

Global Plastics Pollution Treaty: EU urged not to export the French and Spanish tobacco EPR schemes

Geneva, 12 August 2025 – With just two days to go before the conclusion of INC-5.2 negotiations on the global treaty to end plastic pollution, the Comité national contre le tabagisme (CNCT) and Surfrider Foundation Europe, together with the Global Youth Voices, Stop Tobacco Pollution Alliance (STPA) and Smokefree Partnership (SFP) coalitions, have issued a joint statement with a clear warning to the European Union: do not export, through Article 8.4, the model of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for tobacco products already in force in France and Spain – a scheme funded and run by the manufacturers themselves, ineffective and harmful to both public health and the environment.

A model that pollutes, protects the industry and weakens the treaty

The French (Alcome) and Spanish (Avora) experiences speak for themselves: these schemes give the tobacco industry institutional legitimacy, divert policies away from source reduction, and fuel greenwashing – condemned by the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) at COP10, ratified by both France and the European Union. Moreover, applying an EPR scheme to tobacco products runs counter to the principles of the circular economy and to the general provisions of the future treaty, which aim to reduce the production and use of single-use plastics at source. The result: pollution persists, young people remain exposed to addiction, and billions of cigarette filters discarded each year continue to contaminate soil and water.

Protecting health, the environment and the economy

Every year, billions of cigarette filters – whether made of plastic, paper or hemp – end up in the environment, releasing toxic substances that contaminate soil and water, up to 1,000 litres per butt. With no health benefit whatsoever, these filters sustain nicotine addiction, particularly among young people, and contribute to more than 8 million tobacco-related deaths annually.

Beyond their health and environmental impact, filter pollution represents a major financial burden for local authorities: in France, cleaning up discarded cigarette butts costs around €100 million per year, according to the Ministry for the Ecological Transition. At the European level, banning filters outright would quickly generate billions of euros in savings by reducing spending on litter collection and waste management. In the long term, reducing smoking initiation and consumption would ease the burden on health systems, delivering sustained savings.

A decisive role for the European Union

The European Commission has committed to achieving a tobacco-free generation in Europe by 2040. A total ban on cigarette filters would be a major step towards this goal. In the current negotiations, the EU has a decisive opportunity to prevent the tobacco EPR model – already implemented in France and Spain – from being replicated globally. Excluding this scheme from Article 8.4 would help safeguard the environmental and health integrity of the future treaty and ensure its compatibility with commitments under the FCTC.

The signatories call on the EU to:

- Reject any legitimisation of EPR schemes for tobacco products and recognise that the tobacco industry is unlike any other;
- Support a global ban on all cigarette filters, regardless of their composition;
- Ensure the treaty is aligned with international health agreements (such as the FCTC);
- Strengthen the polluter-pays principle with independent, binding mechanisms limiting the tobacco industry's role to financing the costs of its past, present and future environmental damage.

“The EU has the power to prevent the export of an ineffective model that serves the industry, costs taxpayers billions, and threatens young people’s health,” said the NGOs behind the declaration. “This treaty will be a legacy for future generations: it must protect people, not polluters.”

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