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## THE LANGUAGE OF LIES

An Analysis of the Discourse of Neoliberal Think Tanks Linked to  
the Tobacco Industry in Europe

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Geneva Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies

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## Abstract

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The tobacco industry has many means at its disposal to influence the discourse on tobacco and tobacco prevention and, ultimately, public health policy. One channel to do so are neoliberal think tanks. These think tanks publish a wide range of papers and hold events through which they critique various tobacco prevention policies and attempt to influence public discourse and legislative processes. This paper focuses on identifying the main arguments of these neoliberal think tanks in the discourse around tobacco. Furthermore, it examines what characterizes these think tanks, how they are connected to each other and how they influence policy and legislation in Switzerland, the UK and Sweden through their discourse.

In order to answer these questions, we conducted a literature review and interviews with public health, think tank and lobbying experts; reviewed publicly available information on neoliberal think tank websites to create a mapping of neoliberal think tanks; and analyzed government and parliamentary documents - such as consultation reports, minutes of parliamentary debates and other official documents - to determine the influence of neoliberal think tanks on tobacco prevention policies. Our results show that neoliberal think tanks in Europe are well connected via institutional and personal connections - for example via the EPICENTER network - and in the cases of the UK and Sweden direct their criticism to specific, planned or already introduced, tobacco prevention regulations. In Switzerland, on the other hand, this does not seem to be the case. In this context, the concept of Tobacco Harm Reduction seems to be of particular importance, being repeated by neoliberal think tanks throughout Europe and influencing tobacco prevention policies in Switzerland, the UK and Sweden. Finally, our interviews indicate that transparency and disclosure of conflicts of interest linked to research performed by think tanks are important measures to reduce the tobacco industry's influence on legislation.

**Key words:** Tobacco, Neoliberalism, Think Tanks, Public Health

## 1. Introduction

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The tobacco industry (TI) has many different means at its disposal to influence public health policies, be it direct lobbying, legal measures, bought researchers or front groups. One such means of influence are think tanks (TTs). TTs produce a wide array of publications which can benefit the TI through their capacity of influencing the discourse around key topics. Most of these TTs follow a neoliberal ideology, but, as we shall see, there are also other types of TTs which cooperate with the TI. The discourse of neoliberal TTs connected to the TI, the networks they form and their influence on national public health policies are complex and multifaceted phenomena that warrant closer examination.

This report seeks to shed light on the discourse of neoliberal TTs connected to the TI, the networks they form, and their influence on tobacco prevention policies. Before delving into the topic, it is important to first define what a think tank is. In general terms, TTs are typically considered public, civil society actors devoted to influencing public policy by bridging academic and policy communities. They apply research to inspire, inform, or impact policy, functioning either as independent, not-for-profit entities distinct from government and other sectors, or with broader inclusivity that accommodates government-tied or profit-based organizations.<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that, despite professing independence, many TTs' operational reality shows substantial influence from funding sources, political affiliations, or institutional biases, fundamentally compromising their full autonomy.

In this paper, we are going to ask the following questions: First, how can TTs which are related to the TI be characterized? Are they linked to one another and if yes, how? Second, what are their main arguments concerning the topic of tobacco and public health policies? Can we identify rhetorical patterns and evolutions in their discourse over the last ten years? Third, how are TT publications used in lobby activities? Is it possible to identify how the TT discourse influences tobacco prevention policies?

The findings of our report are organized into four main sections. The first section contains a literature review, in which we identify the most important arguments of neoliberal TTs. The second section presents our findings from interviews with tobacco control experts. In the third section, we describe the process of mapping TTs associated with the tobacco industry

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<sup>1</sup> Melissa Conley Tyler et al., *Think Tank Diplomacy* (Brill, 2017).

in Europe. The fourth section provides an overview of the influence of neoliberal TTs on the political discourse and tobacco prevention policies in Switzerland, the UK and Sweden.

We encountered several limitations that have informed the scope and depth of our research. The most salient obstacle was discerning significant shifts in these institutions' discourse over the past decade. Our literature review, interviews with tobacco control experts, and examination of TTs websites revealed a striking consistency in neoliberal TTs' arguments concerning tobacco products, invariably advocating neoliberal principles of market freedom and minimal government intervention. While there has been an increase in discussions around electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) and tobacco harm reduction (THR), these do not represent a substantial evolution in their discourse.

To understand this report, it is crucial to note the complex relationship between neoliberal TTs and the tobacco industry. Through their works, these TTs shape policy narratives and, thus, lend support to the tobacco industry by promoting notions of market freedom and allocating significant resources to scientists who are willing to advance the agenda of the tobacco industry, thus fostering a false impression of support grounded in science, among other channels. This mutually beneficial relationship ultimately promotes the interests of both the tobacco industry and the TTs.



## 2. Methodology

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### *Literature review*

For the literature review section, we used a diverse range of sources, including journal articles, books, and websites, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The review is divided into two sections: one focusing on content from TTs' websites and their publications, and the other examining the perspectives of journalists who write about medicine and their views on TTs that collaborate with the tobacco industry.

### *Interviews*

We conducted seven interviews in English, French, German, and Swiss German. Our approach to identifying interviewees was strategic and collaborative. Our initial contacts were provided by Luciano Ruggia and Kris Schürch, our partners at AT Schweiz, who shared a list of individuals relevant to our research. With this list in hand, we reached out to prospective interviewees, detailing the aims and scope of our research. Our research also led us to contact two authors who have written about neoliberal TTs networks.

It is important to note that our research does not include conversations with members of neoliberal TTs associated with the tobacco industry. This decision was guided by our commitment to uphold the highest standards of rigor and ethical practice in research. We believe it is necessary to disclose the purpose and nature of our research to all interviewees. Given the controversial nature of our research subject, we were wary that disclosing our research focus could elicit biased responses or outright refusals from individuals directly linked with these TTs. Therefore, to preserve the integrity of our research, we have chosen not to engage with these specific TTs. Despite not having conducted interviews with neoliberal TTs linked to the tobacco industry, we have undertaken an exhaustive secondary literature and data collection process. This includes analyzing the TTs' official documentation, information on their websites, and relevant publications. By doing so, we aim to ensure that our research is unbiased. Our comprehensive approach to data collection allows us to provide a balanced and well-informed analysis of the role of neoliberal TTs in the context of the tobacco industry and policymaking processes.

### *Mapping*

In our research, we categorized TTs as neoliberal, liberal, or technical, and identified and mapped connections within them. This process involved three stages: identifying connections, creating a database of connections, and visualizing the data with Looker Studio, a data visualization platform.

We categorized connections as either technical or personal. A link between two TTS was identified if one or more conditions were met: institutional connections like official partnerships, shared event participation, or collaborative publications; or personal connections, where individuals have worked for multiple TTs concurrently or sequentially. Our analysis was restricted to publicly available information, focusing primarily on neoliberal TTs. We then documented these connections to create a database for our visual map, relying on Looker Studio to translate our database into a visual report with a filterable map, enabling users to view tailored information.

### *Legislation*

We chose Switzerland, the United Kingdom (UK), and Sweden for multiple reasons. First, each has a comprehensive parliamentary website containing large numbers of publicly accessible documents. Second, Switzerland interested us due to its liberal tobacco policies and our partnership with AT Schweiz. Third, the UK hosts well-connected TTs, including the IEA, a key player in the European Policy Information Center (EPICENTER) network and Nanny State Index. Fourth, Timbro, another EPICENTER member with political ties, is based in Sweden. Finally, the UK and Sweden have contrasting Nanny State Index rankings: the UK ranks 11th overall, 1st in tobacco (most regulated), and 29th in e-cigarettes (least regulated), while Sweden ranks 26th in tobacco and 1st in e-cigarettes.

We examined pertinent documents to assess how neoliberal TTs shape public health policy in the three countries. We explored various sources, including TTs publications, consultation reports, parliamentary debates on tobacco regulation, and, for the UK, NHS (National Health System) documents on harm reduction. Our objective was to determine whether neoliberal TTs influence health policies and to examine the political discourse surrounding tobacco prevention. Although establishing a definitive correlation is impossible, our findings indicate that it is likely that in the UK and Sweden, TTs do influence tobacco prevention discourse, whereas this is less the case in Switzerland.



### 3. Concepts and Definitions

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In the following section, we are going to provide a characterization of the neoliberal TTs whose discourse forms the core of our analysis, in order to better understand the networks these TTs form. To ensure that this study remains within its scope and time constraints, we will focus on the EPICENTER network and its individual members as an illustration for this characterization. We consider EPICENTER to be currently the most significant neoliberal TT network in Europe with notable TTs such as the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA, UK), Timbro (Sweden), and Institut Économique Molinari (IEM, France) contributing to creating a platform for propagating neoliberal discourse around tobacco, including the production of the Nanny State Index by the IEA.

Our approach comprises three steps. First, we briefly describe what constitutes neoliberalism itself - outlining its content and history - and show how it can be defined based on EPICENTER members' perspectives. Second, we briefly examine how European neoliberal TTs have evolved over time. Thirdly, we distinguish between different types of TTs: neoliberal TTs, liberal TTs, and technical TTs. The term 'technical TT' is our terminology used in this paper to describe TTs that concentrate on specific topics (e.g., illicit trade) rather than endorsing a particular ideology like neoliberalism. We believe that distinguishing between these categories is crucial to gaining a more comprehensive understanding of tobacco industry-related TTs.

#### 3.1 Neoliberalism: A brief history and definition of the term

It would be beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the concept of neoliberalism in detail. But since neoliberal TTs are the focus of this report, we believe it is important to clarify what we mean by the term.

The term neoliberalism emerged at the beginning of the 20th century. According to Dieter Plehwe, Eli F. Heckscher's "Old and New Economic Liberalism" (1921) and Hans Honegger's "Trends of Economic Ideas" (1927) made two early contributions to the creation of a term for a "new liberalism," with the term neoliberalism "in the modern sense" probably

appearing for the first time Honegger's work.<sup>2</sup> In 1937, Walter Lippmann wrote "The Good Society," in which he anticipated some of the core concepts of what would become neorealism. One year later, the French Economist Louis Rougier, fascinated by Lippman's book, organized the "Colloque Walter Lippmann," in which 15 future members of the Mont Pèlerin Society were present (including Friedrich August von Hayek, Ludwig Mises, Michael Polanyi and Wilhelm Röpke).<sup>3</sup> During this conference, neoliberalism was defined as "the priority of the price mechanism, free enterprise, the system of competition, and a strong and impartial state."<sup>4</sup>

Ten years later, the perhaps biggest step towards the formation of a new school of thought was made, when in 1947 the Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS) was founded by a group of 39 European and American scholars, including the above mentioned Hayek, Mises, Polanyi and Röpke, as well as others, like Milton Friedman, Karl Popper and William Rappard.<sup>5</sup> The goal of MPS was to unite like-minded scholars, to generate new ideas through research on economics and politics, to disseminate these ideas, and to "further the cause of a free society."<sup>6</sup>

The MPS society grew constantly after its foundation and from the 1940s to the 1970s, a first generation of neoliberal TTs were founded - such as Foundation for Economic Education (1946), the IEA (1955), the Reason Foundation (1968), the Fraser Institute (1974) and the Manhattan Institute (1978) - which began to influence American and British politics in particular. Yet it still took until the 1980s for neoliberal thought to achieve significant political influence. Notably, during the regime of the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990), a group of economists commonly referred to as the "Chicago Boys"<sup>7</sup> advised the Chilean government to deregulate, privatize, cut public spending and strengthen Chile's integration into the global economic system.<sup>8</sup>

Since then, neoliberalist thought has spread across the globe and has influenced policies in many countries. Both Ronald Reagan (President of the United States of America 1981-

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<sup>2</sup> Dieter Plehwe, "Introduction," in *The Road From Mont Pèlerin - The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective*, ed. Philipp Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Plehwe, "Introduction," 13.

<sup>4</sup> Plehwe, "Introduction," 14.

<sup>5</sup> Richard M. Ebeling, "In the Beginning: The Mont Pèlerin Society, 1947," American Institute for Economic Research, May 29, 2022, <https://www.aier.org/article/in-the-beginning-the-mont-pelerin-society-1947/>.

<sup>6</sup> John F. Henry, "The Historic Roots of the Neoliberal Program," *Journal of Economic Issues* 44, no. 2 (2010): 547. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20778698>.

<sup>7</sup> A group of Chilean scholars who had almost all been educated at the University of Chicago under Friedman and Arnold Harberger.

<sup>8</sup> Ashley Davis-Hamel, "Successful Neoliberalism?: State Policy, Poverty, and Income Inequality in Chile," *International Social Science Review* 87, no. 3/4 (2012): 80-83. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41887539>.

1989) and Margaret Thatcher (UK Prime Minister 1979-1990) were ardent proponents of neoliberalist policies. During the 1980s the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the United States Department of the Treasury proposed a list of free-market reforms for countries of the Global South based on neoliberal thought (later dubbed the “Washington Consensus”), which were implemented in several countries of the Global South. Critics argue that they not only contributed to a further decline in these countries’ economic conditions, but also exacerbated economic inequalities within them.

It is important to note that multiple definitions of neoliberalism exist and that the term has been used to describe a wide variety of ideas and policies. Boas and Gans-Morse pointed out in 2009 that “Scholars not only tend to attach a negative normative valence to neoliberalism; they frequently fail to define the term when using it in empirical research.”<sup>9</sup> They furthermore stated that neoliberalism has been used in the study of political economy in at least four ways: “to denote a set of economic reform policies, a development model, a normative ideology, and an academic paradigm.”<sup>10</sup> Springer, Birch and MacLeavy wrote in 2020 that “Neoliberalism is a slippery concept, meaning different things to different people” and that the relationship between “neoliberalism and a vast array of conceptual categories,” like gender, citizenship, discourse, and many more have been examined.<sup>11</sup>

In the following, we are going to propose our own definition of neoliberalism, within the scope of this paper. We will base our understanding of neoliberalism on the missions/visions stated by members of EPICENTER, which we have identified as the most prominent network of neoliberal TTs in Europe. Many of these TT present their vision and mission on their websites. The following are four such examples, which we find to be

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<sup>9</sup> Taylor C. Boas and Jordan Gans-Morse, “Neoliberalism: From New Liberal Philosophy to Anti-Liberal Slogan,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 44 (February 2009): 142. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-009-9040-5>.

<sup>10</sup> Boas and Gans-Morse, “Neoliberalism,” 143.

<sup>11</sup> For an overview, see Simon Springer, Kean Birch and Julie MacLeavy, “An Introduction to Neoliberalism,” in *The Handbook of Neoliberalism*, ed. Simon Springer, Kean Birch and Julie MacLeavy (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 1.

For connection between neoliberalism and gender, see Julie MacLeavy, “A ‘new politics’ of austerity, workfare and gender? The UK coalition government’s welfare reform proposals,” *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 4, no. 3 (November 2011): 355-367. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsr023>.

For the relation between neoliberalism and citizenship, see Aihwa Ong, “Mutations in Citizenship,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 2-3 (May 2006): 499-505. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276406064831>.

For the link between neoliberalism and discourse, see Simon Springer, *Violent Neoliberalism - Development, Discourse, and Dispossession in Cambodia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137485335>.

representative of the perspective of TTs which are member of EPICENTER and of other neoliberal TTs:

IEA:

*“Our mission is to improve understanding of the fundamental institutions of a free society by analysing and expounding the role of the markets in solving economic and social problems. Given the current economic challenges facing Britain and the wider global environment, it is more vital than ever that we promote the intellectual case for a free economy, low taxes, freedom in education, health and welfare and lower levels of regulation.”<sup>12</sup>*

Institute of Economic and Social Studies (INESS, Slovakia):

*“Our vision is a Slovakia endorsing free enterprise, prosperity, individual liberty and peace, a country, where its citizens are aware of the functions and benefits of the market mechanism and the impact of government interventions in the economy.”<sup>13</sup>*

Timbro:

*“Our mission is to build opinion in favor of market economy, free entrepreneurship, individual freedom and an open society.”<sup>14</sup>*

IEM:

*“L’IEM est une association dont la mission est de favoriser la liberté et la responsabilité économique. Il cherche à faciliter le changement en participant à l’émergence de consensus en faveur de la liberté économique, à montrer l’intérêt de l’échange et d’un monde moins réglementé et moins fiscalisé et à toucher le grand public pour affaiblir les idées reçues génératrices de statu quo.”<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>12</sup> IEA, “What We Do,” *IEA (Institute of Economic Affairs)*, accessed June 8, 2023. <https://iea.org.uk/what-we-do/>.

<sup>13</sup> INESS, “About INESS,” *INESS (Institute of Economic and Social Studies)*, accessed June 8, 2023. <https://www.iness.sk/en/about-iness>.

<sup>14</sup> Timbro, “About Us,” *Timbro*, accessed June 8, 2023. <https://timbro.se/in-english/>.

<sup>15</sup> Translation: “The IEM is an association whose mission is to promote economic freedom and responsibility. It seeks to facilitate change by participating in the emergence of a consensus in favor of economic freedom, to

Based on these four (and other) missions/visions stated by the members of EPICENTER, in our opinion the three most important aspects of neoliberalism in the context of this paper are: 1. personal freedom and responsibility, 2. the centrality of the free market mechanism, 3. a government that neither regulates nor taxes its citizens too strongly. It is important to clarify that when these TTs speak of freedom, they mean mainly freedom of an economic nature. Other freedoms - like political freedom - seem to be, although not entirely absent, less important. Neoliberal TTs are thus TTs which base their activity on the definition of neoliberalism which we have outlined above.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that these TTs would not call themselves neoliberal, but much rather opt for terms like “pro free market” or describe themselves in the light of their support for (economic) freedom in general. Although there are no official statements by these TTs on the matter, we argue that this is because neoliberalism has mostly become a term with negative connotations, as has been pointed out by Boas and Gans-Morse. While the term was originally intended to describe the "new liberalism" - which a group of liberal economists devised in response to the perceived failure of the "old liberalism" in the face of the dominance of Keynesianism in the 1930s and 1940s - it is now mostly used with a critical undertone or even ideological rejection.

It should also be pointed out that the neoliberal TTs which we have examined in our research are not primarily linked to the tobacco industry, but are connected to other actors such as libertarian foundations, big corporations like Exxon and Koch Industries and political parties as well. Tobacco companies are one of many donors and partners to neoliberal TTs, but not the only one, as we will see below.

How this neoliberal ideology which we have outlined above translates into concrete discourse about tobacco products and the regulation thereof will be shown in the literature review.

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demonstrate the value of trade and of a less regulated, less taxed world, and to reach out to the general public in order to weaken preconceived ideas that generate the status quo.” (Translated with DeepL)  
See IEM, “Qui sommes-nous,” *IEM (Institut Économique Molinari)*, accessed June 8, 2023.  
<https://www.institutmolinari.org/2019/03/10/qui-sommes-nous/>.



### 3.2 A Brief History of European neoliberal think tanks

Now that we have looked at the notion of neoliberalism and its history, it is worthwhile to briefly look at the emergence of European neoliberal TTs, which we have already alluded to above.

In 1955, the IEA was founded by Antony Fisher, John Harding and Oliver Smedley. One year later, Fisher - who had joined the Mont Pèlerin Society in 1947 and who had been motivated by Friedrich Hayek to “avoid politics and reach intellectuals with reasoned argument”<sup>16</sup> - recruited Ralph Harris to work for the IEA, who himself brought Arthur Harris to the IEA. Together, Harris and Seldon ran the IEA for over three decades. The goal of the IEA was straightforward: influence the opinion of government and business elite groups and of “second-hand dealers in ideas”<sup>17</sup> - journalists, academics, teachers, etc.<sup>18</sup> - in favor of neoliberalism.

Ben Jackson describes in detail how the IEA mobilized “financial support from the business community and the patronage and scholarly output of sympathetic intellectuals” and “how these resources were used to shape elite opinion in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s.”<sup>19</sup> Through intensive networking, the IEA succeeded in winning over politicians like Geoffrey Howe and Keith Joseph, who later served as advisors to Margaret Thatcher and significantly influenced her neoliberal policies.<sup>20</sup> The IEA, then, did not remain alone in its efforts. Fisher was later involved in the founding of several other neoliberal TTs, like the Manhattan Institute, the Pacific Research Institute, the National Center for Policy Analysis (all in the US) and briefly served as co-director of the Canadian Fraser Institute. Most important of all, he also founded the Atlas Network.

Established in 1981, the Atlas Network is a network of neoliberal TTs aiming to found, fund, and connect neoliberal TTs around the world. The network now claims to have over 500 member TTs in more than 100 countries, among them EPICENTER and its members. The idea behind the Atlas network, according to Fischer, was that “one institute sounds like a lonely

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<sup>16</sup> Institute of Economic Affairs, “IEA Timeline,” Institute of Economic Affairs, accessed June 8, 2023. <https://iea.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Chronology.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Ben Jackson, “The think-tank archipelago: Thatcherism and neo-liberalism,” in *Making Thatcher’s Britain*, ed. Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 44. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511998164.004>.

Originally, “second-hand dealers in ideas” is an expression allegedly used by Friedrich Hayek.

<sup>18</sup> Jackson, “Think-tank archipelago,” 44.

<sup>19</sup> Jackson, “Think-tank archipelago,” 45.

<sup>20</sup> Jackson, “Think-tank archipelago,” 59.

solo; many institutes, all singing a similar refrain, are the chorus needed to influence public opinion and ultimately public policy.”<sup>21</sup> Funded by foundations like the John Templeton Foundation and the Earhart Foundation and by companies like Exxon Mobile and Koch Industries,<sup>22</sup> Atlas has also received funding from and been an important ally of the tobacco industry.<sup>23</sup> For example, it received \$275’000 from Philip Morris International (PMI) in 1994 for “Tobacco Issues Management”,<sup>24</sup> “received ‘public policy grants’ ranging from US\$ 75’00 to US\$475’000 until at least 2000 [...]”<sup>25</sup> Smith, Thompson and Lee also point out that many TTs which are members of the Atlas Network have received funding from the tobacco industry.<sup>26</sup>

Others tried to emulate the successful Anglo-Saxon model of the TT. In 1978, for example, the TT Timbro was founded in Sweden. Inspired by the IEA and the American CATO Institute, it set out to defy the reviled welfare state. Sigurd Allern and Ester Pollack, calling Timbro an “ideological vanguard [...] leading the struggle for privatization and deregulation in all areas, including health care and education,”<sup>27</sup> point out that, although nominally politically independent, “many of its leaders and spokesperson have been members of the Swedish Conservatives (Moderaterna/Moderates) or the Liberals.”<sup>28</sup> Timbro today remains one of the most important Swedish TTs<sup>29</sup> and is a member of the Atlas Network.

As the number of neoliberal TTs grew, another network was founded in the 1990s, namely the Stockholm Network. Founded in 1997 and disbanded in 2009, it brought together more than 120 TTs in over 40 (mainly European) countries, among them many future members

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<sup>21</sup> Karin Fischer, “The Atlas Network: Littering the World with Free-Market Think Tanks,” *Global Dialogue*, July 8, 2018. <https://globaldialogue.isa-sociology.org/articles/the-atlas-network-littering-the-world-with-free-market-think-tanks>.

