

Swiss voters approve near-total ban on tobacco advertising

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A woman walks past a poster reading "Today tobacco! Tomorrow cervelat sausage? Currently, most tobacco advertising is legal at a national level, except on television and radio, and when specifically targeting minors [Arnd Wiegmann/Reuters]

Bern, February 14 (RHC)-- Swiss voters decided on Sunday to tighten their notoriously lax tobacco laws by banning virtually all advertising of the hazardous products, with nearly 57 percent of voters and 16 of Switzerland's 26 cantons backing the near-total ban, final results showed.

"We are extremely happy. The people understood that health is more important than economic interests," Stefanie De Borja of the Swiss League against Cancer told AFP news agency.

Switzerland lags far behind most wealthy nations in restricting tobacco advertising – a situation widely blamed on substantial lobbying by some of the world's biggest tobacco companies with headquarters in the country.

Currently, most tobacco advertising is legal at a national level, except on television and radio, and when specifically targeting minors. Some Swiss cantons have introduced stricter regional legislation and a new national law is pending, but the campaigners who forced the issue to a vote under Switzerland's direct democracy system demanded far tighter rules.

Opponents of the initiative, which include the Swiss government and parliament, argued that it goes too far. "Today we are talking about cigarettes, but we will soon be talking about alcohol and meat," warned Philippe Bauer, a parliamentarian with the right-wing Liberal Party, decrying "this dictatorship of the politically correct, where everything has to be regulated".

His concerns echo those voiced by Philip Morris International (PMI), the world's largest tobacco company, which, like British American Tobacco and Japan Tobacco, has headquarters in Switzerland and has helped fund the "No" campaign.

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