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Tobacco exports flourish as Swiss smoke less

Tobacco manufacturers in Switzerland are going from strength to strength, with exports almost doubling in the past five years. However, the number of Swiss smokers is gradually decreasing as anti-smoking measures gain momentum, and the number of Swiss-made cigarettes sold on the domestic market continues to fall.

Switzerland is something of a magnet for international tobacco companies, with three large firms - British American Tobacco Switzerland, Philip Morris International (PMI) and JT International - having headquarters or operations centres here.

PMI has recently invested almost SFr500 million in the upgrade of its Lausanne and Neuchâtel sites. Switzerland is also an important market for PMI. Like all tobacco companies, PMI treads a delicate line, selling products that it knows to be harmful. PMI makes the argument that as long as there are smokers, there will be tobacco companies.

Regulation should govern the manufacture, marketing, sale and use of all tobacco products, while at the same time allowing to commercialise products that meet adult consumers' preferences, said the company.

However, many new smokers come from the ranks of the under 18s. The World Health Organization (WHO) has called for a ban on all tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship to protect young people. The WHO chose World No Tobacco Day to make its appeal. This year's campaign focused on the multi-billion dollar efforts of tobacco companies to attract young people to its addictive products through sophisticated marketing. WHO says the tobacco industry employs predatory marketing

strategies to get young people hooked to their addictive drug.

Switzerland's national smoking prevention programme, which aims to make society view non-smoking as the norm, has been in place since 2001.

The programme seeks to inform smokers about the consequences of tobacco consumption and the risks associated with it. Half of all regular smokers die prematurely from smoking-related diseases; smoking causes 8,000 premature deaths each year in Switzerland.

Although the number of Swiss smokers has fallen over the past decade, there was no change between 2006 and 2007, with the rate remaining steady at 29 per cent.

This was despite moves by the federal and cantonal authorities to ban smoking in public buildings and restaurants.

Despite the fact that Switzerland regulates and spends heavily on prevention, Swiss tobacco farmers still enjoy a subsidy. Tobacco companies must pay SFr 0.026 per packet of cigarettes to the domestic growers' cooperative for the advancement of the sector. The contribution of around SFr18 million per year supports just over 320 farms that make a living from tobacco.

In 2007 12.5 billion cigarettes were sold in Switzerland. This means 625 million packets or 98 packets per person over 14 years old per year.

Cigarettes have been manufactured in Switzerland since 1870.

On the domestic market, cigarette manufacturers have a turnover of more than SFr3 billion, half of which is paid into the pension and invalidity insurance funds through tobacco taxes. Swiss manufacturers have a range of around 50 brands, with up to 200 different products on offer.

from swissinfo

Surge in arms exports

Swiss arms exports grew by 63 per cent during the first six months of 2008, with Pakistan the biggest customer, according to the Federal Customs Office.

The figures took into account the delivery in April of an air defence system to Pakistan. The controversial order was first approved by the cabinet in 2006 but temporarily suspended due to tensions in the country.

Denmark spent SFr44 million on Swiss arms, making it the second-largest buyer, followed by Germany at SFr36 million, Belgium at SFr35 million and Britain at SFr25 million.

Last month the government approved the export of weapons to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and South Korea.

A pacifist group, Switzerland Without an Army, has collected enough signatures to force a nationwide vote for an arms export ban. No date for the ballot has been set so far. *from swissinfo*



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