<sup>22</sup> DeSmog, “Atlas Network (Atlas Economic Research Foundation),” DeSmog, accessed June 8, 2023. <https://www.desmog.com/atlas-economic-research-foundation/>.

<sup>23</sup> Julia Smith, Sheryl Thompson and Kelley Lee, “The atlas network: a ‘strategic ally’ of the tobacco industry,” *The International Journal of Health Planning and Management* 32 (April 2016): 433-448. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hpm.2351>.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas J. Borelli, “Philip Morris, December 28, 1994,” Philip Morris, December 28, 1994. <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/#id=nlxw0220>.

Found in Smith, Thompson, and Lee, “The atlas network”, 439.

<sup>25</sup> Philip Morris, “1995 Public Policy Grants”, Philip Morris, February 8, 1996.

<https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/#id=nxgc0152>; and Philip Morris, “1999 Public Policy Contributions,” Philip Morris, August 3, 1999. <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/#id=jpdb0170>.

Found in Smith, Thompson, and Lee, “The atlas network”, 439.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, Thompson, and Lee, “The atlas network”, 441-442.

<sup>27</sup> Sigurd Allern and Ester Pollack, “The Role of Think Tanks in the Swedish Political Landscape,” *Scandinavian Political Studies* 43, no. 3 (July 2020): 167. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12180>.

<sup>28</sup> Allern and Pollack, “The Role of Think Tanks in the Swedish Political Landscape,” 153.

<sup>29</sup> Allern and Pollack, “The Role of Think Tanks in the Swedish Political Landscape,” 156.

of EPICENTER.<sup>30</sup> EPICENTER itself was founded in 2014, bringing together “veteran” TTs like the IEA and Timbro, as well as newcomers like the IEM (founded in 2003), the INESS (founded in 2006) and Prometheus (founded in 2014, Germany). Prometheus was founded by Frank Schäffler, member of the German liberal party-Free Democratic Party (FDP) and of the German parliament, casting further doubt concerning the alleged political independence of European neoliberal TTs.

Another recently founded network of neoliberal TTs is the “4liberty.eu” platform. Founded in 2014, it brings together 19 neoliberal TTs from Central and Eastern Europe, including the Civil Development Forum (FOR, Poland), INESS and the Lithuanian Free Market Institute (LFMI, Lithuania), which are also part of the EPICENTER network. 4liberty.eu is supported by the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, the official foundation of the German liberal party FDP, pointing to another link to the European political landscape.

### **3.3 Distinction between neoliberal, liberal and technical think tanks**

Neoliberal TTs are not the only TTs connected to the tobacco industry. Besides neoliberal TTs, we have come up with the term “technical thin tank” to facilitate the identification and distinction of TTs without a clear political identity, which focus on “technical” topics, such as illicit trade in the case of TTs funded by PMI Impact. Furthermore, during our research we have identified a large number of liberal TTs which, in our opinion, do not qualify as neoliberal, although some are connected to neoliberal networks or the TI. We will therefore include some of them in our mapping and draw a distinction between neoliberal, liberal and technical TTs.

As mentioned above, neoliberal TTs focus on the subjects of personal (economic) freedom and responsibility, free markets, and the limitation of government interference in the economy and ultimately in the lives of its citizens. Just like the neoliberal TTs, the topic of freedom is also at the center of the activities of liberal TTs, but their approach is different, although the two groups seem to overlap to a limited degree, as we will see below. We are again going to use statements by TTs themselves to support our perspective.

The 21 Research Center (Hungary), for example, “is dedicated to advancing the political insight, openness and democratic culture of Hungarian society.”<sup>31</sup> The Belgian Centre

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<sup>30</sup> Powerbase, “Stockholm Network,” Powerbase, last modified March 3, 2017. [https://powerbase.info/index.php/Stockholm\\_Network](https://powerbase.info/index.php/Stockholm_Network).

<sup>31</sup> 21 Research Center, “Our Work,” *21 Research Center*, accessed June 8, 2023. <https://21kutatokozpont.hu/index2.html>.

Jean Gol (Belgium), on the other hand, “a pour vocation d’alimenter la réflexion sur les thèmes de société importants comme par exemple, ceux de l’enseignement, de la santé, de la justice, de la sécurité, de l’emploi et d’autres [...]”<sup>32</sup> The Paddy Ashdown Forum (UK) advances “progressive ideas through research, education, and international sustainable development from application of systems thinking at the interplay of social, economic and environmental issues.”<sup>33</sup> Lastly, the Good Laboratory Practice (GLP) Lab (Switzerland)<sup>34</sup> states “Wir wecken den Erfindergeist in der Politik und schaffen einen kreativen Raum für innovative Lösungen,”<sup>35</sup> focusing on topics such as urban development, mobility, and equality.

All of the above-cited TTs are members of the European Liberal Forum (ELF). Although we qualify the vast majority of the 51 members of this network as liberal, there seem to exist several connections to neoliberal networks and the tobacco industry. Center for Liberal Studies - Markos Dragoumis (KEFIM, Greece), for example, is both a member of ELF and EPICENTER; fundalib (Spain) is both a member of ELF and of the Atlas Network;<sup>36</sup> and the Fondazione Luigi Einaudi (Italy) signed a 2016 open letter to the WHO arguing against plain packaging.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, because of their general outlook - as can be seen in the examples in the paragraph above - we maintain that a clear characterization of the two different groups can be established.

Technical TTs, on the other hand, focus not on politics, but on questions which we define as of a more “technical” nature. Here are some examples from TTs who received funds from PMI Impact. The Center for the Study of Democracy (Belgium), for example, focuses on topics such as crime and security, justice, corruption, human rights, etc. GLOBSEC (Slovakia) states that its main goal is to “shape the global debate through conducting research activities and connecting key experts on foreign and security policy.”<sup>38</sup> The focus of the Cross Border Research Association (Switzerland) lies “mainly on supply chain and transportation security;

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<sup>32</sup> Translation: The Centre Jean Gol “aims to promote reflection on important social issues such as education, health, justice, security, employment and others.” (Translated with DeepL) See CJG, “Mission,” *CJG (Centre Jean Gol)*, accessed June 8, 2023. <https://www.cjg.be/>.

<sup>33</sup> The Paddy Ashdown Forum, “About Us,” *The Paddy Ashdown Forum*, accessed June 8, 2023. <http://www.thepaddyashdownforum.org/>.

<sup>34</sup> The think tank of the Swiss green liberal party.

<sup>35</sup> Translation: We awaken the inventive spirit in politics and create a creative space for innovative solutions. (Translated with DeepL) See GLP Lab, “Unsere Arbeit,” *GLP Lab (Grün Liberal Progressiv Lab)*, accessed June 8, 2023. <https://www.glplab.ch/>.

<sup>36</sup> Fundalib, “Main Page,” *Fundalib (Fundación para el Avance de la Libertad)*, accessed June 8, 2023. <https://fundalib.org/>.

<sup>37</sup> International Coalition Letter Against Plain Packaging, 2016. <https://www.fondazione.luigieinaudi.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/International-Coalition-Letter-against-Plain-Packaging-English-Version.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> GLOBSEC, “About Us,” *GLOBSEC*, accessed June 8, 2023. <https://www.globsec.org/who-we-are/about-us>.

customs and border management security; and, global trade facilitation.”<sup>39</sup> These examples show that the foundation of these technical TTs is not neoliberal ideology but an interest in a certain topic and the goal of shaping the discourse about these topics. Unlike neoliberal TTs, whose links to the tobacco industry are based both on ideological affinity and the funding they receive from the industry, the links between technical TTs and the tobacco industry are purely instrumental, i.e. based on funding. This can be seen in the example of PMI Impact, which funded (and still does fund) projects of multiple TTs on illicit tobacco trade, as we shall see in the literature review.

To conclude this section, four key aspects stand out when characterizing neoliberal TTs with links to the TI. First, neoliberal TTs follow a clear neoliberal ideology, focusing on personal (economic) freedom and responsibility, advocacy for free markets, and resistance against state regulations. In this, they were inspired by the developments that took place in the mid-20th century around the Mont Pèlerin Society and the IEA.

Second, because of the influence of various influential TTs, such as the IEA or Timbro, they have links to liberal and conservative parties throughout Europe, although almost all of these TTs claim to be politically independent.

Third, various networks, such as the Atlas Network, EPICENTER, and liberty4.eu, have a long-standing history of exchanging ideas, supporting each other, and cooperating across Europe and globally. Although our list of neoliberal TTs is not exhaustive, it is clear that European neoliberal TTs in general are well connected among each other. This will be further elaborated on in the mapping section.

Fourth, there is a clear difference between neoliberal, liberal, and technical TTs, even though examples of all three categories (but mostly neoliberal TTs) are associated with the tobacco industry. Whereas liberal TTs primarily focus on political and civil liberties, neoliberal TTs are mainly concerned with economic freedom and technical TTs focus on clear cut topics, like illicit trade.

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<sup>39</sup> CBRA, “CBRA Overview,” *CBRA (Cross-Border Research Association)*, accessed June 8, 2023. <https://www.cross-border.org/>.



## 4. Findings

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### 4.1 Literature Review

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#### 4.1.1 Think Tank Network

In the following section, we are going to look at the discourse of neoliberal TTs. The chapter will be divided according to the most important arguments brought up by these TTs.

#### Neoliberalism and regulations

At the heart of the discourse of neoliberal TTs on tobacco lie the topics of individual freedom (particularly freedom of choice concerning consumption), personal responsibility, and market-based solutions to public health issues. As these neoliberal ideals stand in direct opposition to government interventions into the economy and people's private lives in general,<sup>40</sup> neoliberal TTs oppose many of the regulations on tobacco that have been introduced or might be introduced in the future by European states. The regulations criticized in the discourse of neoliberal TTs include, in particular, taxes on tobacco and ENDS products,<sup>41</sup> plain packaging of cigarettes,<sup>42</sup> the depiction of graphic health warning labels on cigarette packages,<sup>43</sup> advertisement and marketing bans,<sup>44</sup> and other prohibitions such as the ban on smoking in public places.<sup>45</sup> In the neoliberal view, the state should intervene as little as possible in the economy and people's lives in general, because such interventions both supposedly work less

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<sup>40</sup> As in the neoliberal perspective the individual is to be as free as possible and thus the only actor responsible for her/his health, state interventions into public health are generally criticized by neoliberal think tanks.

<sup>41</sup> Frédéric Sautet, "Fiscaliser la cigarette électronique serait une erreur dans la lutte contre le tabagisme," *IEM (Institut Économique Molinari)*, September 23, 2015: 5. <https://www.institutmolinari.org/2015/09/23/fiscaliser-la-cigarette-electronique-serait-une-erreur-dans-la-lutte-contre-le-tabagisme/>.

<sup>42</sup> Petar Ganev, "Plain Packaging and its Unintended Consequences," *IME (Institute for Market Economics)*, November 2012: 3. [https://ime.bg/var/docs/PlainP/Plain\\_packaging\\_IME\\_ENG.pdf](https://ime.bg/var/docs/PlainP/Plain_packaging_IME_ENG.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> LFMI, "LFMI comments on European Commissions suggestions for the Tobacco Directive (2001/37/EC)," *LFMI (Lithuanian Free Market Institute)*, March 14, 2013. <https://en.llri.lt/news/economic-policy/lfmi-comments-on-european-commissions-suggestions-for-the-tobacco-directive-200137ec/irinka>.

<sup>44</sup> Mark Oates and Daniel Pryor, "2 Million Years of Life - How Safer Smoking Alternatives Can Level Up Health and Tackle the Cost of Living Crisis," *ASI (Adam Smith Institute)*, March 31, 2022: 11. <https://www.adamsmith.org/research/2-million-years-of-life-how-safer-smoking-alternatives-can-level-up-health-and-tackle-the-cost-of-living-crisis>.

<sup>45</sup> IBL, "Sala fumatori - La libertà di avere un vizio, almeno finché si vuol vivere in un paese libero," *IBL (Istituto Bruno Leoni)*, January 21, 2020. <https://www.brunoleoni.it/sala-fumatori>.

well than market-based approaches and because they limit the freedom of the affected population.

### ***Critique of Paternalistic Prohibitions***

As (economic) freedom is the highest good, interventions - and particularly prohibitions - by the state are perceived as so-called “paternalism” by neoliberal TTs. The Istituto Bruno Leoni (IBL, Italy) argues that anti-tobacco measures taken by the Italian state – such as the display ban on tobacco products for retail distributors, graphic health warning labels and plain packaging – are paternalistic. Paternalism, in their view, is the idea that people need to be forced to make the right choice, because they are not able to do so by themselves. Paternalism thus, in the words of IBL, “liberates” people from their freedom of choice.<sup>46</sup> Civismo (Spain) makes the same argument, stating that paternalistic prohibitions (in this specific case in regard to ENDS) limit people’s freedom of choice.<sup>47</sup> One of the best examples of the neoliberal critique of state regulation of tobacco is the Nanny State Index,<sup>48</sup> an annual report produced since 2017 by Christopher Snowdon of the IEA and authors affiliated with TTs that are members of the EPICENTER network. The index rates countries according to how free their citizens are when it comes to smoking, ENDS, drinking, and eating. The stronger the national regulations in one of these four sectors are, the less free are their citizens.<sup>49</sup> The report is published on the websites of numerous EPICENTER member organizations of EPICENTER and is frequently cited in neoliberal TT reports, articles and blog posts on tobacco.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Pietro Monsurrò, “La guerra al tabacco – L’inefficacia è un dettaglio secondario?,” *IBL (Istituto Bruno Leoni)*, October 13, 2011: 35. <https://www.brunoleoni.it/la-guerra-al-tabacco-l-inefficacia-e-un-dettaglio-secondario>.

<sup>47</sup> Antonio O’Mullony, “El Sector del Vapeo en España y su Impacto Económico,” *Fundación Civismo*, October 7, 2021: 25. <https://civismo.org/es/vapeo/>.

<sup>48</sup> The term “nanny state” was introduced by the conservative British politician Ian Macleod in a 1965 article in *The Spectator*. It was later popularized during the tenure of Margaret Thatcher. It is commonly used to describe a state which - instead of treating its citizens like free, responsible adults - intervenes too strongly in the lives of its citizens and is therefore perceived to infantilize them, thus the word nanny. It has since been used repeatedly in political discussions in the UK, as we shall see further below, and has spread beyond the UK. See John Coggon, *The Nanny State Debate: A Place Where Words Don’t Do Justice* (London: Faculty of Public Health, 2018). <https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/publications/the-nanny-state-debate-a-place-where-words-dont-do-justice>.

<sup>49</sup> Christopher Snowdon, “The Nanny State Index 2021,” *Nanny State Index*, 2021. <https://nannystateindex.org/>.

<sup>50</sup> For example, see Hayek Institut, “Wollen wir den Schutz von Vater Staat?,” *Hayek Institut (Friedrich August von Hayek Institut)*, May 15, 2021. <https://hayek-institut.at/nanny-state-index/>; FOR, “FOR Communication 17/2019: Alcohol, cigarettes, food and beverages - Poland is more restrictive than Germany and the Czech Republic,” *FOR (Civil Development Forum)*, April 30, 2019. <https://for.org.pl/en/a/6769.for-communication-17/2019-alcohol-cigarettes-food-and-beverages-poland-is-more-restrictive-than-germany-and-the-czech-republic>; and Timbro, “Nanny State Index 2019,” *Timbro*, April 30, 2019. <https://timbro.se/allmant/nanny-state-index-2019/>.



The argument about paternalistic intervention is picked up by other TTs, many of which are members of EPICENTER. In 2016 (before joining EPICENTER in 2022) Prometheus commissioned a study that argued that when people are confronted with paternalistic measures, they lose their autonomy.<sup>51</sup> The study characterizes soft paternalistic measures as “nudges,” thus not as direct rules, or prohibitions, but as a form of low-key manipulation. Graphic health warning labels are used as one of the examples to describe nudges.<sup>52</sup> The concept of nudging is also invoked by *Avenir Suisse*,<sup>53</sup> which argues that the private sector should play a more active role in public health matters, that the state should not levy taxes on food because they “place a greater burden on low-income households,” and that contradictions in the government’s position – namely punishing the consumption of harmful product while at the same time subsidizing the industrial sectors which produce those products – should be eliminated.<sup>54</sup>

### *Critique of “Sin Taxes”*

The financial burden of taxes on tobacco products – often addressed as one of multiple “sin taxes”<sup>55</sup> – on people with low incomes is a topic which many of the neoliberal TTs address. The Center for Political Studies (CEPOS, Denmark) makes this argument repeatedly,<sup>56</sup> inserting it in an overall critique of the tax-policy of the socialist Frederiksen government (Sweden).<sup>57</sup> The Institute of Economic and Social Studies (INESS, Slovakia) criticizes taxes on tobacco products for only serving the state as a source of income which does not favor public health, as it keeps smokers from switching to apparently less harmful ENDS (a point discussed in detail below).<sup>58</sup> Whereas many of the publications of these TTs are short articles or blog

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<sup>51</sup> Jan Schnellenbach, “Respektiert eine Politik des “weichen” Paternalismus die Autonomie individueller Konsumenten?” *Prometheus – Das Freiheitsinstitut*, March 29, 2016: 2. <https://prometheusinstitut.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Schnellenbach-Studie-Nudging-Prometheus.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> Schnellenbach, “Respektiert eine Politik,” 17-20.

<sup>53</sup> Haig Simonian, “When Nudge Turns to Shove,” *Avenir Suisse*, February 1, 2022. <https://www.avenir-suisse.ch/en/when-nudge-turns-to-shove/>.

<sup>54</sup> Diego Taboada and Jérôme Coandey, “Privat vor Staat – auch in der Prävention,” *Avenir Suisse*, January 2022. <https://www.avenir-suisse.ch/publication/privat-vor-staat-auch-in-der-praevention/>.

<sup>55</sup> The others are on alcohol and unhealthy food.

<sup>56</sup> Jonas Herby, “Højere cigaretpriiser rammer lavindkomsterne,” *CEPOS (Center for Political Studies)*, October 11, 2019. <https://cepos.dk/artikler/hoejere-cigaretpriiser-rammer-lavindkomsterne/>.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Due Bostrup and Mads Lundby Hansen, “S-Regeringens økonomiske politik gør alle indkomstgrupper fattigere – især lavindkomstgrupperne,” *CEPOS (Center for Political Studies)*, November 19, 2020. <https://cepos.dk/artikler/mettes-politik-gor-alle-fattigere/>.

<sup>58</sup> Radovan Āurana, “Tobacco Tax: Taxes at Any Price,” *INESS (Institute of Economic and Social Studies)*, September 10, 2021. <https://iness.sk/en/tobacco-tax-taxes-any-price>.

posts on their websites, as in the case of the IEM,<sup>59</sup> the IEA has published multiple longer research reports on the topic, making the same argument in greater detail.<sup>60</sup> Over and over, these TTs repeat that taxes on tobacco products, alcohol and unhealthy foods are paternalistic, limit the citizens' freedom, place a heavy burden on people with low incomes, prevent people from switching to less harmful ENDS, and ultimately only serve the state to fill its coffers.

### ***Market Based Alternatives to Regulations***

Instead of “nanny states” introducing hard restrictions or softer nudges, neoliberal TTs thus propose to focus on the responsibility of the consumers. The LFMI, for example, argues that instead of taxing tobacco products, more emphasis should be put on educating the consumers.<sup>61</sup> In the neoliberal perspective, companies thus need to be able to advertise their products in order to inform the consumers about these products.<sup>62</sup> On the same ground the LFMI opposes larger health warnings on cigarette packages, as these would cover up information about the brand and the product, which is necessary for consumers to make informed choices, while at the same time reducing the competition in the tobacco market (which neoliberal TTs consider as healthy and necessary for the functioning of the market).<sup>63</sup> A similar argument is made by Prometheus, which argues that it is not paternalistic interventions but rather an overall higher level of wealth in a society and better financing of the public health system that improve public health.<sup>64</sup> In a report published by the IEA in 2013, Christopher Snowdon argues that “the interests of consumers are nearly always better advanced by the provision of accurate information and free choice than by prohibitions and restrictions on commercial speech. Markets can correct themselves more quickly than governments.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Valentin Petkantchin, “Sin taxes: the examples of alcohol and tobacco,” *IEM (Institut Économique Molinari)*, March 19, 2014. <https://www.institutmolinari.org/2014/03/19/sin-taxes-the-examples-of-alcohol-and-tobacco/>.

<sup>60</sup> Christopher Snowdon and Mark Tovey, “Smoking and the Public Purse,” *IEA (Institute of Economic Affairs)*, August 7, 2017. <https://iea.org.uk/publications/smoking-and-the-public-purse/>; and Christopher Snowdon, “Of Course Sin Taxes are Regressive,” *IEA (Institute of Economic Affairs)*, July 25, 2018. <https://iea.org.uk/publications/of-course-sin-taxes-are-regressive/>.

<sup>61</sup> LFMI, “More Liberal Voices. On the Effects of Tobacco Taxation,” *LFMI (Lithuanian Free Market Institute)*, September 4, 2018. <https://en.llri.lt/news/economic-policy/tax-and-budget/more-liberal-voices-on-the-effects-of-tobacco-taxation/lrinka>.

<sup>62</sup> Ganev, “Plain Packaging and its Unintended Consequences,” 3.

<sup>63</sup> LFMI, “LFMI comments on European Commissions.”

<sup>64</sup> Prometheus, “Brauchen wir ein Kindermädchen? – Der Einfluss von Lifestyle-Regulierungen auf die Gesundheit der Bürger,” *Prometheus – Das Freiheitsinstitut*, 2021: 10. <https://prometheusinstitut.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Nanny-State-Index-2021-Der-Einfluss-von-Lifestyle-Regulierungen-auf-die-Gesundheit-der-Buerger.pdf>.

<sup>65</sup> Christopher Snowdon, “Free Market Solutions in Health: The case of nicotine,” *IEA (Institute of Economic Affairs)*, July 11, 2013: 41. <https://iea.org.uk/publications/research/free-market-solutions-in-health-the-case-of-nicotine>.

## Tobacco harm reduction (THR)

THR in the discourse of neoliberal TTs is almost always tied to the use of ENDS and heated tobacco products, or as they refer to them “reduced-risk products”.<sup>66</sup> These TTs argue that although it is realistically unachievable to stop people from smoking altogether, it is possible to get them to switch to apparently less harmful products. Arguing for the use of ENDS in THR, the Adam Smith Institute (ASI), a free market TT, suggests a correlation between an increase in the use of ENDS and a decrease in the use of cigarettes.<sup>67</sup> It argues that ENDS use is the most popular way for smokers to quit.<sup>68</sup>

The focus of neoliberal tanks is, however, on comparing the adverse effects and harm produced by these products to smoking tobacco. Christopher Snowdon, of the IEA, claims that ENDS are 95% less harmful than smoking.<sup>69</sup> In 2015, *The Lancet* in an editorial article<sup>70</sup> exposed that the figure 95% is false and the result of misinterpretation of the original study by “European Addiction Research.”<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, the statement is still consistently used by neoliberal TTs when talking about the use of ENDS in harm reduction.<sup>72</sup> Demos (UK) claims that “while ENDS are not safe, they are substantially less harmful than smoking.”<sup>73</sup> Since their emergence, there have been concerns about ENDS, especially that they may be a gateway to smoking or that smokers who would otherwise quit may become ‘dual users’. These concerns are dismissed by neoliberal TTs, which argue that the fear of these behaviors leads to risk avoidance and curbs innovation.<sup>74</sup>

Surrounding the undetermined dangers of ENDS and similar products, the European Union, in particular, has introduced numerous precautionary measures regarding their use.

