

Fighting the illicit trade in tobacco products requires a joint global effort:

EU calls on international partners to sign anti- smuggling UN treaty (FCTC Protocol)

European citizens are concerned at the loss of revenue as a result of cigarette smuggling and expect action to be taken to confront this. Continued action is required in Europe and beyond to tackle the harmful effects of the illicit tobacco trade and the EU needs to work on this with its international partners. Today the EU calls on other countries to follow suit and sign the World Health Organisation Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products ("FCTC Protocol").

The EU has been in the lead in negotiating the Protocol under the auspices of the WHO. Following a Commission proposal, the EU ratified the FCTC Protocol on 24 June 2016. The Protocol requires 40 ratifications to enter into force. To date there have been 18 ratifications.

As illicit tobacco trade is a global problem, it requires cooperation on a worldwide scale. The FCTC Protocol is the first international treaty designed to tackle international tobacco smuggling. It sets out measures to secure the supply chain through the creation of a global tracking and tracing system, licensing, due diligence and other record keeping requirements. It also foresees international cooperation through mutual assistance between authorities and increased sanctions.

At an event marking the EU ratification of the FCTC Protocol, European Commission Vice-President Kristalina Georgieva said *"The illicit tobacco trade threatens our citizens' health and drains public budgets. Only an international UN treaty with binding obligations such as the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products can adequately address the major challenge we are facing, we therefore call on all our partner countries around the world to ratify or accede as soon as possible"*.

European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Vytenis Andriukaitis added: *"Smoking is responsible for the loss of almost 700,000 lives every year across the EU. Illicit tobacco trade undermines public health policies to diminish smoking by providing products that do not comply with EU rules, whereby tobacco products must feature health warnings and respect restrictions on additives and flavours. As foreseen in the Protocol, the Commission health services are shaping right now an EU-wide track and tracing system for tobacco products which will help clamp down illegal trade."*

"In the EU, the illicit tobacco market has grown at a striking pace, with contraband and counterfeit cigarettes found in all Member States. But this is not only an EU problem," said Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Miroslav Lajčák. He also underlined that *"this global phenomenon requires global solutions, and this Protocol represents the first international instrument dedicated to addressing this challenge"*.

Background:

A [European Union-wide poll](#) revealed a lack of awareness that black market cigarettes are a major source of revenue for organised crime. The European Commission and Member States' customs authorities are currently putting into practice the Action Plan contained in the Strategy on stepping up the fight against cigarette smuggling and illicit trade in tobacco products of 2013. This includes implementing the tracking and tracing method under the 2014 Tobacco Products Directive, as well as the ratification and global promotion of the FCTC Protocol. In parallel, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) has stepped up its enforcement cooperation with national customs authorities. Last year, the volume of cigarettes seized with OLAF support reached a new record, with 600 million cigarettes confiscated.

For further details on the FCTC Protocol: <http://www.who.int/fctc/protocol/en>

For statements of VP Georgieva: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/georgieva/announcements_en

For Eurobarometer survey results: https://ec.europa.eu/anti-fraud/public-perception-illicit-tobacco-trade_en

Strategy and Action Plan on stepping up fight against cigarette smuggling and illicit trade in tobacco products (2013):

Strategy: https://ec.europa.eu/anti-fraud/sites/antifraud/files/docs/body/communication_en.pdf

Action Plan: https://ec.europa.eu/anti-fraud/sites/antifraud/files/docs/body/action_plan_en.pdf