



Catania, 10 October 2023

Ms. Stella KYRIAKIDES
Commissioner for Health and Food Safety
Stella.KYRIAKIDES@ec.europa.eu

RE: Open Letter for a Redefinition of Anti-Smoking Policies

Dear Ms. Stella KYRIAKIDES,

we are writing as members of the Center of Excellence for the Acceleration of Harm Reduction (CoEHAR) of the University of Catania, and as external scientists and experts in tobacco harm reduction.

Twenty years after the entry into force of the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), tobacco-related pathologies continue to be a leading cause of non-communicable diseases. The fight against smoking remains a priority.

In Europe, approximately 100 million people currently smoke. According to official Eurobarometer data, smokers in the European Union decreased by only 2% between 2014 and 2020, despite the implementation of tobacco control measures outlined in the FCTC. At this rate, it will take at least 60 years to achieve the goal of an eradication of the smoking habit (i.e., reducing smoking prevalence below the 5% threshold).

Taking into account these data, it is time to admit that current tobacco control strategies are not producing the desired results quickly enough. **Therefore, it is necessary to complement existing anti-smoking policies with new approaches, such as harm reduction strategies. This involves providing adult smokers with combustion-free alternatives to conventional cigarettes, thus mitigating the harm caused by the emission of toxic substances from tobacco combustion.** This approach is strongly supported by prestigious public health authorities, including the Institute of Medicine (IOM), which has suggested that combustion-free products can substantially reduce overall tobacco-related mortality and morbidity, despite some residual exposure, albeit at significantly reduced levels.

In Sweden, the example of "snus" (a type of oral tobacco) is paradigmatic: it led to a significant reduction in cigarette smoking with a marked decrease in lung cancer and cardiovascular disease mortality rates. Sweden is not an isolated case. Other countries, such as United Kingdom, Norway, Japan, and New Zealand, which have adopted harm reduction principles, have all seen a significant reduction in smoking prevalence, even among young people, well beyond what was estimated with the simple application of traditional prevention and cessation measures.

The CoEHAR research program has investigated the toxicological effects of combustion-free products, their effectiveness and tolerability among smokers, but also their impact on health



conditions among individuals with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease who have switched to these products. What we have found is that **combustion-free products**:

- 1) **offer a significant reduction in exposure/risk compared to traditional cigarettes;**
- 2) **help smokers quit smoking;** and
- 3) **are associated to clinically relevant improvements in users with smoking-related diseases, such as in those who suffer from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.**

Therefore, combustion-free alternatives should not be equated with conventional cigarettes. Yet, the World Health Organization and various European institutions continue to overlook the benefits of transitioning from combustion products to combustion-free alternatives, focusing solely on their absolute risk.

Our hope is that, in light of scientific evidence, the FCTC and the European Union conduct a careful, balanced, and transparent review of the available scientific evidence on non-combustible products compared to conventional cigarettes. This would provide essential information to take decisions in the interest of millions of smokers.

We are available for any expert hearings at the European Commission on the subject.

Sincerely,

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(listed alphabetically)

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