<sup>66</sup> See PMI, “Reduced-Risk Products,” *PMI (Philip Morris International)*, accessed July 2, 2023.

[https://www.pmi.com/glossary-section/glossary/reduced-risk-products-\(rrps\)](https://www.pmi.com/glossary-section/glossary/reduced-risk-products-(rrps)).

<sup>67</sup> Daniel Pryor, “Up in Smoke: Unlocking Tobacco Harm Reduction,” *ASI (Adam Smith Institute)*, October 30, 2019: 6. <https://www.adamsmith.org/research/up-in-smoke>.

<sup>68</sup> Oates and Pryor, “2 Million Years of Life.”

<sup>69</sup> Christopher Snowdon, “Vaper Trails,” *IEA (Institute of Economic Affairs)*, April 2022. <https://iea.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Vaper-Trails.pdf>.

<sup>70</sup> Lancet, “E-Cigarettes: Public Health England’s Evidence-Based Confusion,” *Lancet* 386, no. 9996 (2015): 829. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(15\)00042-2/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(15)00042-2/fulltext).

<sup>71</sup> David Nutt et al., “Estimating the Harms of Nicotine-Containing Products Using the MCDA Approach,” *European Addiction Research* 20, no. 5 (2014): 218–25. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24714502/>.

<sup>72</sup> Oates and Pryor, “2 Million Years of Life.”

<sup>73</sup> Polly Mackenzie, “Regulating The Future of Vapes,” *Demos*, March 14, 2022. <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/futureofvaping-1.pdf>.

<sup>74</sup> Rowan Saydowski, “Analysis of Flavored Vaping Products as a Harm Reduction Method,” *Property Rights Alliance*, Accessed April 2, 2023. <https://www.propertyrightsalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/Analysis-of-Flavored-Vaping-Products-as-a-Harm-Reduction-Method.pdf>.

Neoliberal TTs are vehemently opposed to such measures. They argue that heavy regulation of the production, marketing, and sale of ENDS undermines tobacco cessation efforts. Demos maintains that advertising rules should be modified so vapes can be promoted as “less harmful” and “switching to vapes is hugely beneficial to health.”<sup>75</sup>

Neoliberal TTs also claim that much of the information about the potential harm of ENDS is unsubstantiated and, therefore, a barrier to tobacco cessation. A report by the ASI claims: “Doctors and pharmacists appear to be giving ill-informed advice about reduced-risk tobacco products, undermining public health efforts toward smoking cessation. A new survey has revealed a serious lack of knowledge among healthcare professionals about ENDS or heated tobacco products – making life harder for people who want to quit smoking.”<sup>76</sup> This claim is supported by the IEA, which contends that people are discouraged from using ENDS as a result of unscientific claims and false scare stories reported in the media.<sup>77</sup>

### **Illicit trade**

In their discourse, many neoliberal TTs also contend that there is a direct correlation between strict tobacco regulation and rising crime rates, corruption, black markets, and illicit tobacco trade. A study by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI, UK) on the illicit cigarette market in the European Union (EU), Switzerland, and Norway claims that over 9% of all cigarettes consumed in Europe in 2016 were illegal.<sup>78</sup> In their opinion, regulations like plain packaging, which are meant to limit the appeal of tobacco products, make it easy for illicit traders to copy and sell such products. Another argument, as noted above, is that high taxes on tobacco lead to price increases and ultimately drive up the volume of illicit products. The Center for The Study of Democracy (CDS, Belgium), a TTs working in association with PMI through “PMI Impact,” states in a policy brief that heavy regulations on tobacco products are one of the main reasons for the increase in illicit trade and criminal networks along the Balkan route.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Alice Dawson and Josh Smith, “Vaping Regulation in 2022,” *Demos*, August 2022. <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Vaping-Regulation-in-2022.pdf>.

<sup>76</sup> Daniel Pryor, “Understand Tobacco Harm Reduction,” *ASI (Adam Smith Institute)*, April 13, 2019. <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Vaping-Regulation-in-2022.pdf>.

<sup>77</sup> Christopher Snowdon et al., “Vaping Works,” *IEA (Institute of Economic Affairs)*, 2021. <https://iea.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Vaping-Works.pdf>.

<sup>78</sup> KPMG, RUSI, “Project SUN: A Study of the Illicit Cigarette Market in the European Union, Norway and Switzerland,” *RUSI (Royal United Services Institute)*, July 4, 2017. <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/lt/pdf/project-sun-2017-report.pdf>.

<sup>79</sup> CSD, “The Illicit Trade Of Tobacco Products Along The Balkan Route: Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Romania,” *CDS (Center For The Study Of Democracy)*, August 2018: 12.

## 4.1.2 Health experts

### Transparency and sources of funding

Health experts advocate for full transparency and disclosure of potential conflicts of interest, specifically funding sources and author affiliations, in academic reports published by health experts and articles published by journalists on the health sector. This will allow readers to assess the reliability of the research and consider the potential influence of the tobacco industry on the findings and conclusions.

For instance, Meg Carter highlights the issue of transparency in the media, in particular undisclosed ties between neoliberal TTs and the tobacco industry. Carter points out that media organizations often present TT contributors as independent sources of information without clarifying their financial backing or vested interests. This creates a misleading impression of impartiality and independence.<sup>80</sup>

Carter cites the example of the IEA, a neoliberal TT that has received funding from tobacco giant PMI.<sup>81</sup> Media outlets such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) routinely fail to disclose ties between TTs such as the IEA and the tobacco industry. Health experts and journalists such as *Guardian* columnist George Monbiot have therefore called for media organizations, including the BBC, to consistently disclose the relevant financial interests of the people they interview.<sup>82</sup>

Two key tactics employed by tobacco lobbyists to further their agendas are “third partying” and “astroturfing.”<sup>83</sup> “Third partying” involves sponsoring TTs to promote a specific message. “Astroturfing,” a strategy imported from the United States, entails creating seemingly grassroots movements to spread a tobacco sponsor’s message. These tactics are well known to professional journalists and media organizations. However, media organizations often struggle to balance transparency with time and space limitations, making it difficult to consistently disclose potential conflicts of interest.<sup>84</sup> The Swiss newspaper *Le Temps* has published a

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<https://csd.bg/publications/publication/policy-brief-no-80-the-illicit-trade-of-tobacco-products-along-the-balkan-route-bulgaria-greece/>.

<sup>80</sup> Meg Carter, “The Not so Independent Tobacco Experts,” *BMJ (British Medical Journal)* 348, no. 1 (April 2014): 1. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.g2908>.

<sup>81</sup> Tobacco Tactics, “IEA: History of Close Ties with the Tobacco Industry,” *University of Bath*, Updated December 15, 2020. <https://tobaccotactics.org/wiki/iea-history-of-close-ties-with-the-tobacco-industry/>.

<sup>82</sup> Carter, “The Not so Independent Tobacco Experts,” 1.

<sup>83</sup> Carter, “The Not so Independent Tobacco Experts,” 1.

<sup>84</sup> Carter, “The Not so Independent Tobacco Experts,” 2.

number of articles by Emmanuel Garessus, who has links to PMI and the neoliberal Progress Foundation,<sup>85</sup> echoing talking points made by the neoliberal TT Institut de Recherches Économiques et Fiscales/Institute of Economic and Financial Research (IREF, France), such as the claims that the health benefits of sin taxes are often disappointing, they can lead to the development of parallel or black markets, and they disproportionately affect the poor.<sup>86</sup> IREF has ties to the tobacco industry and has organized at least one panel discussion with Daniel Pryor, of the ASI in the UK, and Emeric Christiansen, head of tax affairs at Philip Morris France.<sup>87</sup>

Carter emphasizes the need for a more open and mature discussion of lobbyists' roles and their relationships with TTs. She argues that while lobbyists and the interests they represent have a right to be heard, all stakeholders, including the media, must engage in a more transparent dialogue. Ending the secrecy surrounding lobbyists' activities and TTs' financial ties, Carter argues, will benefit everyone.<sup>88</sup>

Notably, in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned that tobacco control efforts could be undermined by articles published by media outlets and medical professionals claiming that smokers were less likely to contract the virus. Stéphane Horel, an expert in corporate lobbying, conflict of interest and the manipulation of science, and Ties Keyzer, an expert in the tobacco industry's lobbying and marketing tactics, reported many of these articles had little credibility, as they were found to have been written by authors with ties to the tobacco industry.<sup>89</sup> Horel and Keyzer cited articles by Christopher Snowdon, a British author and journalist, and Jean-Pierre Changeux, a French neuroscientist, as examples. Both Snowdon and Changeux are known to have received funding from the tobacco industry, raising concerns about potential conflicts of interest.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Emmanuel Garessus, "Philip Morris, Premier Groupe de Tabac à Émettre Des Obligations Durables," *Le Temps*, September 8, 2021. <https://www.letemps.ch/economie/finance/philip-morris-premier-groupe-tabac-emettre-obligations-durables>.

<sup>86</sup> Emmanuel Garessus, "Le Manque de Vertu Des Taxes Sur Les Vices," *Le Temps*, June 15, 2021. <https://www.letemps.ch/economie/manque-vertu-taxes-vices>.

<sup>87</sup> Patrick Coquart, "Un noci-score pour adapter la taxation en fonction de la nocivité du produit," *Revue des Tabacs*, Accessed April 5, 2023. <https://revuedestabacs.com/blog/un-noci-score-pour-adapter-la-taxation-en-fonction-de-la-nocivite%C3%A9-du-produit/>.

<sup>88</sup> Carter, "The Not so Independent Tobacco Experts," 1–2.

<sup>89</sup> Stéphane Horel and Ties Keyzer, "Covid 19: How Harm Reduction Advocates and the Tobacco Industry Capitalised on the Pandemic to Promote Nicotine," *BMJ (British Medical Journal)* 373, no.1303 (June 2021): 1. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n1303>.

<sup>90</sup> Horel and Keyzer, "Covid 19: How Harm Reduction Advocates," 1.

Health experts like Lisa Bero of the University of Sydney also stress the importance of transparency and disclosure of potential conflicts of interest in research conducted by TTs, organizations, and academics affiliated with the tobacco industry. She cautions that research funded by the tobacco industry is prone to bias and conflicts of interest, in particular because of the industry's history of manipulating research and spreading misleading information regarding the health effects of tobacco consumption.<sup>91</sup> Bero believes that expert selection for risk assessment should consider professional competence, diversity of views, disciplines, and attitudes, along with potential affiliation or interest group bias. Promoting transparency about the involvement of interest groups in creating and distributing risk-related information will not prevent their participation in the process. Nonetheless, argues Bero, such transparency will simplify the task of identifying the tactics, if any, employed by an interest group to manipulate the data.<sup>92</sup>

## EU regulation

TTs and advocacy groups play a complex role in EU tobacco control policy: advocacy groups promoting a public health perspective can help guide policy changes and legislation that reduce consumption rates. For example, the Swedish TT Tobaksfakta, formed by health professionals against tobacco in 2010, is a national independent player focusing on measures to reduce tobacco use and has been involved in the process encouraged by the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in Sweden and the EU.<sup>93</sup> Slovenia's Anti-Tobacco Working Group (ATWG), part of Slovenia's National Institute of Public Health (NIPH), has developed a strategy 'For a Tobacco-free Slovenia 2020–2030', a comprehensive plan that aims to significantly reduce the rate of smoking in the country. Its efforts has led to significant strides in reducing smoking rates, preventing second-hand smoke exposure, and promoting a healthier lifestyle.<sup>94</sup>

Neoliberal TTs with ties to the tobacco industry often serve as instruments for the

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<sup>91</sup> Lisa Bero, "Tobacco Industry Manipulation of Research," *Public Health Report* 120, no. 2 (April 2005): 203–204, 206. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1497700/>;

See also: Vital Strategies, "Crooked Nine: Nine Ways the Tobacco Industry Undermines Health Policy," *STOP (Stopping Tobacco Organizations & Products)*, September 2019. <https://exposetobacco.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Crooked-9-STOP.pdf>.

<sup>92</sup> Bero, "Tobacco Industry Manipulation of Research," 206.

<sup>93</sup> Charli Eriksson, et al., "The Swedish Think Tank Tobaksfakta: An Assessment of Relevance and Quality," *Semantic Scholar* (2014). <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Swedish-Think-Tank-Tobaksfakta-%3A-An-Assessment-Eriksson-Falck/15ca8b5f666cdc822183beb6069978864de63daa>.

<sup>94</sup> WHO. "Slovenia's public health advocates recognized for commitment to tobacco control." *WHO (World Health Organization)*. May 26, 2023. <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/26-05-2023-slovenia-s-public-health-advocates-recognized-for-commitment-to-tobacco-control>.

tobacco industry to tailor legislation to their advantage. Since 2000, the EU has undergone a substantial transformation in policy development due to a series of regulatory changes known as “Better Regulation,” a concept used since the 1990s to describe regulatory reform at the EU and EU member state level. Smith et al. explore the strategies and motivations of major corporations, particularly British American Tobacco (BAT), in influencing policy changes. Smith et al. illuminate the process by which well-funded policy entrepreneurs working for the tobacco industry create advocacy coalitions, TTs work on behalf of the industry, and regulated sectors choose evidence-tools like impact assessments.<sup>95</sup>

The Better Regulation agenda introduced mandatory impact assessments (IAs) for EU policymakers, marking a significant shift in regulatory policymaking. The initial step of IAs involves gauging risks to determine whether the potential dangers presented by a specific hazard are significant enough to require regulation.<sup>96</sup> To promote risk assessment guidelines that were in line with its interests, BAT turned to the Brussels-based TT European Policy Center (EPC, Belgium). Together they built a coalition of industries with similar interests in risk assessment, including the pharmaceutical, oil, and chemical sectors. The EPC effectively lobbied for regulatory reforms under the Better Regulation agenda, presenting them as credible and unbiased to EU policymakers and media. Utilizing lobbying strategies, they formed an influential industry coalition, including British American Tobacco, manipulating scientific evidence to favor their case. Involving selectively chosen experts and directing lobbying efforts further distorted the process. EPC's lobbying resulted in skewing the Treaty on European Union language and embedding IAs beneficial to the tobacco industry into EU policymaking.<sup>97</sup> Smith et al. conclude that the EPC achieved its goals of modifying the language of the Treaty on European Union (2007) and exerting influence on the EU Commission, Council, and Parliament.<sup>98</sup> The Better Regulation agenda became a priority for the EU's Lisbon Agenda (2002), which formally adopted IAs in the EU policymaking process.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Katherine Smith et al., “Corporate Coalitions and Policy Making in the European Union: How and Why British American Tobacco Promoted ‘Better Regulation,’” *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 40, no. 2 (2015): passim. <https://doi.org/10.1215/03616878-2882231>.

<sup>96</sup> Smith et al., “Corporate Coalitions,” 2.

<sup>97</sup> Smith et al., “Corporate Coalitions,” 8–9.

<sup>98</sup> Smith et al., “Corporate Coalitions,” 15–16.

<sup>99</sup> Smith et al., “Corporate Coalitions,” 16–18.



Smith et al.'s findings demonstrate how policy entrepreneurs working on behalf of big tobacco can influence regulatory policy by using multiple access points and concealing interests.<sup>100</sup>

### **Role of THR as a marketing strategy**

The tobacco industry has promoted the idea that that ENDS can reduce risks for heavy smokers and potentially facilitate their cessation efforts. Tobacco companies argue that using non-combustible tobacco products, such as ENDS, nicotine replacement therapies, and smokeless tobacco, can substantially reduce health risks linked to smoking. They maintain that these products deliver nicotine without the toxic chemicals and carcinogens found in cigarette smoke, which are primarily responsible for tobacco-related diseases. The consensus among health experts, however, is that ENDS are not a solution to the youth tobacco epidemic. They note that while ENDS vapor lacks some harmful substances found in traditional cigarettes, it contains other harmful substances in various concentrations depending on product type, heating temperature, and user maintenance.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, the variety of flavors or aromas in ENDS make these products more appealing to young people, a marketing tactic that echoes the colorful packaging strategies used by the tobacco industry in the past. It should also be noted that ENDS represent a vast and varied spectrum of products, including closed and open systems, pods, and disposable devices, which do not have universally accepted and implemented quality and safety standards, adding another layer of complexity to their use and regulation.

Tobacco companies have used THR as a marketing strategy for ENDS and heated tobacco products. IQOS, PMI's brand of "smoke-free" heated tobacco products (HTP), is a notable example of this strategy.<sup>102</sup> For over a decade, the tobacco industry has enlisted the help of health experts and physicians to advocate for ENDS and HTPs as a THR approach for their lobbying activities. By enlisting these professionals, the industry aims to validate and reinforce its lobbying activities through credible voices, highlighting the potential benefits of transitioning from combustible cigarettes to apparently less harmful ENDS or HTPs. Konstantinos Farsalinos, a highly controversial Greek cardiologist with links to the tobacco

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<sup>100</sup> Smith et al., "Corporate Coalitions," 17.

<sup>101</sup> Mina Tehrani et al, "Characterizing the chemical landscape in commercial e-cigarette liquids and aerosols by liquid chromatography-high-resolution mass spectrometry," *Chemical research in toxicology* 34, no. 10 (2021): passim. <https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.chemrestox.1c00253>.

<sup>102</sup> PMI, "Our smoke-free products," *PMI (Philip Morris International)*, accessed March 24, 2023. <https://www.pmi.com/smoke-free-products>.

industry, has been a prominent author on the subject of ENDS since 2011.<sup>103</sup> He is also an active member of a network of scientists, consultants, and TT advocates for THR through lobbying-like initiatives. THR has gained considerable traction in recent years. In the UK, for example, THR has been endorsed by leading health institutes such as the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, and the Royal College of Physicians.<sup>104</sup>

Writing in 2014, Martin McKee, professor of European public health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine cautioned that little research had been done to date on the potential effectiveness of ENDS in smoking cessation and warned that any product containing nicotine has harmful effects on health and should be subject to appropriate regulation.<sup>105</sup>

Today, the prevailing view among the majority of health experts is that ENDS and HTPs are harmful to health. Contrary to the tobacco industry's claims, the WHO now warns that ENDS are harmful to health and consequently does not endorse THR.<sup>106</sup> In 2020, the WHO stated that the evidence on the effectiveness of ENDS for smoking cessation was inconclusive and stressed the potential health risks. ENDS contain toxic chemicals and are associated with increased risk of cardiovascular diseases, lung disorders, and fetal harm during pregnancy. The WHO warned that the use of ENDS by children and adolescents can have negative impacts on their brain development and increase the likelihood of smoking traditional cigarettes in the future.<sup>107</sup> The US Centers for Disease Control also cautions against the use of ENDS, warning that they may be harmful to nonsmokers and could lead to nicotine addiction and smoking in adolescents. In fact, studies have indicated that adolescents who use ENDS are at an increased risk of developing a nicotine addiction and smoking cigarettes.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> BMJ, "How harm reduction advocates and the tobacco industry capitalised on the pandemic to promote nicotine," *BMJ (British Medical Journal)*, June 2, 2021. <https://www.bmj.com/company/newsroom/how-harm-reduction-advocates-and-the-tobacco-industry-capitalised-on-the-pandemic-to-promote-nicotine/>.

<sup>104</sup> Horel and Keyzer, "Covid 19: How Harm Reduction Advocates," 1–2.

<sup>105</sup> Martin McKee, "Electronic Cigarettes: Proceed with Great Caution," *International Journal of Public Health* 59, no. 5 (August 2014): 684. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00038-014-0589-z>.

<sup>106</sup> WHO, "E-cigarettes are harmful to health," *WHO (World Health Organization)*, February 5, 2020.

<https://www.who.int/news/item/05-02-2020-e-cigarettes-are-harmful-to-health>;

WHO, "Heated tobacco products: information sheet - 2nd edition," *WHO (World Health Organization)*, July 10, 2020. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-HEP-HPR-2020.2>.

<sup>107</sup> WHO, "E-cigarettes are harmful to health."

<sup>108</sup> Joshua Liberman and Samuel Wann, "E-Cigarettes—What a Practicing Cardiologist Needs to Know," *The American Journal of Cardiology* 119, no. 4 (February 2017): 683. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S000291491631829X>.

## 4.2 Interviews

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### Interviewees

The seven experts we interviewed are:

Hugo Molineaux is an associate editor for AT Schweiz and researcher for OxySuisse. He completed his Master's in history at the University of Geneva in 2022. His focus of study was on the Fédération romande de publicité (FRP), a private advertising association based in Lausanne. His research in the FRP's archives targeted the tobacco industry's strategies utilized to counter regulations, with a particular focus on a major tobacco advertising campaign in 1993. In his current capacity, Molineaux continues to conduct research and work in the field of tobacco control.

Pascal Diethelm, a prominent Swiss econometrician and dedicated anti-smoking campaigner, is president of OxySuisse, a key player in the fight against smoking. He spent most of his professional career at the World Health Organization (WHO), where he created a comprehensive database to track global smoking prevalence. Today, Diethelm remains active as vice president of France's National Committee Against Smoking (Comité national contre le tabagisme, CNCT) and serves on the committee of the French Alliance against Tobacco (Alliance contre le tabac, ACT).

Danielle van Kalmthout joined the Belgian Alliance for a Smoke-Free Society (Alliance pour une Société sans Tabac) in 2018, where she champions a future where children can grow up without the menace of tobacco. Her previous work at the Policy Research Department of the Flemish League of Families (Gezinsbond) centered on environmental issues, sustainable development, and energy policy, with a particular focus on children's environmental health. She established and coordinated "Childproof," an initiative that brought together non-governmental organizations (NGOs), scientists, and doctors to tackle environmental pollution and its impact on children's health.

Dieter Plehwe is a senior research fellow at the Berlin Social Science Center (Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung) and expert in international and comparative political economy, neoliberalism, and think tank networks. As a prominent scholar, Plehwe has extensively studied the connections between think tanks and corporate lobbying.

Allen Gallagher is a research fellow at the Tobacco Control Research Group of the University of Bath, a group whose work includes investigating the tobacco industry's lobbying efforts to influence public health policy. As an expert in tobacco control and industry influence, Gallagher has contributed to numerous studies and publications that shed light on big tobacco's tactics and strategies.

