

LETTERS

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HAVING A SAY More than 30,000 Italian tobacconists responded to the Commission's consultation on possible changes to the tobacco directive. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

EU citizenship finally catches fire?

In a recent *Entre Nous* ("No smoke without ire", 20-26 January), you pointed out that a European Commission consultation on possible changes to the tobacco products directive garnered a huge volume of responses and wrote that "the majority of responses have been stoked by pro-smoking campaign groups".

As you know, European citizens do not always have the best appreciation of the Commission and of its initiatives. No previous public consultation launched by the Commission has registered such significant participation. This should be considered a real success for the Commission, which has long hoped for the widest possible participation in its consultations.

National and European professional associations did manage on this occasion to

involve their members and to convince them to use a European mechanism that is often considered very remote and inaccessible. Many retailers accepted the invitation to express an opinion, including thousands of small family businesses in Italy. In all, about 30,000 Italian tobacconists participated.

We certainly contributed to this success, as an organisation that represents more than 75% of Italian tobacconists.

We would not wish a shadow to be cast on this work.

I would also like to state that our organisation is registered in the Commission's Register of Interest Representatives. This shows our commitment to the principles of transparency required for professional organisations that the Commission considers to be civil-society organisations.

Our organisation, which is an independent, non-profit organisation, also participated in the public consultation by sending its own position paper to the Commission's directorate-general for health and consumer policy, explaining its positions on the possible amendments.

We therefore asked each of our members who agreed with our assessment to state as much in a personally signed document. Each of those who filled in and signed the document then conferred on the Federation the task of going through the procedures necessary to make a submission to the public consultation on the website of the health and consumer policy department.

All these authorisations, including the data of the members concerned, are kept in our local offices. We

also wrote to the Commission on 2 December 2010 to inform it about this modality of participation.

The opinions expressed by our members are therefore the result of a well considered and widely shared assessment. For purely technical reasons, these opinions were transformed into a pre-programmed summary format for each topic of the consultation.

We would hope that the results of this consultation are not misrepresented and that this exceptional level of democratic participation should not be turned into a defeat for the only system available to the European citizens to make their voices heard in Brussels.

Giovanni Riso
Chairman
Federazione Italiana Tabaccai
Rome

Standing up for *lettori*

We welcome your editorial ("Erosion of Italy's European tradition is a crying shame", 3-10 February) in which you highlight the case of foreign lecturers against the Italian state and universities, a case that has been "grinding on" since before *European Voice* began.

It is important to stress, however, that some Italians are working to fulfil Italy's treaty obligations with regard to this case.

They include President Giorgio Napolitano. He signed the recent Gelmini law, which "extinguishes" pending court cases, but only after adding a critical comment questioning the constitutional legitimacy of Article 26, which pertains to foreign lecturers.

Erminia Mazzoni, the Italian chairwoman of the European Parliament's petitions committee, told the committee on 25 January "this is an extreme case which has gone on for too long" and called upon the Italian authorities to "shoulder their responsibility once and for all".

At the same hearing, we

told the committee that Article 26 was in direct conflict with judgments of the European Court of Justice (ECJ), in particular those of 2001 and 2006, which ruled that foreign lecturers were entitled to enjoy the benefits of a single, open-ended contractual relationship, since this is the rule for Italian workers.

This view is now supported by two Italian judges, one in Pavia and one in Naples, both of whom, on 1 February, only three days after the law came into force, declined to apply Article 26. The former awarded a French colleague her full legal rights in line with the ECJ judgments, while the latter questioned the constitutional legitimacy of Article 26, which damages and costs totalling €175.666.

But, to be sure, much more needs to be done. We should not constantly be obliged to sue for arrears on wages and pensions.

David Petrie
Chairman
Association of Foreign
Lecturers in Italy
Verona

Fishy tale on moral scales

The article "Mysteries of the deep" (*Entre Nous*, 27 January-3 February) claims that the European Parliament occupies "the moral high ground", above the European Commission, as it "requires" its caterer Sodexo not to sell from a red-list of endangered fish species.

This is not correct and paints the situation in the Parliament in too positive a light. In fact, there is no contractual requirement for Sodexo to observe its internal traffic-light system on endangered fish species. Sodexo only stopped selling red-listed fish in the Parliament last year, and still

sells yellow-listed fish without contractual restrictions.

A group of MEPs has been involved in discussions with Sodexo to improve its fish-labelling system, including introducing a traffic-light system to improve consumer awareness. Sodexo has stated that it will bring in such a system by this September, though it is still unclear if this will apply to all fish products sold.

So things are improving, but if the Parliament has the moral high ground, then things must be very bad at the Commission.

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