cannot yet be cured, there is sufficient evidence that patients have a much better quality of life, including a longer productive working life, when the disease is diagnosed and treated early. Unfortunately, this hardly happens in practice, since the disease with the difficult name does not appear to be on anyone's radar screen – patients, healthcare professionals and the public are left in the dark. In light of the WHO's daunting predictions, this is not only deplorable for the patients concerned, but also grossly irresponsible, given that little has yet been done to curb the rising disease burden. Luckily, examples of good practice do exist: thanks to the Finnish COPD programme, for instance, societal costs related to COPD dropped from €800m in 1997 to €194m in 2007. Both hospitalisations due to COPD and the periods spent in hospital fell by 39.7 per cent and 37.6 per cent respectively.

It is the duty of the EU to flag and disseminate such examples of good practice with a view to tackling the rising COPD threat and eliminating health inequalities in Europe. Together with the European federation of allergy and airway diseases patients association, I am hosting a series of workshops on COPD to raise awareness of the disease and discuss policy solutions. The first workshop focusing on prevention and diagnosis takes place this week in the European parliament on 29 June and will bring together a number of well known specialists and high ranking policymakers. Our goal is to develop concrete recommendations on how to improve the situation for patients across Europe and curb costs. These we will publish on the occasion of world COPD day on 16 November. Take a deep breath – and watch this space. ★

Seán Kelly is a member of parliament's regional development committee Further details of EFA's COPD workshop in the European parliament can be found at: <http://www.efanet.org/activities/events.html>