Otto Hostettler, a Swiss journalist with over 30 years' experience, currently works as a reporter and editor at Zurich-based *Beobachter* magazine. Hostettler is also co-founder of the Swiss research network *investigativ.ch* and co-president of the research platform *lobbywatch.ch*, as well as a lecturer on research and open-source intelligence at Swiss Radio and Television SRF and the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts.

Kathrin Lauber is a research fellow at the Global Health Policy Unit of the University of Edinburgh. With a strong background in political science and public policy, Lauber has conducted extensive research on the strategies that corporations use to influence science and policymaking, including the food industry's attempts to influence global-level non-communicable disease policy at the WHO.

Yannick Romero is a senior knowledge and advocacy manager at the Geneva-based Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), where he focuses on tobacco control and public health policy. With a background in research and advocacy, Romero has contributed to numerous publications and studies on cancer control and the impact of the tobacco industry on public health.

### **Recurring themes**

In the interviews we conducted, we identified several recurring themes in the discourse of neoliberal TTs linked to the tobacco industry in Europe.

First, neoliberal TTs strongly emphasize individual responsibility. As Molineaux highlighted, they often convey the message that every adult citizen is responsible for their own health, implying that consumers, not industry, are responsible for the health consequences of tobacco products on their bodies. This perspective can be traced back to the early 2000s when the concept of "carbon footprint" was invented by Ogilvy & Mather, a New York-based advertising, marketing, and public relations agency hired by the multinational oil and gas

company, British Petroleum (BP) to promote the idea that climate change was not the fault of corporations but of consumers.<sup>109</sup>

Van Kalmthout provided a unique perspective on the tobacco industry's tactics and the environment, in particular the cigarette filter. The filter was introduced by tobacco companies to reduce the health impact of cigarette smoking. She pointed out that in retrospect, this turned out to be mainly a marketing trick.<sup>110</sup> Research showed that the filter simply causes smoke to be inhaled even deeper and possibly also allows fibers derived from the cellulose acetate into the lungs.<sup>111</sup> In addition, cigarettes without a filter are a barrier to starting smoking because the filter reduces certain burning effects in the throat. Van Kalmthout maintained that introducing the filter has caused more harm than good.

Van Kalmthout further explained that cigarette butts, for example, are the most common waste elements picked up worldwide during environmental cleanups.<sup>112</sup> Every year, 4.5 trillion cigarette butts are discarded into nature. Filters consist of cellulose acetate that breaks down into microplastics and thus ends up in the (aquatic) environment. Besides, plastic cigarette butts contain many toxic substances including arsenic, heavy metals, zinc and copper, which also end up in the environment. Finally, cigarette butts are very difficult to clean up because they get stuck between tiles and sand. She advocated that a filter ban is a necessary measure to protect the environment.

Molineaux and Lauber also identified the recurring theme of opposition to the “nanny state,” a term suggesting a pushback against state interference in personal health matters. In this narrative, neoliberal TTs portray regulations and restrictions, particularly health-related ones, as attacks on individual liberties. As a 1994 case study of Switzerland's advertising ban

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<sup>109</sup> Mickaël Correia, *Criminels climatiques: enquête sur les multinationales qui brûlent notre planète* (La Découverte, 2022), 5-6; Stuart Tannock, *Educating for radical social transformation in the climate crisis* (Springer Nature, 2021), 27; Rebecca Solnit, “Big Oil Coined ‘Carbon Footprints’ to Blame Us for Their Greed. Keep Them on the Hook,” *The Guardian*, August 23, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/aug/23/big-oil-coined-carbon-footprints-to-blame-us-for-their-greed-keep-them-on-the-hook>.

<sup>110</sup> Danielle van Kalmthout, “For a healthy start in life, children need smoke-free environments: Progress of the Generation Smoke-Free campaign in Belgium since its launch in 2018,” *National Library of Medicine* 9, no. 6 (2023): 2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9999196/>.

<sup>111</sup> WHO, “Tobacco: Industry tactics to attract younger generations,” *WHO (World Health Organization)*, March 25, 2020. <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/tobacco-industry-tactics-to-attract-younger-generations>.

<sup>112</sup> OECD, “Extended Producer Responsibility: A Guidance Manual for Governments,” *OECD iLibrary*, March 20, 2001. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264189867-en>; Clifton Curtis et al., “Tobacco Industry Responsibility for Butts: A Model Tobacco Waste Act,” *Tobacco Control* 26, no. 1 (2017): 113–17, <https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2015-052737>.

found, the tobacco companies' strategy was to emphasize the issue of freedom of speech rather than health concerns.<sup>113</sup>

Gallagher's first focus was on neoliberal TTs' advocacy of free market principles and resistance to state intervention. The TTs maintain that tobacco control measures, such as heightened taxes and standardized packaging, are likely to boost the illicit tobacco trade, thus threatening the economy, despite such arguments lacking support from the evidence base.<sup>114</sup> Gallagher also highlighted the "policy dystopia" narrative often used by these TTs.<sup>115</sup> In other words, how they suggest that wholly negative consequences will result from the implementation of tobacco control policies.

Shifting the focus to global policy, Gallagher observed that neoliberal TTs increasingly criticize the WHO's positions. They now extend their opposition beyond specific governmental measures to challenging the legitimacy of global organizations involved in tobacco control. Gallagher also highlighted the strategic repositioning of some TTs, with them claiming a role in public health, while criticizing global health bodies like the WHO, and the guidance of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).<sup>116</sup>

Gallagher also explained these TTs' influence on policy and regulation, noting that the tobacco industry is trying to rebrand itself as a solution rather than the problem. He added, however, that the impact of such narratives remains ambiguous due to the complexities of governmental decision-making.

Hostettler focused on the role of economic actors, such as the Swiss Trade Association (Schweizerischer Gewerbeverband, SGV) and the Allianz der Wirtschaft für eine massvolle Präventionspolitik (AWMP) in delaying the implementation of new tobacco laws. He highlighted the influential role of individuals such as Anastasia Sommer, academic figures like Reto Auer, and organizations such as Swiss Health and Nicolife. But Hostettler also noted that

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<sup>113</sup> UCFS, "Industry Documents Library," Ucsf.edu, accessed May 25, 2023, <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/>.

<sup>114</sup> NCDs, "Illicit Trade Increases Tobacco Use," World Health Organization - Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, accessed June 27, 2023, <https://www.emro.who.int/noncommunicable-diseases/highlights/illicit-trade-increases-tobacco-use.html>.

<sup>115</sup> Selda Ulucanlar, et al., "The Policy Dystopia Model: An Interpretive Analysis of Tobacco Industry Political Activity," *National Library of Medicine* 13, no. 9 (2016): passim. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5029800/>.

<sup>116</sup> WHO, "Who Framework Convention on Tobacco Control: Guidelines for Implementation of Article Article 11," *WHO (World Health Organization)*, 2014. <https://fctc.who.int/who-fctc/overview/treaty-instruments/packaging-and-labelling-of-tobacco-products>.

despite Avenir Suisse's presence at events on the sidelines of parliamentary sessions, there was no evidence that the think tank had an influence on parliamentary decisions.

Another theme Molineaux highlighted was “reasonable or moderate regulation,” citing the example of Japan Tobacco International (JTI), which argued in 2021 against tobacco taxes and promoted a narrative that advocated a balance between health concerns and economic freedom.<sup>117</sup> This is in line with the tobacco industry’s theme of self-regulation and its argument that it is best suited to set its own guidelines for conduct.

Both Molineaux and Diethelm stressed the TTs’ frequent use of the “slippery slope” argument to resist regulation. According to this argument, accepting one regulation, such as plain packaging on tobacco products, is likely to lead to additional regulations in other sectors, like wine or fast food.<sup>118</sup>

Diethelm highlighted the standard argument against “sin taxes,” i.e. that they will increase illicit trade in tobacco products, reflecting a broader neoliberal agenda of reducing taxation levels overall. He also noted the TTs’ promotion of ENDS as an optimal public health solution. This narrative portrays the tobacco industry as a contributor to public health solutions rather than a public health problem.

In our interview with Lauber, the recurring themes were the influence of neoliberal TTs and their strategies, the approaches and frameworks used in the process of policymaking, and the role of funding in shaping perspectives. However, she stressed that these TTs typically presented economic arguments separately from the freedom of choice argument, indicating that their impact was multifaceted. Lauber also highlighted the differences in attitudes toward state intervention across regions, such as the Nordic countries, the UK, and Switzerland. Lastly, she emphasized the key role of funding in shaping positioning, pointing out the established connections between financial support and the stances taken by various organizations.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> JTI, “Unreasonable Tobacco Tax Increases Lead to Surge in Illegal Trade Says New Report,” *JTI (Japan Tobacco International)*, accessed June 6, 2023. <https://www.jti.com/news-views/unreasonable-tobacco-tax-increases-lead-surge-illegal-trade-says-new-report>; Pietro Boschetti and Philippe Mach, “Temps présent - Attention, ce parlement peut nuire à votre santé,” *RTS (Radio Television Suisse)*, September 6, 2018, <https://pages.rts.ch/emissions/temps-present/9732471-attention-ce-parlement-peut-nuire-a-votre-sante.html>.

<sup>118</sup> See International Coalition Letter; 5 Years of Failure: Global Coalition Letter Against Plain Packaging. 2018. <http://www.propertyrightsalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/2018-Global-Plain-Packaging-Coalition-to-WHO.pdf>; Twitter, “Interdiction-publicité NON,” accessed May 25, 2023. <https://twitter.com/nonpublicite?lang=fr>.

<sup>119</sup> See Alice Fabbri, et al., “The Influence of Industry Sponsorship on the Research Agenda: A Scoping Review,” *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 11. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6187765/>.

## Collaboration between think tanks

In our interview with Diethelm, he illuminated the ways in which neoliberal TTs, particularly those associated with the tobacco industry, interact and collaborate with each other to advance their collective objectives. This collaboration, he noted, is not incidental but organized and planned.

Diethelm emphasized that collaboration is indeed a prevalent tactic among these TTs, often facilitated through platforms like the Atlas Network. He pointed out that such collaboration is no accident but a deliberate, structured process. He drew an analogy with mushrooms: just as separate mushrooms sprout from the same underlying organism, these TTs, although appearing distinct, share the same ideologies. In Diethelm's words, "It's really a mushroom movement." As Diethelm's mushroom analogy makes clear, although TTs present themselves as separate and independent organizations, they function as distinct manifestations of an extensive ideological system lying beneath the surface which is based on neoliberal free-market principles.

The Atlas Network plays a significant role in this cooperative environment. John Blundell, its former president, declared its mission more than 30 years ago: "to litter the world with free-market TTs." The Atlas Network serves as a nexus for these TTs, providing a platform for them to align their ideologies, consolidate resources, and pool their advocacy efforts. For instance, noted Diethelm, from 2016 to 2018, the Atlas Network brought together over 60 TTs to endorse two coalition letters objecting to plain packaging, thereby "creating a false sense of credibility."<sup>120</sup>

Thus, as Diethelm's insights make clear, the connections among these TTs are intricate and strategically woven. While they may seem independent on the surface, they are closely interconnected and coordinate their efforts to further a common neoliberal agenda, bolstered by organizations such as the Atlas Network.

Romero shed light on the tobacco industry and associated TTs' "deceptive practices."<sup>121</sup> He described how these TTs craft narratives to misrepresent their motives, often presenting themselves as foundations or associations to suggest philanthropic endeavors. Romero noted that these organizations co-opt the rhetoric of tobacco control advocates, like promoting the

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<sup>120</sup> International Coalition Letter; 5 Years of Failure.

<sup>121</sup> WHO, "Tobacco Industry: Decades of Deception and Duplicity," *WHO (World Health Organization)*, accessed July 3, 2023. <https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/FS-TFI-198-2019-EN.pdf?ua=1>.



narrative of “freedom,” as a manipulative way to market harmful products. He also pointed out tobacco companies’ practice of exploiting regulatory loopholes and their investments in research departments to produce findings that support their narratives.

In the interview with Plehwe, a distinct theme emerged regarding the differences and interconnections within the think tank community. He underscored a crucial distinction between think tanks that publish in academic journals and those that do not, cautioning against “putting them in the same pot.” Plehwe pointed out that the public frequently fails to discern whether information from think tanks is based on trustworthy scientific research or simply a repackaged, ideologically-driven narrative. The media’s lack of scrutiny regarding think tanks’ expertise allows those with little credibility to benefit from their association with more reputable ones. When experts do challenge their expertise, their voices are seldom heard in public discourse.

Finally, Plehwe highlighted the role of think tank networks, such as the Atlas network, in providing insights into the relationships between different think tanks. He drew attention to the interplay between think tanks and academia, underlining that despite their potentially divergent academic and policy objectives, these two aspects often become intertwined through personal connections, thus influencing their ideological positions.

## 4.3 Mapping

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Throughout this report, there have been demonstrations of neoliberal these TTs not being isolated entities but rather part of a larger network that collaborates, shares resources, and influences policymaking processes regarding tobacco control. This section of our study aims to explore the linkages and connections, both institutional and personal, between tobacco-related TTs in Europe and Switzerland. The cooperation among various TTs enables knowledge exchange, joint research initiatives, and advocacy efforts on an international scale. Another noteworthy pattern is the presence of key individuals holding positions in multiple TTs, either concurrently or consecutively in their careers. This interconnectivity at an individual level fosters the exchange of ideas and knowledge transfer between different organizations.

### 4.3.1 Institutional connections

#### *Shared ideological framework*

Similarities can be drawn in the ideological framework of neoliberal TTs (limited government intervention in economic affairs, prioritizing individual liberties, and emphasizing the role of free markets). The Atlas network's mission, for instance, is to bring together TTs with similar free market ideologies.<sup>122</sup> Thus, it can be argued that the shared framework provides a basis for collaboration and cooperation between the neoliberal TTs.

#### *Networks*

Neoliberal TTs seem to formalize their collaboration through networks and alliances to enhance their influence and reach. EPICENTER is a prime example of this type of an alliance. The network claim<sup>123</sup> to bring together the expertise of many free society TTs to participate in policy debates. In this manner, these networks seem to facilitate knowledge sharing, resource pooling, and coordinated efforts.

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<sup>122</sup> Atlas Network, "Our Mission," *Atlas Network*, accessed June 8, 2023. <https://www.atlasnetwork.org/our-mission>.

<sup>123</sup> EPICENTER, "About EPICENTER," *EPICENTER network*, accessed June 5, 2023. <https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/about-2/>.

## ***Lobbying***

It can be argued that the TTs collaborate and coordinate their efforts to amplify their influence and promote their shared agenda. An example is when an open letter to the UK government, signed by the CPS, IEA, and the ASI, among others, was published on the news<sup>124</sup> as a response to heavy regulations on vapes. This letter also exists in the web archives of all these TTs and it is observed that they collectively advocate for policies that resist increased regulation, taxation, or marketing restrictions on tobacco products. By leveraging their networks, alliances, and connections, these TTs can exert influence on decision-makers and advocate for policies aligned with their agendas.

## ***Research and Publications***

Many of the neoliberal TTs publish each other's research publications on their websites. For instance, Visio Institut uses EPICENTER's report "Taxing high incomes"<sup>125</sup> on their website while arguing about Slovenian tax law. As explained in the literature review, it can be argued that they produce research that downplays the health risks of smoking, challenge the effectiveness of tobacco control measures, or emphasize the economic benefits of the tobacco industry. Arguably, because these publications are so widespread through their connections, they can contribute to shaping public opinion and influencing policy debates.

## ***Events***

It is argued that TTs often engage in public relations and advocacy campaigns to shape public discourse. The 'Free Market Roadshow' held in London in 2015 is an example.<sup>126</sup> This conference had guest speakers and participation from TTs such as Timbro and IEA, to name a few. The conference had the agenda to discuss EU policies through a free-market lens and had attendance from businesses, scholars and other TTs. Thus, in this way, neoliberal TTs can be linked through collaborative events.

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<sup>124</sup> Lynn, Davidson, and Natasha Clark, "Philip Hammond 'must not slap a tax on vaping because it helps smokers quit,'" *The Sun*, August 7, 2018. <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/6957327/philip-hammond-must-not-slap-a-tax/>.

<sup>125</sup> Visio Institut, "Slovenija v vrhu obdavčitve najbolj produktivnih," *Visio Institut*, October 2019. <http://visio-institut.org/slovenija-v-vrhu-obdavcitve-najbolj-produktivnih/>.

<sup>126</sup> CPS, "The Free Market Roadshow - London," *CPS (The Centre for Policy Studies)*, accessed June 8, 2023. <https://cps.org.uk/events/post/2015/the-free-market-roadshow-london/>.

### 4.3.2 Personal connections

Personal connections between European neoliberal TTs working on the subject of tobacco can be observed through their shared personnel and financial contributions. This analysis is supported by evidence from prominent TTs such as the IEA and the ASI. Some TTs share common backgrounds of key individuals associated, such as founders, board members, directors, and researchers, which can indicate personal connections. For example, the IEA and the ASI have historical ties and shared origins in the UK's TT landscape.

Both the IEA and the ASI were founded by Antony Fisher, a British businessman and philanthropist. Fisher established the IEA in 1955, making it one of the earliest free-market-oriented TTs in the UK.<sup>127</sup> Later, in 1977, Fisher founded the ASI as a continuation of his efforts to promote free-market policies and ideas.<sup>128</sup>

The Atlas network is another example where the board members are or have been affiliated with various Atlas TTs. For instance, as at August 2018, Linda Whetstone was Chair of the Atlas Network Board and a Board member of the IEA<sup>129</sup> and George Ohrstrom was an Atlas Board member and Trustee of the Reason Foundation.<sup>130</sup>

Additionally, financial contributions can serve as another indicator of personal connections between these TTs. An article from the Guardian titled, 'How the right's radical TTs reshaped the Conservative party' mentions funding connections between TTs, "The Atlas TTs are privately funded. Fossil fuel magnates, hedge fund and finance billionaires, and tobacco and oil companies have been prominent donors to partners in the network."<sup>131</sup> Considering these specific examples alongside other relevant findings discussed throughout this report, emphasizes how personal connections play a crucial role in shaping neoliberal discourse regarding tobacco control measures within Europe and Switzerland.

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<sup>127</sup> IEA, "About Us," *IEA (Institute of Economic Affairs)*, accessed June 25, 2023. <https://iea.org.uk/about-us>.

<sup>128</sup> ASI, "About the ASI," *ASI (Adam Smith Institute)*, accessed June 25, 2023. <https://www.adamsmith.org/about-the-asi>.

<sup>129</sup> Atlas Network, "People," *Atlas Network*, accessed July 1, 2023. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180802114858/https://www.atlasnetwork.org/about/people/board>.

<sup>130</sup> Reason Foundation, "Reason Trustees and Officers," *Reason Foundation*, March 30, 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180815141950/https://reason.org/trustees-and-officers/>.

<sup>131</sup> The Guardian, "How the Right's Radical Think Tanks Reshaped the Conservative Party," *The Guardian*, November 29, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/29/rightwing-thinktank-conservative-boris-johnson-brexit-atlas-network>.

### 4.3.3 Looker Studio Map Tutorial

Another key element to the mapping aspect of our research involved a visual representation of connections between TTs. The visual report includes an interactive geographical map and can be accessed on “Google looker studio”, through the link [Think Tank Network map](#). The first page of the report allows the user to find and navigate through specific types of TTs explored in this research- neoliberal, liberal, and technical. Upon hovering on the map, the user can find names of TTs, along with their character as shown in the figure below (see figure 1).

Additionally, the “Character” legend on the bottom left are color-coded and can be used to view only the specific type of TTs desired. For instance, as seen in figure 2, only “liberal” TTs are displayed upon selection of the legend “liberal”.

The next two pages of the report can be used to view which TTs are connected in what manner. The user can access the pages through selecting “Institutional Connections” button on the right side of the page which leads to the result as seen in figure 3. On the right side of the page are all the neoliberal TTs included in our research. The user can select any number of TTs to view if institutional connections exist between them. For example, in image 3, the neoliberal TTs “Avenir Suisse” and “Centre for Policy Studies” were selected. Upon which, the map displayed the TTs that have connections with the above mentioned institutions. The last page of the report allows the user to search for TTs with personal connections, in the same manner as mentioned above (see figure 4).

The user can reset the filters to deselect any buttons selected through the “Reset Filters” button on the bottom of the report. Additionally, to facilitate navigation, users can select “Go to Character” or “Institutional Connections” to go to either of the pages, as desired. Lastly, the report can also be downloaded in pdf format and shared by inviting individuals through the “invite” button.

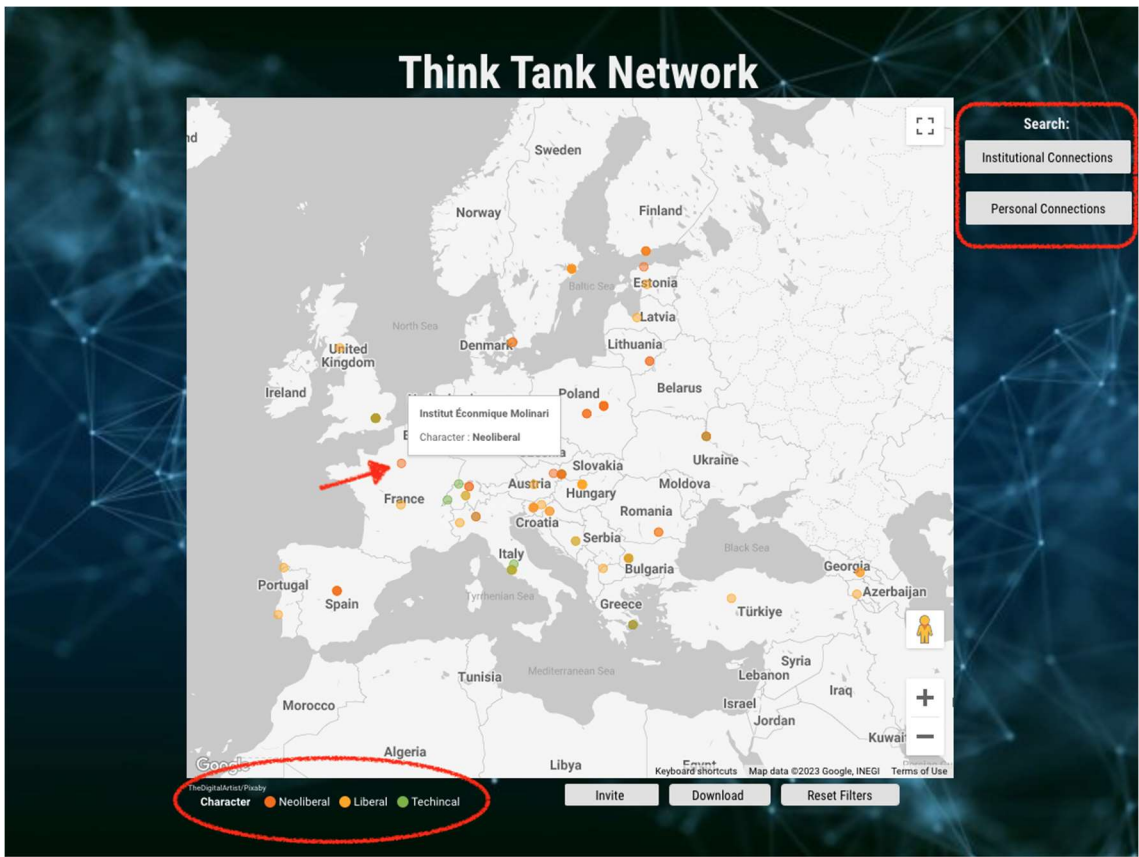


Figure 1.



Figure 2.

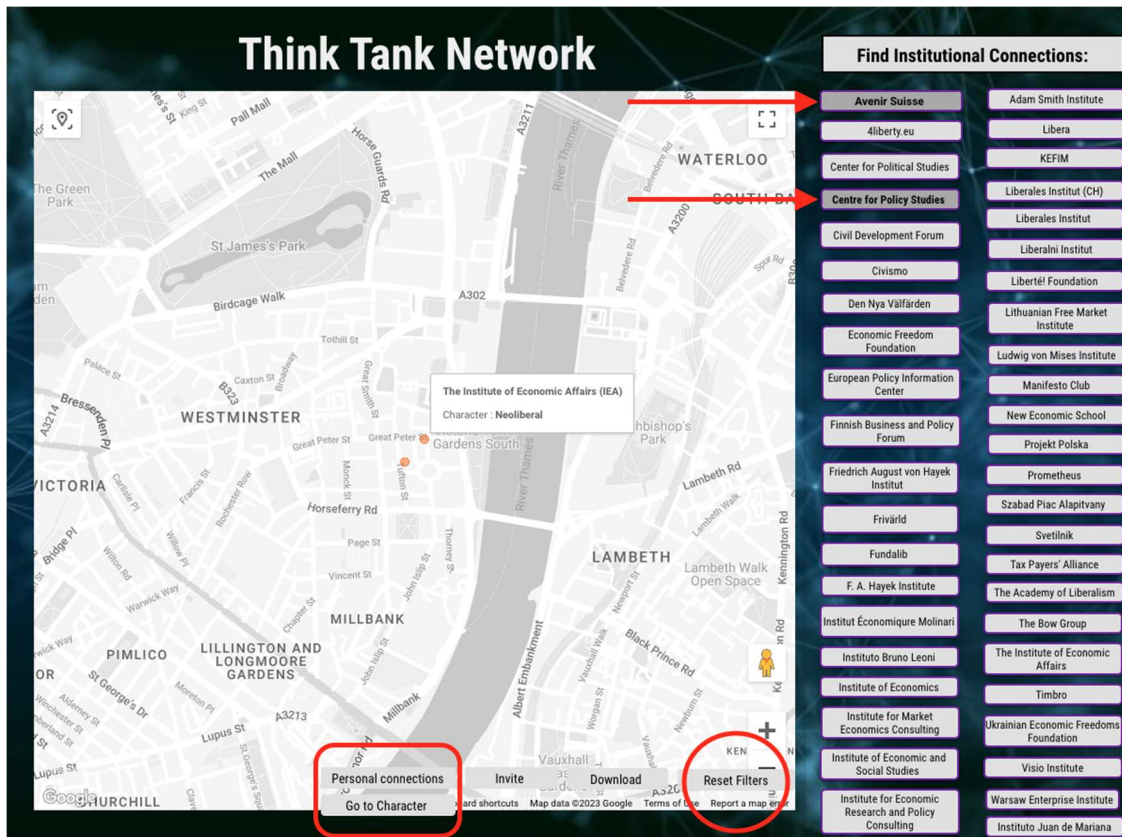


Figure 3.

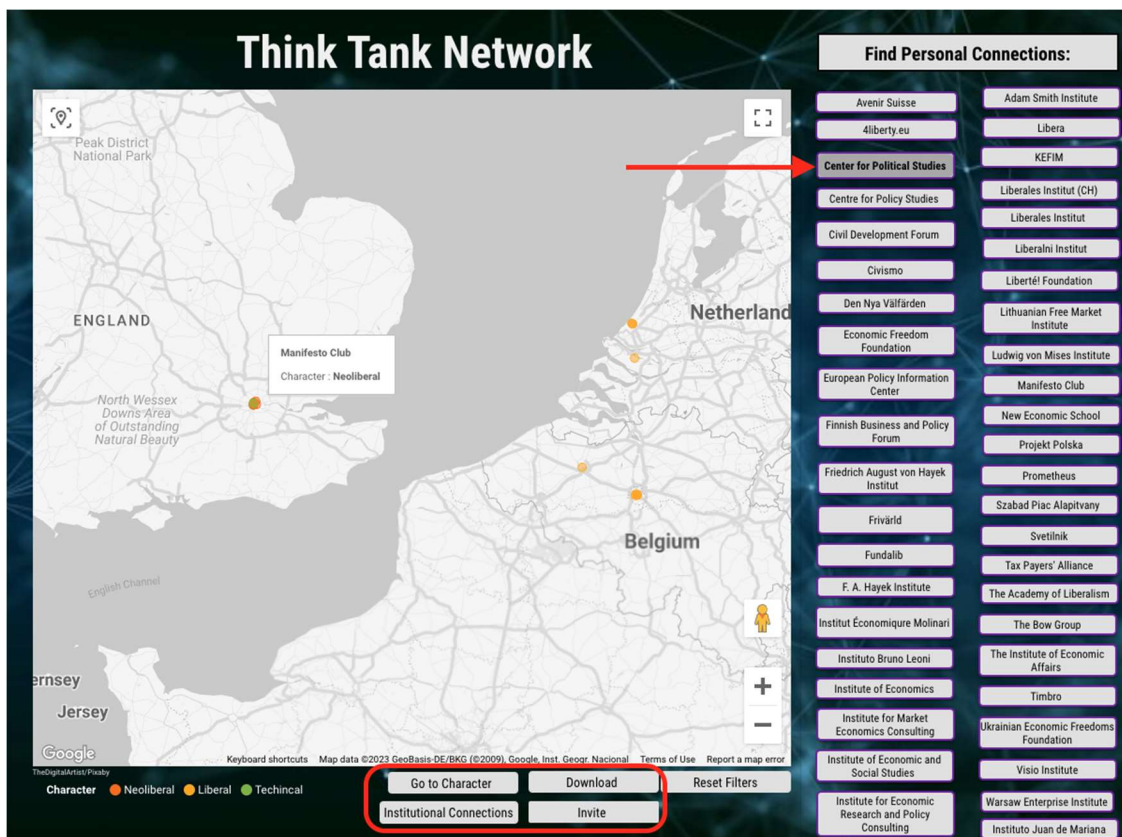


Figure 4.

## 4.4 Legislation

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In this section, we are going to look at whether and if so how the discourse of European neoliberal TTs influences national public health policies in Switzerland, Sweden and the UK. We are going to do this by looking at select examples of relevant governmental documents and discussions in the parliaments of said three countries concerning the topic of tobacco and ENDS.

### 4.4.1 Switzerland

In the case of Switzerland two recent developments are of interest to our analysis:

First, in 2022 the popular initiative “Ja zum Schutz von Kindern und Jugendlichen vor Tabakwerbung” (Yes to protecting children and young people from tobacco advertising) was accepted by the Swiss people and cantons. This initiative entails several changes to the Swiss tobacco policy, once it enters into force in 2024, in the form the Tobacco Products Act.<sup>132</sup> First, tobacco products and e-cigarettes may no longer be sold to persons younger than 18 years.<sup>133</sup> Second, advertisements for tobacco products and e-cigarettes which can be seen by minors will be forbidden. Third, advertisement for tobacco products and e-cigarettes aimed at minors will be forbidden. Fourth, the sponsorship by the tobacco industry of events for young people and events of international character will be forbidden. Fifth, manufacturers and distributors of tobacco products and e-cigarettes must in the future report their expenditure on advertising, sales promotion and sponsorship to the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health.

Second, in 2021 the law on the taxation of electronic cigarettes was amended.<sup>134</sup> Until 2012, e-cigarettes were considered a tobacco substitute product and were therefore taxed accordingly. However, at the instigation of Roberto Zanetti (Swiss Politician SP, socialists), a member of the Council of States, this tax was lifted in 2012 on the grounds that e-cigarettes

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<sup>132</sup> Swiss Federation, “Bundesgesetz über Tabakprodukte und elektronische Zigaretten - BBI 2021 2327,” Swiss Federation, October 1, 2021. [https://www.bag.admin.ch/dam/bag/de/dokumente/npp/tabak/tabpg/tabpg-2021/tabpg-2021.pdf.download.pdf/TabPG\\_2021\\_D.pdf](https://www.bag.admin.ch/dam/bag/de/dokumente/npp/tabak/tabpg/tabpg-2021/tabpg-2021.pdf.download.pdf/TabPG_2021_D.pdf).

<sup>133</sup> At present, the minimum age for tobacco products is 18 in 16 cantons, of which 11 cantons also apply the same rule to e-cigarettes, while 12 others have a minimum age of 16 for tobacco products. Two cantons (Appenzell Innerrhoden and Schwyz) do not have any regulations on the minimum age for tobacco products and e-cigarettes. See Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, “Kantonale Tabakabgabeverbote an Jugendliche,” Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, last modified June 13, 2023. <https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/de/home/strategie-und-politik/politische-auftraege-und-aktionsplaene/politische-auftraege-zur-tabakpraevention/tabakpolitik-kantone/abgabeverbot-tabakprodukte-kantone.html>.

<sup>134</sup> Swiss Federation, “Bundesgesetz über Tabakbesteuerung - SR 641.31,” Swiss Federation, January 1, 2022. <https://www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/19690056/200410010000/641.31.pdf>.



can encourage the cessation of smoking.<sup>135</sup> But as part of the discussions on the above-mentioned Tobacco Products Act, there were calls for renewed taxation of e-cigarettes. In 2019, the Committee for Social Security and Health of the Council of States (SGK-S) then proposed that the taxation of e-cigarettes should again be included in the law. The committee argued that the lower harm potential of e-cigarettes compared to normal cigarettes should be taken into account. In 2021, the parliament accepted the motion and the federal council was tasked with drafting a proposal. On June 16, 2023, the law was approved by Parliament in a final vote. It is not yet clear when it will come into force.

The laws themselves do not contain any references to neoliberal arguments. But both the official documents and the discussions surrounding these two laws offer valuable insights into our questions of whether and if yes how neoliberal TTs influence the public health legislation in Switzerland.

### ***Consultation report on the Tobacco Products Act***

In 2022, a consultation was held on the new Tobacco Products Act. Reading the report on said consultation, it is interesting to see who is for and who is against the partial revision of the law. The majority of cantons, public health organizations, civil society actors and three of the biggest Swiss political parties welcome it, whereas representatives of the economy, e-cigarette organizations and three of the biggest six Swiss political parties have reservations (or reject it completely, in the case of the right-wing Swiss People's Party, SVP).

The SVP (conservatives) argues that the state goes further than what is demanded by the people and thus places itself above the democratic division of powers. Furthermore, the SVP (conservatives) states that "We condemn the planned encroachments on privacy and entrepreneurial freedom in the strongest possible terms."<sup>136</sup> Economiesuisse, Swiss Cigarette, and the Swiss Vape Trade Association (SVTA) make similar arguments, with SVTA claiming that e-cigarettes are 95% less harmful than tobacco cigarettes.<sup>137</sup> SnusMarkt (an online snus retailer) argues that adults still need to be able to see products in order to make an informed decision.<sup>138</sup> The SVP (conservatives), diverse economic associations and EQOY (an e-cigarette

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<sup>135</sup> Zanetti has since revised his position and now supports the taxation of e-liquids.

<sup>136</sup> Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, *Teilrevision Bundesgesetz über Tabakprodukte und elektronische Zigaretten (TabPG, BBl 2021 2327) - Bericht über die Ergebnisse der Vernehmlassung* (Bern: Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, 2023): 8.

[https://www.bag.admin.ch/dam/bag/de/dokumente/npp/tabak/tabpg/teilrevision-tabpg-2023/bericht-vernehmlassung-teilrevision-tabpg.pdf.download.pdf/5a\\_Rev\\_LPTab\\_Vernehmlassungsbericht\\_d.pdf](https://www.bag.admin.ch/dam/bag/de/dokumente/npp/tabak/tabpg/teilrevision-tabpg-2023/bericht-vernehmlassung-teilrevision-tabpg.pdf.download.pdf/5a_Rev_LPTab_Vernehmlassungsbericht_d.pdf).

<sup>137</sup> Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, *Teilrevision Bundesgesetz über Tabakprodukte*, 8-9.

<sup>138</sup> Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, *Teilrevision Bundesgesetz über Tabakprodukte*, 14.

retailer) argue that the obligation of reporting expenditures for advertising, sales promotion and sponsorship will not contribute to the protection of youth and should thus not be implemented.<sup>139</sup> According to the FDP (liberals), information on the expenditures on advertising, sales promotion and sponsorship are business secrets and the reporting thereon does not contribute to the protection of youth.

### ***Discussions in Parliament on the Tobacco Products Act***

Similar arguments against the partial revision of the Tobacco Products Act can be found in the protocol of the discussions in parliament about the Tobacco Products Act. Since 2016 several rounds of discussions have taken place. As above, we will focus on the voices criticizing the partial revision of the law. Ivo Bischofsberger (CVP, christian democrats) reasoned as follows:

*“Die heutige, allumfassend angelegte Prävention führt nicht zu mehr Eigenständigkeit und Selbstverantwortung, führt vor allem auch nicht zu mehr Mündigkeit. Sie gewöhnt den Menschen vielmehr schlicht und ergreifend an seine Bevormundung, denn andere sagen ihm, woran er sich zu orientieren hat. Andere sagen ihm, was er zu tun und was er zu lassen hat.”<sup>140</sup>*

Raymond Clottu (SVP, conservatives) argued similarly:

*“Le projet introduit une nouvelle interdiction de publicité, bien que celle-ci soit indispensable dans la libre économie de marché comme moyen de communication entre les fabricants et les consommateurs. La promotion de produits légaux doit être possible. Les interdictions de publicité ne règlent pas les problèmes de société, pas plus qu'elles n'enlèvent aux consommateurs leur responsabilité individuelle. [...] La publicité pour le tabac n'a pas pour objectif d'inciter à fumer, mais elle est simplement un instrument de concurrence essentiel et légitime entre les acteurs du marché.”<sup>141</sup>*

Damian Müller (FDP, liberals), too, puts forward the argument of excessive regulation:

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<sup>139</sup> Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, *Teilrevision Bundesgesetz über Tabakprodukte*, 18.

<sup>140</sup> Translation: “Today's all-encompassing prevention does not lead to more independence and self-responsibility, and above all does not lead to more maturity. Rather, it simply makes people accustomed to being patronized, because others tell them what to do and what not to do. Others tell them what to do and what not to do.” (Translated with DeepL) See Swiss Parliament, “Amtliches Bulletin: 15.075 - Bundesgesetz über Tabakprodukte,” Swiss Parliament, accessed July 4, 2023. <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/amtliches-bulletin/amtliches-bulletin-die-verhandlungen?SubjectId=37390>.

<sup>141</sup> Translation: “The draft introduces a new advertising ban, even though advertising is indispensable in a free market economy as a means of communication between manufacturers and consumers. It must be possible to promote legal products. Advertising bans do not solve society's problems, nor do they take away consumers' individual responsibility. [...] Tobacco advertising is not intended to encourage smoking, but is simply an essential and legitimate instrument of competition between market players.” (Translated with DeepL) See Swiss Parliament, “Amtliches Bulletin: 15.075.”

*“Wenn ich in den Medienwald blicke, dann sehe ich, dass in der Stadt Basel bereits das Verbot von Plakatwerbung für Grillfleisch und Kurzstreckenflüge gefordert wird. Was kommt als Nächstes? Das Verbot von Werbung für Zucker und Salz oder etwa das Verbot von Werbung für Alkohol, [...]?”<sup>142</sup>*

Müller further claimed that the ban on tobacco advertising does not work and that it is not advertising that encourages young people to smoke, but peer pressure and curiosity. He then pointed out that the voluntary ban on the sale of tobacco products and e-cigarettes by the tobacco industry, on the other hand, had a positive effect.<sup>143</sup>

The arguments not only move on an abstract, ideology-laden level (like the argument about self-responsibility), but also become quite concrete. Bruno Pezzatti (FDP, liberals), for example, argued that, should the proposed partial revision enter into force, it would be primarily the tobacco and the advertising industry (which, according to him, make up for 13'000 workplaces and 1% - 6.5 billion CHF - of the Swiss Gross Domestic Product (GDP)) which would suffer.<sup>144</sup>

Lastly, Andreas Glarner (SVP, conservatives) also emphasized the risk of further regulations for the industry:

*“Wir legiferieren mit Hingabe, mit Inbrunst und schaffen neue Schwierigkeiten, Einschränkungen und Verbote, und das ausgerechnet noch für jene Branchen, die nun wirklich in Not sind. Bitte bedenken Sie: Wenn dieser Gesetzentwurf heute so durchkommt, wenn Sie diesem Gesetzentwurf so unverändert zustimmen, dann schaden Sie ganz direkt der Veranstaltungsbranche, den Medien, der Werbebranche, der Kommunikationsbranche, den Verkaufsläden und den sonst schon stark leidenden Tabakprodukteherstellern. Bedenken Sie bitte: Es geht zum Teil um Arbeitsplätze, die Sie mit Milliarden unterstützt haben und nun mit einem neuen Gesetz gleich wieder vernichten wollen.”<sup>145</sup>*

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<sup>142</sup> Translation: “When I look into the media forest, I see that the city of Basel is already calling for a ban on billboard advertising for barbecue meat and short-haul flights. What's next? The ban on advertising for sugar and salt or, say, the ban on advertising for alcohol, [...]?” (Translated with DeepL) See Swiss Parliament, “Amtliches Bulletin: 15.075.”

<sup>143</sup> Swiss Parliament, “Amtliches Bulletin: 15.075.”

<sup>144</sup> Swiss Parliament, “Amtliches Bulletin: 15.075.”

<sup>145</sup> Translation: “We are legislating with devotion, with fervor, and creating new difficulties, restrictions and prohibitions, and that, of all things, for those industries that are now really in need. Please consider: If this bill passes today, if you approve this bill unchanged, then you will directly harm the event industry, the media, the advertising industry, the communications industry, the stores and the tobacco product manufacturers, who are already suffering greatly. Please remember that this is partly about jobs that you have supported with billions and now want to destroy again with a new law.” (Translated with DeepL) See Swiss Parliament, “Amtliches Bulletin: 15.075.”

Arguments like these abound. They bear a clear resemblance to the arguments that are also made by neoliberal TTs. Furthermore, it is also interesting to see that it does not seem to be a taboo to defend the tobacco industry. The fact that this does not seem to be a problem in Switzerland is evidence of the liberal attitude towards the tobacco industry.

### ***Consultation report on the amendment of the tobacco and e-cigarette taxation law***

In 2021, a consultation on the amendment of the tobacco and e-cigarette taxation law was held. The division of stakeholders into pro and con is very similar in the case of the taxation of tobacco products and e-cigarettes as in the case of the Tobacco Products Act. All cantons agree in principle to taxation, although some point out that taxes should not be set too high compared with other countries, as this would encourage smuggling, the black market and shopping tourism. Reference is also made to the allegedly lower harm potential of e-cigarettes.<sup>146</sup>

Most of the major political parties support taxation, but the SVP (conservatives) reject taxation of e-cigarettes, citing the lower harm potential of e-cigarettes compared to traditional cigarettes. This is also pointed out by the center. The FDP (liberals) also notes that the level of taxation should be based on that of other countries in order to prevent smuggling.<sup>147</sup>

Interestingly, the SVTA agrees with taxation, but disagrees with the level of taxes. They, too, mention the alleged lower harm potential of e-cigarettes compared to conventional cigarettes, and further argue that too high taxes lead to the weakening of the Swiss business location, promote the black market, and may motivate people to mix their own - for health harmful - liquids. Other economic actors also make the argument that e-cigarettes are less harmful and point to risks for Switzerland as a business location.<sup>148</sup>

Several stakeholders - such as the Swiss Conference of Directors of Public Health (GDK) or the Federal Commission on Addiction and Prevention of Noncommunicable Diseases (ESKN) - point to the alleged potential of e-cigarettes to help smokers quit. As a result, the ESKN warns that taxes on e-cigarettes should not be set too high, as this could deter smokers from switching to e-cigarettes. Professor Jean-François Etter of the University of Geneva is explicitly mentioned. He, too, believes that e-cigarettes are 95% less harmful than conventional cigarettes

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<sup>146</sup> Swiss Federal Department of Finance, *Ergebnisbericht - Vernehmlassung zur Änderung des Tabaksteuergesetzes (Besteuerung E-Zigarette)* (Bern: Swiss Federal Department of Finance, 2023), 6-7. <https://www.news.admin.ch/news/message/attachments/73578.pdf>.

<sup>147</sup> Swiss Federal Department of Finance, *Ergebnisbericht - Vernehmlassung zur Änderung des Tabaksteuergesetzes*, 7.

<sup>148</sup> Swiss Federal Department of Finance, *Ergebnisbericht - Vernehmlassung zur Änderung des Tabaksteuergesetzes*, 8.

and demands that legislation take this fact into account in order to encourage smokers to stop smoking and at the same time discourage others from taking up smoking.<sup>149</sup>

***Discussions in parliament on the amendment of the tobacco and e-cigarette taxation law***

In parliamentary discussions on the taxation of e-cigarettes, the argument that e-cigarettes are less harmful than conventional cigarettes can be found above all, often with the reference that they are 95% less harmful. Several examples of this can be found in the minutes of a parliamentary discussion held in March 2023. For example, the 95% argument was put forward by Hannes Germann (SVP, conservatives). Interestingly, Federal Councillor Karin Keller-Sutter pointed out that this was "not an exact science".<sup>150</sup> In June 2023, Beat Walti (FDP, liberals) argued as follows:

*“Einfach zusammengefasst geht es erstens darum, den Raucherinnen und Rauchern den Umstieg als Einstieg in den Ausstieg zu erleichtern, indem man für Produkte, die ein deutlich geringeres Gesundheitsschädigungspotenzial haben, günstige Voraussetzungen schafft. Das gelingt mit dieser Vorlage: Das Schädigungspotenzial dieser neuen alternativen Rauchmittel ist effektiv sehr viel geringer als dasjenige der klassischen Zigaretten.”<sup>151</sup>*

During the same discussion, Daniela Schneeberger pointed out that the taxation of 20 centimes per milliliter of e-liquid proposed in the draft law was too high, considering the lower harm potential of e-cigarettes.

The argument that e-cigarettes are less harmful than traditional cigarettes (also in the form of the 95% argument) is not only found in these discussions, but is also included in official documents. For example, in its message on the amendment of the Tobacco Tax Act, the Swiss Federal Council writes that e-cigarettes are less harmful than traditional cigarettes and writes the following: “Auch wenn Langzeitstudien fehlen, attestieren Fachpersonen aus dem Gesundheits- und Präventionsbereich der E-Zigarette – verglichen mit der herkömmlichen

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<sup>149</sup> Swiss Federal Department of Finance, *Ergebnisbericht - Vernehmlassung zur Änderung des Tabaksteuergesetzes*, 11.

<sup>150</sup> Swiss Parliament, “Amtliches Bulletin: 22.069 - Tabaksteuergesetz. Änderung (Besteuerung von E-Zigaretten),” Swiss Parliament, accessed July 4, 2023. <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/amtliches-bulletin/amtliches-bulletin-die-verhandlungen?SubjectId=59925>.

<sup>151</sup> Translation: “In simple summary, the first objective is to make it easier for smokers to switch as a gateway to quitting by creating favorable conditions for products that have a significantly lower potential to harm health. This bill succeeds in doing just that: the damage potential of these new alternative smoking products is effectively much lower than that of classic cigarettes.” (Translated with DeepL) See Swiss Parliament, “Amtliches Bulletin: 22.069.”

Zigarette – ein um bis zu 95 Prozent geringeres Schädlichkeitspotenzial.”<sup>152</sup> The case of the United Kingdom, which promotes e-cigarettes as a means of quitting tobacco use, is explicitly mentioned.<sup>153</sup>

### *Mentions of neoliberal think tanks in parliamentary discussions*

When searching the Swiss Parliament website for Avenir Suisse and the Liberal Institute, one thing immediately stands out: there are a total of 227 hits on Avenir Suisse,<sup>154</sup> whereas the Liberal Institute is mentioned only once, and that only in a 2008 report by the parliamentary library on its holdings.<sup>155</sup> Avenir Suisse, on the other hand, is mentioned in connection with a wide range of topics. For example, there are contributions on the topics of agriculture,<sup>156</sup> digitalization,<sup>157</sup> social insurance,<sup>158</sup> taxation,<sup>159</sup> and many more.

In many of these contributions, Avenir Suisse is cited as an expert source. Avenir Suisse was also mentioned for clearly neoliberal initiatives. In 2016, for example, Hans-Ueli Vogt (SVP, conservatives) referred to an Avenir Suisse study on regulation in Switzerland as part of a parliamentary initiative to reduce what he saw as too much state regulation.<sup>160</sup> However, Avenir Suisse seems to have a reputation not only as a TT with the capacity to conduct research, but also as a target of criticism.

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<sup>152</sup> Translation: “Even though long-term studies are lacking, experts in the field of health and prevention attest to the e-cigarette - compared to conventional cigarettes - having up to 95 percent less harmful potential.” (Translated with DeepL) See Swiss Federal Council, *Botschaft zur Änderung des Tabaksteuergesetzes (Besteuerung E-Zigaretten)* (Bern: Swiss Federal Council, 2022): 4.

<https://www.admin.ch/gov/de/start/dokumentation/medienmitteilungen.msg-id-90885.html>.

<sup>153</sup> Swiss Federal Council, *Botschaft zur Änderung des Tabaksteuergesetzes*, 11.

<sup>154</sup> 223 of which are for the period 2004-2022. The first mention of Avenir Suisse on the parliamentary website can be found in 2004. See Swiss Parliament, “Suche - Avenir Suisse,” Swiss Parliament, accessed July 4, 2023. <https://www.parlament.ch/de/suche#k=%22Avenir%20Suisse%22>.

<sup>155</sup> Swiss Parliament, “Suche - Liberales Institut,” Swiss Parliament, accessed July 4, 2023.

<https://www.parlament.ch/de/suche#k=%22Liberales%20Institut%22>.

<sup>156</sup> Swiss Parliament, “Suche Curia Vista: 18.4275, Postulat - Übersicht über die entlastenden und belastenden Spezialregeln der Landwirtschaft,” Swiss Parliament, accessed July 4, 2023.

<https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaef?AffairId=20184275>.

<sup>157</sup> Swiss Parliament, “Suche Curia Vista: 17.4087, Postulat - Digitalisierung. Ein neuer Status für den Arbeitsmarkt?,” Swiss Parliament, accessed July 4, 2023. <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaef?AffairId=20174087>.

<sup>158</sup> Swiss Parliament, “Suche Curia Vista: 09.3754, Postulat - Reform der Ergänzungsleistungen zu AHV/IV,” Swiss Parliament, accessed July 4, 2023. <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaef?AffairId=20093754>.

<sup>159</sup> Swiss Parliament, “Suche Curia Vista: 21.317, Standesinitiative - Baldige Einführung und Umsetzung der Individualbesteuerung,” Swiss Parliament, accessed July 4, 2023.

<https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaef?AffairId=20210317>.

<sup>160</sup> Swiss Parliament, “Suche Curia Vista: 16.436, Parlamentarische Initiative - Überregulierung stoppen! Entscheidungsfreiheit und Handlungsspielraum für die Privaten und die Unternehmen bewahren,” Swiss Parliament, accessed July 4, 2023. <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaef?AffairId=20160436>.

This criticism comes from both the left and the right. Samira Marti (SP, socialists) called Avenir Suisse 2021 a "neoliberal-radical lobby organization" and criticized the fact that Avenir Suisse is supported by state-affiliated companies such as Swisscom and SBB. Her concerns related to the democratic legitimacy of this support and the fact that Avenir Suisse calls for the privatization of previously state-owned services.<sup>161</sup> On the other hand, the support of Avenir Suisse by state-affiliated companies was criticized by Albert Rösti (SVP, conservatives) in 2018, alluding to the fact that Avenir Suisse had published "pseudoscientific" studies on Switzerland's relations with the EU and on agricultural policy in the past.<sup>162</sup>

It is thus evident that Avenir Suisse does not have an exclusively good reputation. However, although the exact verification of all mentions of Avenir Suisse in parliamentary documents and minutes is not possible, Avenir Suisse seems to be handled by the majority as an expert source.

It is also informative to search for the keywords "Avenir Suisse" and "tobacco" at the same time. This yields 27 hits. However, these are documents in which both Avenir Suisse and tobacco are mentioned, but there is no direct reference. For example, there are documents on a postulate from the year 2006, in which the economic costs of customs barriers were discussed and in the context of which the tobacco tax is also mentioned. There is another example from 2019, this time concerning a parliamentary initiative on the inclusion of young people in politics. As part of the discussion on this, a study by Avenir Suisse on the future aging of Switzerland was cited and tobacco was mentioned twice. However, the two references were not directly related, but merely made in the context of the same discussion..<sup>163</sup>

So it can be said then that Avenir Suisse is certainly quoted as an expert source on various topics, but does not seem to have any influence on the topic of tobacco, at least not a direct one.

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<sup>161</sup> Swiss Parliament, "Suche Curia Vista: 21.4398, Interpellation - Förderbeiträge von Bundes- und bundesnahen Betrieben an neoliberal-radikale Lobbyorganisationen. Problematischer Widerspruch zum Service-public Auftrag," Swiss Parliament, accessed July 4, 2023. <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20214398>.

<sup>162</sup> Swiss Parliament, "Suche Curia Vista: 18.5494, Fragestunde, Frage - Fragwürdige Unterstützung von Avenir Suisse," Swiss Parliament, accessed July 4, 2023. <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20185494>.

<sup>163</sup> Swiss Parliament, "Amtliches Bulletin: 19.415, Parlamentarische Initiative Arslan Sibel - Den jungen Menschen eine Stimme geben. Aktives Stimm- und Wahlrecht für 16-jährige als erster Schritt ins aktive politische Leben," Swiss Parliament, accessed July 4, 2023. <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/amtliches-bulletin/amtliches-bulletin-die-verhandlungen?SubjectId=56556>.

***Influence of neoliberal think tanks on Swiss tobacco prevention policy.***

As we have seen above, various arguments made by neoliberal TTs appear in the political discourse on tobacco prevention, for example in consultation reports and parliamentary debate. Now the question arises whether this is due to the influence of neoliberal TTs.

In our research, we noticed a few things about this: First, Avenir Suisse hardly ever addresses the issue of tobacco and we could not find a single contribution on the subject from the Liberales Institut. This leads us to conclude that they do not have much influence on Swiss politics in this regard. However, both TTs oppose government intervention and so it cannot be ruled out that they have an influence on Swiss politicians through this positioning. As we have seen above, there are enough examples of politicians who are also on this line. But we cannot prove whether this positioning is caused by the influence of neoliberal TTs or by other actors.

Second, neither Avenir Suisse nor the Liberal Institute were ever mentioned in the documents and protocols regarding tobacco prevention policy that we analyzed. Although a total of 227 references to Avenir Suisse can be found on the website of the Swiss Parliament, no direct reference to tobacco prevention policy can be made. There is also only one mention of the Liberal Institute.

Thirdly, it is interesting to note that both in the consultation reports and in the discussions in parliament, direct reference is often made to the tobacco industry and comparisons are often made with other countries. This leads us to believe that Swiss tobacco prevention policy tends to be oriented towards foreign examples and that there is also definitely a direct influence of the tobacco industry on the political processes. In our interview with Otto Hostettler - journalist at the Observer and co-president of the Swiss watchdog "Lobbywatch" - who has been dealing with the Swiss tobacco lobby for a long time, he said that in his opinion the influence of the tobacco industry on Swiss politics rather takes place via other actors, such as the "Interessengemeinschaft Genuss" or the "Allianz der Wirtschaft für eine massvolle Präventionspolitik" (AWMP). In his experience, Avenir Suisse is not very present in the political processes in Bern.<sup>164</sup>

Based on these observations, we conclude that neoliberal TTs have at best an indirect influence on tobacco prevention policies in Switzerland. It cannot be proven that the examples of neoliberal arguments that we have seen above are based on the influence of such TTs and not on the influence of other actors. We would also like to point out that just because someone

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<sup>164</sup> Otto Hostettler, *Interview*, June 16, 2023.



makes the argument, for example, that e-cigarettes are less harmful than conventional cigarettes, one can not conclude that this person is arguing in favor of the tobacco industry. There is indeed an academic discussion on this topic, in which both the lower harm potential and potential dangers are pointed out.

#### 4.4.2 United Kingdom

In the UK, several new laws regarding tobacco prevention were introduced in the last decade. In 2012, a tobacco display ban was introduced for large shops and in 2015, the same regulation entered into force for specialist tobacconist shops.<sup>165</sup> Furthermore, plain packaging was introduced in 2015.<sup>166</sup> In 2016, a new Tobacco Products Act was introduced.<sup>167</sup> It regulates conventional cigarettes, other tobacco products and e-cigarettes; regulates the labeling, ingredients, and the reporting on products, ingredients, emissions, sales data and market research information as well as the advertisement of e-cigarettes.

#### *Critique by neoliberal think tanks of new tobacco prevention regulations*

Just as in the Swiss case, arguments made by neoliberal TTs can be found in the UK discourse on tobacco prevention measures. First, we will look at the publications of neoliberal TTs on the above-mentioned laws.

In 2012, Christopher Snowden wrote a report for the ASI, addressing the alleged ineffectiveness of plain packaging, linking it to illicit tobacco trade and calling it “an unprecedented assault on commercial expression. It not tramples on the principles of a free market, but it may also be illegal.”<sup>168</sup> Two years later, Julian Morris wrote a report on plain packaging for the ASI. In it, in referring to the case of Australia (the first country to introduce plain packaging, in 2012), he claimed that it did not lead to a reduction of demand for tobacco products and that it had the negative consequence of increasing the consumption of illicit

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<sup>165</sup> United Kingdom Secretary of State, “Statutory Instrument 2012 No. 677 - The Tobacco Advertising and Promotion (Display and Specialist Tobacconists) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012,” United Kingdom Secretary of State, March 4, 2012. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/677/made>.

<sup>166</sup> United Kingdom Secretary of State, “Statutory Instrument 2015 No. 829 - The Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015,” United Kingdom Secretary of State, March 19, 2015. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/829/contents/made>.

<sup>167</sup> United Kingdom Secretary of State, “Statutory Instrument 2016 No. 507 - The Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016,” United Kingdom Secretary of State, April 18, 2016. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2016/507/contents/made>.

<sup>168</sup> Christopher Snowden, “Plain Packaging,” *ASI (Adam Smith Institute)*, February 20, 2012. <https://www.adamsmith.org/research/plain-packaging>.

cigarettes.<sup>169</sup> In the same year, the TaxPayers' Alliance (TPA) posted a blog, titled "time to bin Plain Packaging once and for all". In it, the authors claimed the following:

*"In short, on the ledger of public policy impacts, plain packaging appears to do nothing to discourage smoking and will make it easier for unscrupulous black marketeers to game the system for their own benefit. It's bad policy. It's time to drop it – once and for all."*<sup>170</sup>

In 2015, the TPAs' Chief Executive, Jonathan Isaby, wrote an article for Conservative Home, repeating the argument about illicit tobacco trade and calling plain packaging a "deeply illiberal and un-conservative move which further interferes with a lawful business transaction between consenting adults."<sup>171</sup>

Both the ASI and the TPA are eclipsed by the IEA in the number of publications on plain packaging. A search of the IEA website reveals a total of 28 media posts, 17 blogs & posts, two films, one detailed report and one event that specifically address the topic of plain packaging or at least mention it. The largest number of these posts are from the years 2010-2016, with a particularly large number of posts in the years 2013-2015, i.e. exactly in the phase in which plain packaging was introduced in England.<sup>172</sup> A large number of these publications were written by Christopher Snowden. It would take too long to deal with all these publications here. In a nutshell, the same arguments are made in them as in the articles by the ASI and the TPA. In his 2014 report, Snowden, referring to the Australian case, claims plain packaging has no effect on smoking prevalence, promotes illicit trade, infringes intellectual property and trade rights, and has negative consequences for retailers.<sup>173</sup>

### ***Consultation report on the plain packaging regulation***

From April 16 to August 10 2012, a consultation on plain packaging was conducted in England, Scotland and Wales. Many points of critique which were reported in the report were similar or identical to those made by neoliberal TTs. In the summary of feedback from respondents<sup>174</sup> -

<sup>169</sup> Julian Morris, "Smoking, Plain Packaging, and Public Health," *ASI (Adam Smith Institute)*, March 24, 2014, 20. <https://www.adamsmith.org/research/smoking-plain-packaging-and-public-health>.

<sup>170</sup> TaxPayers' Alliance, "Time to bin Plain Packaging once and for all," *TaxPayers' Alliance*, November 25, 2014. [https://www.taxpayersalliance.com/another\\_day\\_another\\_sin\\_tax](https://www.taxpayersalliance.com/another_day_another_sin_tax).

<sup>171</sup> Jonathan Isaby, "Jonathan Isaby: Why every taxpayer should oppose plain packaging for cigarettes," *Conservative Home*, February 17, 2015. <https://conservativehome.com/2015/02/17/jonathan-isaby-why-every-taxpayer-should-oppose-plain-packaging-for-cigarettes/>.

<sup>172</sup> IEA, "Search results for: plain packaging," *IEA (Institute of Economic Affairs)*, accessed July 4, 2023. <https://iea.org.uk/?s=plain+packaging+>.

<sup>173</sup> Christopher Snowden, "Plain Packaging - Questions that need answering," *IEA (Institute of Economic Affairs)*, April 21, 2014. <https://iea.org.uk/publications/research/plain-packaging-questions-that-need-answering>.

<sup>174</sup> 8% of the respondents indicated that they had links to the tobacco industry, whereas 22% did not answer the questions about connections to the tobacco industry. See United Kingdom Department of Health and Social

among whom were also the IEA, the ASI and the TPA - who are against plain packaging, the report listed the following arguments:

First, negative impacts on different branches of the UK economy, among them packaging companies, logistics companies, inc manufacturers and designers. Furthermore, they mentioned the negative impact plain packaging would have on tobacco wholesalers and retailers, such as problems in the identification of products, increased theft and customer confusion. Second, “Many respondents set out their belief that the link between tobacco packaging and smoking take-up by young people is tenuous [...]” and that plain packaging is therefore not the right measure to reduce smoking among youth. Third, the legality of plain packaging was questioned, with reference to possible violations of intellectual property and freedom of speech. Fourth, one of the most important critiques seems to have been the potential increase in illicit tobacco trade. Fifth, many respondents opined that plain packaging would cause increased price competition, pushing tobacco prices down and thus harming businesses and increasing the affordability of tobacco products for young people. Sixth, “Some respondents were concerned that standardised packaging would limit smokers’ freedom of choice and would represent the “nannying” of smokers by the government.”<sup>175</sup> They were also concerned that measures like plain packaging would be extended to other products, like alcohol or unhealthy food. Lastly, some respondents claimed that existing measures were enough or that alternative regulations should be introduced, such as better enforcement against illicit trade, more education on smoking or age verification schemes.<sup>176</sup>

Some of these arguments are one-to-one the same as those made by neoliberal TTs. However, it is not possible within the scope of this paper to determine whether the respondents who participated in the consultation and were against plain packaging took this position due to the influence of neoliberal TTs or whether they were influenced by other neoliberal actors or the TI itself, especially considering the fact that some of the respondents claimed to be affiliated with the TI. However, the fact that neoliberal TTs influence the discourse on the topic of tobacco prevention through their publications is likely, and so we consider it reasonable to

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Care, “Consultation on standardised packaging of tobacco products: Summary Report,” United Kingdom Government, July 2013, 12.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/212074/Summary\\_of\\_responses\\_to\\_consultation\\_-\\_standardised\\_packaging\\_tobacco.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/212074/Summary_of_responses_to_consultation_-_standardised_packaging_tobacco.pdf).

<sup>175</sup> United Kingdom Department of Health and Social Care, “Consultation on standardised packaging.”

<sup>176</sup> United Kingdom Department of Health and Social Care, “Consultation on standardised packaging,” 26-28.

presume that they also influence actors such as the respondents to the consultation on plain packaging.

### ***Tobacco Harm Reduction as a national tobacco prevention measure***

One of the arguments, also made by neoliberal TTs, that most frequently appears in health policy discourse on tobacco and e-cigarettes is that of THR. This principle has now become an integral part of tobacco prevention strategy in the UK. In its efforts to reduce smoking rates in the UK, e-cigarettes are considered one of the most important tools. For example, the NHS writes on its website: “In recent years, e-cigarettes have become a very popular stop smoking aid in the UK. Also known as vapes or e-cigs, they're far less harmful than cigarettes, and can help you quit smoking for good.”<sup>177</sup> At the same time, the NHS admits that e-cigarettes are not without harm and that the long-term risks of e-cigarettes are not yet known.

THR is often linked to the “95% less harmful” argument, which we have come across repeatedly. The claim that e-cigarettes are 95% less harmful than conventional cigarettes first gained attention in 2015, through a study by Public Health England (PHE). In its report, PHE wrote that “While vaping may not be 100% safe, most of the chemicals causing smoking-related disease are absent and the chemicals which are present pose limited danger. It has been previously estimated that EC are around 95% safer than smoking.”<sup>178</sup> This report was later widely criticized for being scientifically questionable and for suffering from financial conflicts of interest linked to the authors of the report.<sup>179</sup>

In 2017, e-cigarettes were identified as an important means to reduce smoking prevalence by the Tobacco Control Plan for England. In the document, the argument is made that “the evidence is increasingly clear that e-cigarettes are significantly less harmful to health than smoking tobacco. The government will seek to support consumers in stopping smoking and adopting the use of less harmful nicotine products. [...] PHE recommends that e-cigarette

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<sup>177</sup> NHS, “Using e-cigarettes to stop smoking,” *NHS (National Health System)*, accessed July 4, 2023. <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/using-e-cigarettes-to-stop-smoking/>.

<sup>178</sup> Public Health England, “E-cigarettes: an evidence update,” United Kingdom Government, August 19, 2015, 12. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/e-cigarettes-an-evidence-update>.

<sup>179</sup> See The Lancet, “E-cigarettes: Public Health England’s evidence-based confusion.”; Jonathan Gornall, “Public Health England’s troubled trail,” *The British Medical Journal* 351 (November 2015). <https://www.bmj.com/content/351/bmj.h5826>; and Stanton A. Glantz, “UK report claiming e-cigs 95% safer than cigs based on one industry-linked report questions PHE’s scientific credibility,” University of California San Francisco Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education, September 15, 2015. <https://tobacco.ucsf.edu/uk-report-claiming-e-cigs-95-safer-cigs-based-one-industry-linked-report-questions-phes-scientific-credibility>.

use is not covered by smokefree legislation and should not routinely be included in the requirements of an organization's smokefree policy."<sup>180</sup>

### ***Discussions on tobacco regulations in parliament***

As in Switzerland, there are also examples of arguments made by neoliberal TTs in parliamentary discussions in the UK. Here, however, the starting position regarding the influence of neoliberal TTs seems to be different. As we mentioned above, the IEA had influence on the Thatcher government in the 1980s. That influence appears to have remained. Journalist Jonathan Gornall wrote in 2019 that the IEA "is connected - ideologically, financially, or both - to no fewer than 25 serving Conservative MPs, including several candidates for May's job."<sup>181</sup> These politicians included, for example, Dominic Raab (former Foreign Secretary and former Deputy Prime Minister of the UK) and Matt Hancock (former Health Secretary of the UK). According to a 2022 Guardian article, there were also significant connections to the government of Liz Truss. Truss allegedly often spoke at IEA events<sup>182</sup> and her senior special advisor, Ruth Porter, was communication director at the IEA before joining Truss' team.<sup>183</sup> Chances are therefore higher than in the case of Switzerland that the discourse on tobacco prevention policies by neoliberal-leaning politicians (in this case, mostly members of the conservative party) has been influenced by neoliberal TTs.

There are many examples. In a discussion in the House of Commons in 2013 about plain packaging, Philip Davies (Conservative) said the following:

*"Idiotic, nanny state proposals such as the plain packaging of tobacco are what we expect from the Labour party. What we expect from Conservative Ministers is for them to believe in individual freedom and individual responsibility, and to stand up to the health zealots and nanny state brigade who, if they could, would ban everything and have everything in plain packaging."*<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Department of Health and Social Care, "Towards a Smokefree Generation: A Tobacco Control Plan for England," United Kingdom Government, July 2017, 15. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/towards-a-smoke-free-generation-tobacco-control-plan-for-england>.

<sup>181</sup> Jonathan Gornall, "Big tobacco, the new politics, and the threat to public health," *The British Medical Journal* 365 (May 2019): 1. <https://www.bmj.com/content/365/bmj.l2164/article-info>.

<sup>182</sup> Matt Honeyombe-Foster, "London Influence: IEA way or the highway - SpAd advice - Give (time) generously," *Politico*, September 8, 2022. <https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/politico-london-influence/iea-way-or-the-highway-sp-ad-advice-give-time-generously-2/>.

<sup>183</sup> George Monbiot, "Has Liz Truss handed power over to the extreme neoliberal thinktanks?" *The Guardian*, September 23, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/sep/23/liz-truss-power-extreme-neoliberal-thinktanks>.

<sup>184</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, "Hansard, House of Commons: Tobacco Packaging," United Kingdom Parliament, November 28, 2013. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2013-11->

Davies is not the only one to mention the concept of the nanny state. A few months earlier, David Nuttall (Conservative) mentioned the same idea: “there are those of us who believe it is up to the individual to take personal responsibility for their own health and who entirely support the Government’s decision not to have any extension of the *nanny state*.”<sup>185</sup>

There are other arguments of the discourse of neoliberal TTs that are being used in parliamentary discussions. In 2015, in a discussion about plain packaging, Lord Naseby (Conservative) stated the following: “Frankly, plain packs are little more than a smuggler’s charter. They offer criminals a wonderful template that will allow them to copy tobacco packaging easily and thereby infiltrate the supply chain more effectively.”<sup>186</sup> He pointed out the economic risk to packaging companies and the jobs that would be put at risk.<sup>187</sup>

The connection between plain packaging and illicit trade seems to be a rather common one. In 2016, while discussing the Small Shops Regulation, Craig Mackinlay (Conservative) claimed a connection between different tobacco regulations and the rise in the consumption of illicit tobacco:

*“I have been working closely with the Tobacco Retailers Alliance and the National Federation of Retail Newsagents on the issue of illicit tobacco. For many shops, tobacco sales drive footfall and lead to other sales, but the Tobacco Manufacturers Association suggests that because of the increasingly draconian rules on tobacco sales, plain packaging, hidden counters and the tobacco taxation escalator, 30% of UK smokers now buy from illicit sources.”*<sup>188</sup>

All these arguments form part of the discourse of neoliberal TTs on the topic of tobacco prevention. Although we cannot prove that the politicians who use these arguments in debates were influenced by neoliberal TTs, the fact that there exist personal, ideological

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[28/debates/1311285300008/TobaccoPackaging?highlight=%22nanny%20state%22%20%22tobacco%22#contribution-13112853000208](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2013-07-16/debates/1311285300008/TobaccoPackaging?highlight=%22nanny%20state%22%20%22tobacco%22#contribution-13112853000208).

<sup>185</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, “Hansard, House of Commons: Tobacco Products (Packaging),” United Kingdom Parliament, July 16, 2013. [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2013-07-16/debates/13071683000017/TobaccoProducts\(Packaging\)?highlight=%22nanny%20state%22%20%22tobacco%22#contribution-13071683000039](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2013-07-16/debates/13071683000017/TobaccoProducts(Packaging)?highlight=%22nanny%20state%22%20%22tobacco%22#contribution-13071683000039).

<sup>186</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, “Hansard, House of Lords: Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015,” United Kingdom Parliament, March 16, 2015. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2015-03-16/debates/1503166000489/StandardisedPackagingOfTobaccoProductsRegulations2015?highlight=%22tobacco%22#contribution-1503166000158>.

<sup>187</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, “Hansard, House of Lords 2015.”

<sup>188</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, “Hansard, House of Commons: Small Shops Regulation,” United Kingdom Parliament, November 2, 2016. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2016-11-02/debates/46303031-76AC-46B1-B892-3A2B6311B7ED/SmallShopsRegulation?highlight=%22illicit%22%20%22tobacco%22#contribution-EF2A7C62-6EF0-4219-AB5D-E3F8D2C0FA42>.

and financial ties between these TTs and the British conservative party point towards the fact that these TTs indeed influence the discourse on tobacco prevention policies in the UK.

### *Mentions of neoliberal think tanks in parliamentary discussions*

A last interesting aspect to look at is the frequency with which neoliberal TTs are mentioned in the political parliamentary discussions. From 2000 to 2022, the IEA was mentioned 172 times, the ASI 98 times, and the TPA 266 times. It is important to note that the IEA, the ASI and the TPA are mentioned as expert sources in connection to many different subjects. During a discussion about income tax in 2021, Richard Fuller (Conservative) cited an IEA paper which criticized the UK government's accounting of public sectors pension costs.<sup>189</sup> In 2019, Lord Framlingham (Conservative) brought up a report by the TPA which was initiated, among others, by himself and two other Members of Parliament,<sup>190</sup> which argued in favor of scrapping High Speed 2<sup>191</sup> and of implementing other projects instead.<sup>192</sup> In 2013, Lord Borwick (Conservative) cited an IEA article, stating that "According to research from the *Institute of Economic Affairs* from July 2013: Far from acting as a gateway to smoking, all the evidence indicates that e-cigarettes are a gateway *from* smoking."<sup>193</sup> And in 2011, Dominic Raam (Conservative) mentioned an ASI study on the alleged potential of profit-based schools to "boost the number of free schools."<sup>194</sup>

On the other hand, it must be noted that, although these TTs are cited as expert sources, they also receive a lot of criticism. In 2022 Bob Blackman (Conservative) warned about the

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<sup>189</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, "Hansard, House of Commons: Income Tax (Charge)," United Kingdom Parliament, October 28, 2021. [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2021-10-28/debates/6164CE9C-33BD-4148-8820-628F96A447B4/IncomeTax\(Charge\)?highlight=%22institute%20of%20economic%20affairs%22#contribution-F3BD099F-8D6D-47D8-B779-FD4016750F77](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2021-10-28/debates/6164CE9C-33BD-4148-8820-628F96A447B4/IncomeTax(Charge)?highlight=%22institute%20of%20economic%20affairs%22#contribution-F3BD099F-8D6D-47D8-B779-FD4016750F77).

<sup>190</sup> Phil Basey et al., "The Great British Transport Competition," *TaxPayers' Alliance*, 2019. [https://www.taxpayersalliance.com/the\\_great\\_british\\_transport\\_competition](https://www.taxpayersalliance.com/the_great_british_transport_competition).

<sup>191</sup> A high speed railway line under construction in England.

<sup>192</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, "Publicly Funded Infrastructure Projects," United Kingdom Parliament, July 2, 2019. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2019-07-02/debates/83FBD86E-EEB1-4C90-8A54-5E239AA290B0/PubliclyFundedInfrastructureProjects?highlight=%22taxpayers%27%20alliance%22#contribution-FF41EEDD-E9A7-457A-9C0F-7CDED901D436>.

<sup>193</sup> This is the only case of an MP citing the IEA, the ASI or the TPA in favor of the TI which we were able to find. See United Kingdom Parliament, "Hansard, House of Lords: Smoking: E-Cigarettes," United Kingdom Parliament, December 17, 2013. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2013-12-17/debates/13121756000136/SmokingE-Cigarettes#contribution-13121756000030>.

<sup>194</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, "Hansard, House of Commons: Education Performance," United Kingdom Parliament, May 12, 2011. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2011-05-12/debates/11051251000001/EducationPerformance?highlight=%22adam%20smith%20institute%22#contribution-11051251000215>.

IEA's alternative smokefree 2030 plan<sup>195</sup> which, according to him, "is entirely in the interests of the industry, which is hardly surprising given the funding the IEA has received from big tobacco."<sup>196</sup> In this, he was joined by Alex Cunningham (Labour) who pointed out that "PMI described the IEA as a 'media messenger on its behalf, able to assist in "policy outreach' to 'pro-actively relay our positions', while British American Tobacco described it as a 'vehicle for delivery' of its UK reputation initiatives."<sup>197</sup> In the same year, during a debate on the impact of the cost of living on the public wellbeing, Lord Monks (Labour) called the IEA, the ASI and the European Research Group (ERG, UK)<sup>198</sup> "the team of ignominy [...] all of whom have earned a place in the dock for the Truss-Kwarteng calamity," and criticized them for their role in Brexit.<sup>199</sup> In 2017, Lord Wallace of Saltaire (Liberal Democrats) criticized that "right-wing bodies such as the TaxPayers' Alliance and the Global Warming Policy Foundation do not declare their large donors."<sup>200</sup>

The fact that neoliberal TTs are mentioned frequently - both positively and negatively - in British parliamentary debates testifies to the fact that they are influential actors in British politics. It must be mentioned that we were able to find only one occasion on which an MP cited a neoliberal TT - namely, the IEA - on the topic of tobacco. More often, it seems, they are mentioned critically in debates about tobacco regulations. Nevertheless, this, too, speaks of the influence these TTs seem to hold in the British political system.

### ***Influence of neoliberal think tanks on British tobacco prevention policy***

As in the case of Switzerland, we see that arguments that are part of the discourse of neoliberal TTs also appear in the political discourse on tobacco prevention in the UK, be it in consultation

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<sup>195</sup> Christopher Snowdon, "The Alternative Smoke-Free 2030 Plan," *IEA (Institute of Economic Affairs)*, November 2, 2022. <https://iea.org.uk/publications/the-alternative-smoke-free-2030-plan/>.

<sup>196</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, "Hansard, House of Commons: Smokefree 2030," United Kingdom Parliament, November 3, 2022. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2022-11-03/debates/4D5B2F2A-B964-4408-8B1E-743F30F7C055/Smokefree2030?highlight=%22institute%20of%20economic%20affairs%22%20%22tobacco%22#contribution-EA5C59FE-FF06-430D-A017-AAB12191D756>.

<sup>197</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, "Hansard, House of Commons: Smokefree 2030."

<sup>198</sup> The European Research Group is a research group of eurosceptic British parliamentarians.

<sup>199</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, "Hansard, House of Lords: Cost of Living: Public Well-being," United Kingdom Parliament, October 20, 2022. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2022-10-20/debates/A00DB6C6-C3D2-432C-948B-2383EC9B11B4/CostOfLivingPublicWell-Being?highlight=%22institute%20of%20economic%20affairs%22#contribution-B0FBA30A-F7F9-4F49-99AF-E2AED39F28EC>.

<sup>200</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, "Civil Society and the Democratic Process," United Kingdom Parliament, June 27, 2017. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2017-06-27/debates/D255A5F1-476B-4B6C-A315-253AAF765171/CivilSocietyAndTheDemocraticProcess?highlight=%22taxpayers%20alliance%22#contribution-91566D4B-3656-4376-9839-C4FD216E3EDB>.



reports, parliamentary debates or even official documents. However, there seem to be two major differences: First, while neoliberal TTs in Switzerland pay virtually no attention to the issue of tobacco, it seems to be a prominent topic among British neoliberal TTs. Second, these TTs seem to have more intensive links to British politics and are mentioned far more often in parliamentary discussions than their Swiss counterparts. Interestingly, however, their image does not seem to be only positive, as we have seen above, one reason being their connection to the tobacco industry. Thus, they are both quoted as experts and criticized.

It is also interesting to see that neoliberal British TTs do not simply argue against specific tobacco prevention measures in general, but seem to adapt their publications to the political changes to a certain extent. For example, both the IEA, the ASI, and the TPA published several papers in 2014 and 2015 criticizing plain packaging. Since plain packaging has been enshrined in law, however, there have been fewer publications on the subject. The new issue they are taking up now seems to be the allegedly lower harmfulness of e-cigarettes compared to conventional cigarettes. They are not alone in this, however, because, as we have seen, THR via e-cigarettes is already an integral part of national tobacco policy. Whether neoliberal TTs brought this about through their discourse, merely reinforced already existing tendencies, or had no influence, we cannot prove, because they do not operate in a vacuum, but there exist other actors who follow neoliberal ideology and/or are connected to the tobacco industry. However, considering their links to British politics, it would be unreasonable to assume that they have no influence on this process.

#### 4.4.3 Sweden

Sweden is a very particular case when it comes to smoking. As of 2022, around 6% of the Swedish population aged 16-84 smoked on a daily basis. On the other hand, 20% of men and 7% of women aged 16-84 consumed snus daily.<sup>201</sup> Only a very small percentage of the Swedish population smoked e-cigarettes in 2022, with 2% of the population aged 16-84 using e-cigarettes. Of the total population, only 0.5% smoked e-cigarettes on a daily basis. Young people seem to smoke e-cigarettes most often, with 8% of men and 5% of women aged 16-29 using them daily or occasionally.<sup>202</sup> The low smoking rate, coupled with the high rate of snus users, has given rise to a discussion about whether snus consumption increases or decreases the

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<sup>201</sup> The Public Health Agency of Sweden, "Vuxnas bruk av tobaks- och nikotinprodukter," The Public Health Agency of Sweden, last modified December 15, 2022. <https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/livsvillkor-levnadsvanor/andts/utveckling-inom-andts-anvandning-och-ohalsa/anvandning/anvandning-av-tobaks-och-nikotinprodukter/vuxnas-bruk-av-tobaks--och-nikotinprodukter/>.

<sup>202</sup> The Public Health Agency of Sweden, "Vuxnas bruk av tobaks- och nikotinprodukter."

smoking rate. This discussion is very similar to the discussions in Switzerland and the UK, with the difference that in the case of the first two countries it is e-cigarettes that are regarded as a potential means of smoking cessation by some, whereas in Sweden it is snus.

Two recent changes in the Swedish tobacco policy are of interest to us: First, in 2019 the smoking ban, which was introduced in 2005 for indoor areas including bars and restaurants (with some exceptions), was expanded to include outdoor areas like restaurant terraces and playgrounds, based on the law “Lag om tobak och liknande produkter” (Law on Tobacco and Similar Products).<sup>203</sup> At the same time, the parliament refused to introduce tighter rules on advertisement on tobacco and e-cigarettes as well as on the sale of tobacco products in vending machines.<sup>204</sup> Second, in 2022 the Swedish parliament decided to yet again introduce tighter restrictions on tobacco concerning product notification, product requirements, sales and marketing in the law “Lag om tobaksfria nikotinprodukter” (Law on Tobacco-Free Nicotine Products),<sup>205</sup> but rejected a ban on e-liquid flavors.<sup>206</sup>

### ***Critique by Timbro of new tobacco regulations***

According to Allern and Pollack, Timbro was the second most cited Swedish TT from 2014-2018, after the Swedish Institute of international affairs. Out of the several existing Swedish neoliberal TTs, like Fri Värld (FV, Sweden) and Den Nya Valfärden (DNV, Sweden), it seems to be by far the most important. Also, it seems to be more influential than liberal, green and socialist TTs, being cited almost 5000 times in Swedish newspapers from 2014-2018.<sup>207</sup>

Like its British counterparts, Timbro seems to adapt their publications to a certain extent to developments in domestic politics. While searching for publications on the subject of tobacco on the website of Timbro, we came across multiple publications about the extension of the smoking ban which was introduced in 2019. All of these articles were written in 2018-2019, most of them in 2019, whereas before and after, Timbro seems to not have paid attention to this criticizing this specific tobacco prevention measure. In 2018, Timbro wrote that

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<sup>203</sup> Swedish Ministry of Social Affairs, “Lag om tobak och liknande produkter - 2018:2088,” Swedish Ministry of Social Affairs, December 20, 2018. <https://rkrattsbaser.gov.se/sfst?bet=2018:2088>.

<sup>204</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Betänkande: 2018/19:SoU3 - Ny lag om tobak och liknande produkter,” Swedish Parliament, December 12, 2018. [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/betankande/ny-lag-om-tobak-och-liknande-produkter\\_h601sou3/](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/betankande/ny-lag-om-tobak-och-liknande-produkter_h601sou3/).

<sup>205</sup> Swedish Ministry of Social Affairs, “Lag om tobaksfria nikotinprodukter - 2022:1257,” Swedish Ministry of Social Affairs, June 30, 2022. <https://rkrattsbaser.gov.se/sfst?bet=2022:1257>.

<sup>206</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Betänkande: 2021/22:SoU31 - Hårdare regler för nya nikotinprodukter,” Swedish Parliament, June 21, 2022. [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/betankande/hardare-regler-for-nya-nikotinprodukter\\_h901sou31/](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/betankande/hardare-regler-for-nya-nikotinprodukter_h901sou31/).

<sup>207</sup> Allern and Pollack, “The Role of Think Tanks in the Swedish Political Landscape,” 156.

“Restaurant owners should be able to decide on their own outdoor seating, and smokers have as much right to public space as the Prime Minister himself.”<sup>208</sup> In another article of the same year, it called the outdoor smoking ban a “tyrannical”.<sup>209</sup> A year later, it claimed that “The smoking ban hurts more than it helps”, stating the following:

*“After just over a month, the smoking ban has already put people out of work, forced cafes to close and made nightlife more dangerous. [...] The damage done by the anti-tobacco lobby and its political allies is far greater than the "problem" of smoke on outdoor terraces.”*<sup>210</sup>

In 2021 it again critiqued that the outdoor smoking ban is not justified, claiming that “the research support for the risks of passive smoking in outdoor environments is weak” and stating that the allegedly less harmful alternatives to cigarettes, like snus, nicotine pouches and e-cigarettes, “are often wrongly assumed to be a gateway to smoking, rather than a way out.”<sup>211</sup> In 2023, it claimed that “[...] many millions of Europeans could have escaped diseases like Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), lung cancer and premature death if snus was allowed to compete with smoking in more countries on the continent [...]”.<sup>212</sup> Interestingly, even though it mentions e-cigarettes from time to time, snus seems to be by far the more important topic, which, given the fact that a lot more people consume snus than use e-cigarettes in Sweden, is only logical. But the similarity of the arguments compared to those made in Switzerland and the UK in connection with e-cigarettes is nonetheless striking.

Looking at how Timbro criticizes the government's measures in tobacco regulation, it is interesting to see that neither DNV nor FV pay much attention to this issue. On DNV's website, there is not a single article on the topic of tobacco. On the website of FV you can find some articles. Unfortunately, we do not have access to these, because the website of FV does not seem to work. However, based on the titles, we can conclude that these articles are not primarily against the government's public health policy, but rather in support of neoliberal/free market ideas. We will thus limit ourselves to the analysis of Timbro's publications.

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<sup>208</sup> Blanche Sande, “Lämna rökarna ifred,” *Timbro*, January 24, 2018. <https://timbro.se/smedjan/lamna-rokarna-ifred/>.

<sup>209</sup> Blanche Sande, “Kan de ta uteserveringarna från rökarna så kan de ta vad som helst,” *Timbro*, December 10, 2018. <https://timbro.se/smedjan/kan-de-ta-uteserveringarna-fran-rokarna-sa-kan-de-ta-vad-som-helst/>.

<sup>210</sup> Blanche Sande, “Rökförbudet skadar fler än det hjälper,” *Timbro*, August 9, 2019. <https://timbro.se/smedjan/rokforbudet-skadar-fler-an-det-hjalper/>.

<sup>211</sup> Mimmie Björnsdotter Grönkvist, “Fimpa nollvisionen,” *Timbro*, May 5, 2021. <https://timbro.se/smedjan/fimpa-nollvisionen/>.

<sup>212</sup> Susanna Silfverskiöld, “Hotet mot det svenska snuset är inte över,” *Timbro*, January 17, 2023. <https://timbro.se/smedjan/hotet-mot-det-svenska-snuset-ar-inte-over/>.

### *Discussion about the Tobacco Products Act of 2018*

The discussion around snus as an alternative to smoking cigarettes is also topical in the Swedish Parliament. In 2018, during a discussion on the new Tobacco Products Act, which was passed this year (and included the extension of the smoking ban, which came into force in 2009), Johan Hultberg (Moderates) made the following statement: “Given that snus appears to play an important role in reducing smoking and tobacco-related harm, it is wrong for politicians to equate snus with smoking tobacco and to regulate snus in detail in various ways.”<sup>213</sup>

In the same discussion, Christina Österberg (Swedish Democrats) made the following statement.: “Experience from Sweden shows that the presence of snus contributes to fewer people taking up smoking but also to many people quitting smoking and taking up snus instead. The best option is of course to abstain from tobacco altogether.”<sup>214</sup>

The argument regarding the lower harmfulness of snus compared to tobacco is not the only argument used by neoliberal TTs as well as politicians. Joar Forssell (Liberals) said in the same discussion, which is also the source of the two quotes above, that:

*“When you go ahead and ban even e-cigs and hookahs, it is no longer for public health reasons. Then it is paternalism, and you are eliminating the entire part of the serving culture that offers hookahs. You are eliminating businesses and restricting people’s right to actually decide on their own lives.”*<sup>215</sup>

In this quote, the argument of state paternalism is clearly made, which is so often criticized by neoliberal TTs.

It is interesting to note that the Parliament accepted various aspects of the government's proposal on the new tobacco law, while rejecting others. As mentioned above, various stricter rules were introduced: Those who want to trade tobacco must have a license since 2018/2019; the smoking ban was extended to outdoor public places and now also covers electronic cigarettes; snus packs must contain at least 20 pouches; and EU traceability and safety labeling rules were introduced in Sweden. In contrast, Parliament rejected extending existing restrictions on advertising and marketing of tobacco products to online commerce and also opposed restricting self-service of tobacco products.

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<sup>213</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Betänkande: 2018/19.”

<sup>214</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Betänkande: 2018/19.”

<sup>215</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Betänkande: 2018/19.”

On the rejection from the Liberal Party to tighten the rules regarding the advertising and marketing of tobacco products, Bengt Eliasson (Liberals) said the following:

*“The reason why many young people, and unfortunately especially young girls, start smoking is much more complicated than just marketing and advertising. [...] Of course, there should be no advertising aimed at children and young people. We are in complete agreement on that. But we also cannot make completely unreasonable restrictions on business so that companies cannot advertise their products.”*<sup>216</sup>

Johan Hultberg (Moderates) said the following regarding opposition to the ban on self-service of tobacco products.: “The fact that we have succeeded in stopping this proposal also means that many retailers, especially those with small shops in rural areas, will not have to incur high costs to rebuild their shops.” Further arguments why self-service should not be restricted were not put forward during the discussion in Parliament.<sup>217</sup>

### ***Discussion about the ban on e-liquid flavors***

In 2022, another government bill was debated in the Swedish Parliament, which proposed stricter rules for tobacco-free nicotine products. Once again, the Parliament adopted part of the proposal, but rejected another part. Adopted were proposals for tougher rules for “product notification, product requirements, sales and marketing of tobacco free nicotine products and aims to limit the health risks and problems associated with the use of such products.”<sup>218</sup> Rejected the government's proposal to introduce a ban on flavors for e-liquids, partly due to the fact that we should first wait for the results of a government-commissioned study on the subject before making any decisions.<sup>219</sup> But other arguments were also put forward. Johan Hultberg (Moderates) made the following statement on the Moderate Party's rejection of the government's proposal:

*“If we are to continue to reduce traditional smoking, I firmly believe that we should be careful not to make significantly less harmful alternatives, such as snus and e-cigarettes, less attractive to smokers. But this is of course what the government is doing with its*

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<sup>216</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Betänkande: 2018/19.”

<sup>217</sup> The rejection to tighten advertising and marketing of tobacco products and to ban tobacco self-service was proposed by the Health Commission of the Swedish Parliament and adopted by the Parliament. It can be assumed that the Commission's discussions contain further passages relevant to us. Unfortunately, these are not available to us.

<sup>218</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Betänkande: 2021/22.”

<sup>219</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Betänkande: 2021/22.”

*proposal to ban the taste of e-liquids. The consequence of the government's proposal is thus a risk of greater tobacco-related harm.”*

Thus, the principle of Tobacco Harm Reduction seemed to have played a role in this decision as well. Hultberg further claimed that the law could be difficult to implement because of its wording (the law did not require a total ban on flavors, but a ban on “additives in e-liquids that lead to a clearly perceptible smell or taste of something other than tobacco”)<sup>220</sup> and that it would encourage illegal trade. His final argument was that of free choice, which belongs to adults: “A flavor ban is wrong in principle. Adults who use e-cigarettes must be allowed to choose the flavors they want, and we should not politically ban things that are not dangerous. And taste is not dangerous.”<sup>221</sup> Lastly, he stated that nicotine is dangerous and that the Moderates therefore welcome new legislation on the matter.<sup>222</sup>

Clara Aranda (Sweden Democrats) argued in the same discussion that e-liquid has an important role to play in helping people who want to quit smoking in this process and to move away from the taste of tobacco. She also mentioned the danger that a ban on taste could motivate young people to go back to conventional cigarettes.<sup>223</sup> Pia Steensland (Christian Democrats) also supported opposing the ban on flavors for e-liquids, citing Tobacco Harm Reduction.<sup>224</sup>

### ***Mentions of neoliberal think tanks in parliamentary discussions***

In our research, we have identified three neoliberal Swedish TTs: Timbro, DNV and FV. All of them have been mentioned in parliamentary discussions, but to very different degrees. When searching for the keywords “Timbro”, “Den Nya Välfärden” and “Fri Värld” from 2000-2022, one finds 255 mentions of Timbro, 44 of DNV and 3 of FV. Unfortunately, the search function of the Swedish Parliament website does not allow searching for multiple keywords at the same time. Furthermore, it would go beyond the time frame of our research project to check each individual document to find out how often Timbro was mentioned in connection with the topic of tobacco.

But through a review of documents in which these three TTs (mainly Timbro and DNV) are mentioned, we come to the conclusion that the pattern is comparable yet not identical to the

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<sup>220</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Betänkande: 2021/22.”

<sup>221</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Betänkande: 2021/22.”

<sup>222</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Betänkande: 2021/22.”

<sup>223</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Betänkande: 2021/22.”

<sup>224</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Betänkande: 2021/22.”

situations in Switzerland and the UK: First, they are mentioned not only in relation to tobacco and public health policy, but in connection to many different topics. Second, neoliberal TTs are both cited as expert sources and are also the target of criticism. But we found fewer examples of criticism of neoliberal TTs than in the case of Switzerland and the UK.

There are many examples of Timbro being mentioned as an expert source: In a 2022 protocol about tax equalization between different municipalities, for example, a study by Timbro is cited to support the argument made by the parliament.<sup>225</sup> In 2018 a study by Timbro on climate change was cited, criticizing the government for not having invested in the most effective measures against climate change, like international climate investments.<sup>226</sup> In a 2016 discussion about migration and integration, a Timbro study on the subject is mentioned, in which Timbro claims that there is empirical evidence that “citizenship has a low status in Sweden.”<sup>227</sup>

On the other hand, Timbro has also received criticism. Kashayar Farmanbar, Sweden’s Minister for Energy and Minister for Digital Development, criticized a Timbro report on electricity prices for being misleading in 2022.<sup>228</sup> There are also cases of criticism of the link between liberal parties and Timbro. In 2012, for example, Jonas Sjöstedt (Socialists) criticized the Centre Party for listening too often to Timbro and too little to the people and asked how else (if not through Timbro's influence) it had come up with the idea of exempting rich mining companies from taxation.<sup>229</sup> Momodou Malcolm Jallow (Socialists) criticized in 2020 that a member of a parliamentary commission on the subject of the housing market and rent was at the same time a member of Timbro and involved in opinion forming on market rent.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Motion: 2022/23:1956 av Ida Drougge m.fl. (M) - Reformering av det kommunala utjämningsystemet,” Swedish Parliament, November 23, 2022. [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/motion/reformering-av-det-kommunala-utjamningssystemet\\_ha021956/](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/motion/reformering-av-det-kommunala-utjamningssystemet_ha021956/).

<sup>226</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Motion: 2018/19:1633 av John Weinerhall (M) - Effektiv klimapolitik,” Swedish Parliament, November 28, 2018. [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/motion/effektiv-klimatpolitik\\_h6021633/](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/motion/effektiv-klimatpolitik_h6021633/).

<sup>227</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Motion: 2016/17:3384 av Andreas Carlson m.fl. (KD) - Migration och integration,” Swedish Parliament, October 5, 2016. [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/motion/migration-och-integration\\_h4023384/html/](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/motion/migration-och-integration_h4023384/html/).

<sup>228</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Betänkande: 2022/23:KU20 Del 3 Utfrågningar - Granskningsbetänkande del 3,” Swedish Parliament, April 3, 2023. [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/betankande/granskningsbetankande-del-3\\_ha01ku20d3/html/](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/betankande/granskningsbetankande-del-3_ha01ku20d3/html/).

<sup>229</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Protokoll: Riksdagens protokoll 2011/12:129 - Riksdagens protokoll 2011/12:129 Onsdagen den 13 juni,” Swedish Parliament, June 13, 2011. [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/protokoll/riksdagens-protokoll-201112129-onsdagen-den-13\\_gz09129/html/](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/protokoll/riksdagens-protokoll-201112129-onsdagen-den-13_gz09129/html/).

<sup>230</sup> Swedish Parliament, “Skriftlig fråga: 2020/21:3081 av Momodou Malcolm Jallow (V) - Utredningen Fri hyressättning vid nyproduktion av bostäder,” Swedish Parliament, June 2, 2021. [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/skriftlig-fraga/utredningen-fri-hyressattning-vid-nyproduktion-av\\_h8113081/](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/skriftlig-fraga/utredningen-fri-hyressattning-vid-nyproduktion-av_h8113081/).

However, it must be said overall that we found far more examples where Timbro is mentioned as an expert source than there are cases of criticism.

### ***Influence of neoliberal think tanks on Swedish tobacco prevention policy***

In conclusion, there are a few things worth mentioning about the influence of neoliberal TTs on tobacco prevention policies in Sweden.

First, at least one neoliberal Swedish TT is critical of the government's tobacco prevention measures, namely Timbro. Timbro is one of the most important Swedish TTs of all and is by far the most important neoliberal Swedish TT. Timbro's criticism is directly directed against measures taken by the government, such as the extension of the smoking ban to outdoor spaces in 2019.

Second, various arguments, which are also part of the discourse of neoliberal TTs on tobacco, are used by politicians of liberal, center-right, and right. Although we cannot prove that they make these arguments due to the influence of Timbro or other neoliberal TTs, it stands to reason that Timbro, which is repeatedly cited as an expert source by politicians on various issues and whose association with liberal, center-right, and right-wing parties is criticized by left-wing parties, has an influence on the political discourse around tobacco, e-cigarettes, etc.

Third, given that Sweden has a smoking rate of less than 6%, it would be interesting to analyze whether this is actually connected to the fact that many people in Sweden consume snus (as Timbro claims), or from the tobacco prevention measures that the government has constantly reinforced over the past decades. In this context, it would also be interesting to analyze why such measures are enforced despite the resistance of neoliberal actors like Timbro. Although various government proposals for stricter laws (such as the rejection of the ban on self-service and advertising in online retail or the rejection of the ban on e-liquid flavors) were rejected by parliament, other regulations that tighten tobacco regulation compared to the past were adopted despite opposition from neoliberal actors.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

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This report sheds light on the discourse of neoliberal TTs linked to the tobacco industry in Europe, their discourse and their influence on tobacco prevention policies in Switzerland, the UK and Sweden. These TTs, which advocate for personal (economic) freedom, self-



responsibility, free markets, and limited government intervention amplify the TIs agenda and challenge tobacco control regulations through their resources and connections.

Our report highlights the most important arguments employed by neoliberal TTs to promote their agenda. Neoliberal TTs argue against what they characterize as paternalistic measures, such as graphic health warning labels, plain packaging, display bans, and “sin taxes”, framing them as limitations on personal choice, freedom and the economy. This discourse is part of a wider neoliberal discourse which started to develop around the middle of the 20th century. Neoliberal TTs advocate for personal responsibility and resist government regulations, dismissing concerns about the risks associated with emerging tobacco products like ENDS.

Our findings show that neoliberal TTs are not isolated entities but form networks that extend across Europe and the globe, both via institutional as well as personal connections. They collaborate with libertarian foundations, big corporations, and political parties, forming a network of influence. The Atlas Network, established in 1981, and EPICENTER, established in 2014, are two key platforms for these TTs to align their ideologies and consolidate resources, further strengthening their cooperation and advocacy efforts. Furthermore, the Nanny State Index published by Christopher Snowden of the IEA seems to have become a central aspect of this cooperation in the European context, with the report being published by many neoliberal TTs across Europe.

As regards the influence of neoliberal TTs on the tobacco prevention policies of Switzerland, the UK and Sweden, the situation is not very clear. In the legal texts we looked at, we did not find a single reference to neoliberal ideas. However, neoliberal arguments find their way into the political discourse in other ways: As the reports on the consultations on new legislation in Switzerland and the United Kingdom show, arguments put forward by neoliberal TTs are widespread. In parliamentary debates politicians repeatedly refer to concepts like the importance of personal (economic) freedom and responsibility, the reprehensibility of state paternalism and the “nanny state”, the ineffectiveness of tobacco prevention policies like plain packaging, display bans and higher taxes, and the risk of illegal trade. These arguments can also be found in Swiss and British consultation reports, indicating that these arguments are widespread.

Particularly relevant in this respect seems to be the debate surrounding the issue of THR, which is being conducted in all three countries under consideration. In Switzerland, the allegedly lower harmfulness potential of e-cigarettes compared with conventional cigarettes is

having an impact on the taxation of e-cigarettes; in the case of the UK, THR via e-cigarettes is now part of the government's official approach to tobacco control; and in Sweden, the benefits and harms of snus are being debated while e-cigarette consumption is on the rise among young people.

Whether all this is - directly or indirectly - due to the influence of neoliberal TTs, however, remains an open question. After all, neoliberal TTs do not operate in a vacuum and the TI has other means at its disposal to influence political processes. The fact that Switzerland, for example, is still very liberal with regard to the TI, even though Swiss neoliberal TTs hardly take up the issue of tobacco, must therefore be due to the action of other actors associated with the TI - or even the TI itself. In the UK and Sweden, on the other hand, neoliberal TTs - especially the IEA and Timbro - deal more intensively with the issue of tobacco regulation, often direct their criticism specifically at planned or already introduced regulations, and also seem to be better connected to politics than their Swiss counterparts. That neoliberal TTs have an influence on tobacco prevention policies (or the lack thereof) in these two countries therefore seems more likely than in the case of Switzerland. Nevertheless, no clear correlation or even causality can be established in this regard in the context of this project.

This report argues that transparency and disclosure of potential conflicts of interest emerge are key factors in countering the influence of these TTs. The health experts we interviewed stressed the need for full transparency in research conducted by TTs, academics, and organizations affiliated with the tobacco industry. This transparency would facilitate the identification of tactics employed by interest groups to manipulate data and influence policy.

To address the impact of neoliberal TTs on tobacco control policies, it is essential for tobacco control NGOs and policymakers to remain vigilant and well-informed. Understanding the intricate networks and tactics employed by neoliberal TTs can help develop counter-strategies that prioritize public health over industry interests.

In conclusion, the discourse of neoliberal TTs linked to the tobacco industry poses challenges to tobacco control efforts in Europe. But with increased awareness, transparency, and robust evidence-based policymaking, it is possible to mitigate their influence and prioritize public health in the fight against tobacco use. By fostering collaboration among health experts, policymakers, and civil society actors, it is possible to counter the narratives propagated by these TTs and work towards effective tobacco control measures that protect the well-being of individuals and communities.

For future research, we recommend examining the evolving language used by neoliberal TTs associated with the tobacco industry over an extended period of time. Tracing this evolution may reveal subtle changes in their tactics over time. A historical review may also highlight specific instances in which these TT have succeeded in delaying health-related decisions, illustrating their influence on issues such as secondhand smoke. Further research should also seek to understand how these entities blur the distinctions between economic freedom and individual liberties, such as freedom of speech, shaping the discourse around tobacco control.

In addition, transparency in policymaking emerged as a key theme from our interviews and readings. Further study could further explore this relationship and examine ways to insulate policymaking processes from groups that share interests with the tobacco industry. Finally, it would be valuable to examine the tobacco industry's influence on international initiatives, such as the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, in order to enhance the transparency and integrity of such global efforts. A broader and deeper understanding of these dynamics will strengthen our ability to protect public policy from undue industry influence.

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## Appendix

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### A. Abbreviations

<b>List of Abbreviations</b>	
ACT	Alliance Contre le Tabac
ASI	Adam Smith Institute
AT Schweiz	Swiss Association for Tobacco Control
ATWG	Anti-Tobacco Working Group
AWMP	Allianz der Wirtschaft für eine massvolle Präventionspolitik
BAT	British American Tobacco
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BP	British Petroleum
CDS	Center for The Study of Democracy
CNCT	Comité National Contre le Tabagisme
COPD	Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease
CPS	Center for Political Studies
CVP	Christian Democratic People's Party
DNV	Den Nya Valfärden
ELF	European Liberal Forum
ENDS	Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems
EPC	European Policy Center
EPICENTER	European Policy Information Center
ERG	European Research Group
ESKN	Federal Commission on Addiction and Prevention of Non-communicable Diseases
EU	European Union
FCTC	Framework Convention on Tobacco Control
FDP	Free Democratic Party
FOR	Civil Development Forum
FRP	Fédération Romande de Publicité
FV	Fri Värld
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDK	Swiss Conference of Directors of Public Health
GLP	Good Laboratory Practice
HTP	Heated Tobacco Products
IA	Impact Assessments
IBL	Istituto Bruno Leoni
IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs
IEM	Institut Économique Molinari
INESS	Institute of Economic and Social Studies
IREF	Institute of Economic and Financial Research

JTI	Japan Tobacco International
KEFIM	Center for Liberal Studies - Markos Dragoumis
LFMI	Lithuanian Free Market Institute
MPS	Mont Pèlerin Society
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NHS	National Health Service
NIPH	National Institute of Public Health
PHE	Public Health England
PMI	Philip Morris International
RUSI	Royal United Services Institute
SGK-S	Committee for Social Security and Health of the Council
SGV	Swiss Trade Association
SP	Swiss Politician
SVP	Swiss People's Party
SVTA	Swiss Vape Trade Association
THR	Tobacco Harm Reduction
TPA	TaxPayers' Alliance
TT	Think Tank
UICC	Union for International Cancer Control
UK	United Kingdom
WHO	World Health Organization

**R Database**  
Actors Info

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Actors	Character	Country	About	Research on Tobacco	Relevant Research
Centre for Policy Studies	neoliberal	United Kingdom	About	None But <a href="#">involvement in TI</a>	
The Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA)	neoliberal	United Kingdom	About	<a href="#">on tobacco</a>	<a href="#">Vaper Trails: New nicotine products and the innovation principle</a> <a href="#">Analysis of Flavored Vaping Products as a Harm Reduction Method</a> <a href="#">International Best Practices for Tobacco and Nicotine Public Policy</a> <a href="#">Vaping Works: International Best Practices; United Kingdom, New Zealand, France and Canada</a> <a href="#">Plain Packaging – Questions that need answering</a> <a href="#">Free Market Solutions in Health: The case of nicotine</a> <a href="#">Does Advertising Increase Smoking?</a> <a href="#">Canada's ruinous tobacco display ban: economic and public health lessons</a> <a href="#">Understanding the basic economics of tobacco harm reduction</a> <a href="https://iea.org.uk/media/new-smoking-rules-are-a-threat-to-freedom/">https://iea.org.uk/media/new-smoking-rules-are-a-threat-to-freedom/</a> <a href="#">The case for abolishing the tax privileges of international organisations</a> <a href="https://iea.org.uk/publications/research/aggressively-regressive-the-sin-taxes-that-make-the-poor-poorer">https://iea.org.uk/publications/research/aggressively-regressive-the-sin-taxes-that-make-the-poor-poorer</a> <a href="https://iea.org.uk/plain-packaging-in-australia-5-years-on-we-told-you-so/">https://iea.org.uk/plain-packaging-in-australia-5-years-on-we-told-you-so/</a>
Adam Smith Institute (UK)	neoliberal	United Kingdom	About	<a href="#">on tobacco</a>	<a href="https://www.adamsmith.org/research/the-golden-opportunity">https://www.adamsmith.org/research/the-golden-opportunity</a> <a href="#">2 Million Years of Life How Safer Smoking Alternatives Can Level Up Health and Tackle the Cost of Living Crisis</a> <a href="#">Up in Smoke Unlocking Tobacco Harm Reduction</a> <a href="https://www.adamsmith.org/blog/boycott-still-dont-understand-tobacco-harm-reduction?topTobacco%20">https://www.adamsmith.org/blog/boycott-still-dont-understand-tobacco-harm-reduction?topTobacco%20</a> <a href="https://www.adamsmith.org/research/bioinnovation">https://www.adamsmith.org/research/bioinnovation</a> <a href="#">1 MILLION YEARS OF LIFE How harm reduction in tobacco policy can save lives</a>
The Bow Group	neoliberal	United Kingdom	About		<a href="https://www.bowgroup.org/notes-revolt-over-plain-packaging-for-cigarettes/">https://www.bowgroup.org/notes-revolt-over-plain-packaging-for-cigarettes/</a>
Friedrich August von Hayek Institut (Austria)	neoliberal	Austria	About	articles against the "nanny state"	<a href="https://hayek-institut.at/nanny-state-index/">https://hayek-institut.at/nanny-state-index/</a> <a href="https://hayek-institut.at/bericht-ccrm-nanny-state-index/">https://hayek-institut.at/bericht-ccrm-nanny-state-index/</a> <a href="https://hayek-institut.at/nanny-state-index-2019/">https://hayek-institut.at/nanny-state-index-2019/</a> <a href="https://hayek-institut.at/vertrauen-sie-der-wissenschaft/">https://hayek-institut.at/vertrauen-sie-der-wissenschaft/</a> <a href="https://hayek-institut.at/9-jahre-einheitsregelung/">https://hayek-institut.at/9-jahre-einheitsregelung/</a>
European Policy Information Center (EPICENTER)	neoliberal	international	About		<a href="https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/briefings/an-evidence-based-tobacco-products-directive/">https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/briefings/an-evidence-based-tobacco-products-directive/</a> <a href="https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/briefings/setting-the-parameters-for-a-new-tobacco-products-directive/">https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/briefings/setting-the-parameters-for-a-new-tobacco-products-directive/</a> <a href="https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/briefings/tobacco-harm-reduction-and-the-new-top/">https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/briefings/tobacco-harm-reduction-and-the-new-top/</a> <a href="https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/briefings/e-cigarettes-and-article-20-of-the-tobacco-products-directive/">https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/briefings/e-cigarettes-and-article-20-of-the-tobacco-products-directive/</a> <a href="https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/publications/smoking-again-the-resolution-in-tobacco-and-nicotine-consumption/">https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/publications/smoking-again-the-resolution-in-tobacco-and-nicotine-consumption/</a> <a href="https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/blog/the-known-unknowns-of-tax-and-regulatory-policy/">https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/blog/the-known-unknowns-of-tax-and-regulatory-policy/</a> <a href="https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/publications/nanny-state-index-2021/">https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/publications/nanny-state-index-2021/</a> <a href="https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/briefings/over-reach-the-us-lifestyle-regulation-plans/">https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/briefings/over-reach-the-us-lifestyle-regulation-plans/</a> <a href="https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/blog/who-is-you-nanny/">https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/blog/who-is-you-nanny/</a> <a href="https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/briefings/a-response-to-the-scheer-preliminary-opinion-on-electronic-cigarettes/">https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/briefings/a-response-to-the-scheer-preliminary-opinion-on-electronic-cigarettes/</a> <a href="https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/blog/netherlands-crackdown-on-e-cigarettes/">https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/blog/netherlands-crackdown-on-e-cigarettes/</a> <a href="https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/publications/nanny-state-on-ban/">https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/publications/nanny-state-on-ban/</a> <a href="https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/blog/the-spanish-nanny-state-takes-a-step-back/">https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/blog/the-spanish-nanny-state-takes-a-step-back/</a> <a href="https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/publications/nanny-state-index/">https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/publications/nanny-state-index/</a> <a href="https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/blog/a-european-sugar-tax-paternalistic-counterproductive-and-regressive/">https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/blog/a-european-sugar-tax-paternalistic-counterproductive-and-regressive/</a> <a href="https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/blog/flavored-eu-regulations-on-e-cigarettes-have-set-the-market-back/">https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/blog/flavored-eu-regulations-on-e-cigarettes-have-set-the-market-back/</a> <a href="https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/publications/of-course-sin-taxes-are-regressive/">https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/publications/of-course-sin-taxes-are-regressive/</a> <a href="https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/">https://www.epicenternetwork.eu/research/</a>

Sheet1 Sheet3

Figure 5. Think Tank Network Database

## C. Interview questions

The following section of the Appendix features the English version of the set of questions we used in our interviews. Please note that while these are the primary questions, not all interviews were conducted in English and some questions were subtly adjusted to suit the specific expertise and background of each interviewee.

1. Could you please introduce yourself?
  - a. Please tell us about your background and experience (in relation to the tobacco industry, research institutions, or neoliberal think tanks).
2. How would you characterize the think tanks involved with the tobacco industry (in terms of their political stance, organizational structure, and overall objectives)? Can you provide some examples to illustrate your point?
3. Could you identify two or three statements/phrases/ideas provided by these think tanks which have surprised/shocked/taken your attention?

4. Can you identify any recurring themes or common threads in the messaging from these think tanks connected to the tobacco industry? Would you care to provide an example?  
Ex: the argument of “sin taxes” to fight against a strong tobacco taxation
5. In your experience, how has the discourse of think tanks with links to the tobacco industry evolved through the years? Let's define discourse broadly to include everything they publish on their websites, social media, op-ed pieces, and academic journals.
  - a. Can you provide some examples?
6. In what ways, to your knowledge, do these think tanks interact or collaborate with each other to advance their objectives?
  - a. Can you identify any notable patterns in these connections?
  - b. Can you identify any institutional processes or strategies for influencing policymaking or defining what “objects” should be paid attention to?
7. Many neoliberal think tanks have argued that ENDS (electronic nicotine delivery systems) are less harmful than traditional tobacco products and are therefore a solution to reducing cigarette consumption. Would you say that the tobacco industry’s claim that ENDS are less harmful than conventional tobacco products has affected legislation? How is this argument used by the tobacco industry to influence tobacco control policies?
8. Can you provide any particular instances where the narratives and recurring tropes used by neoliberal think tanks have had a direct impact on policymaking or legislation related to the tobacco industry?
9. Are there any specific examples or case studies that you find particularly illuminating? Which other expert should we ideally interview on those topics?
10. What potential challenges or concerns do you see in the relationship between these think tanks, the tobacco industry, and policymaking?
11. Lastly, based on your experience, what recommendations would you make for future research or policy interventions to address the influence of neoliberal think tanks on the tobacco industry?