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Ukraine

Parity Foundation
Alcohol and Drug Information Centre

Uncertainty has plagued Ukraine since December 2004, when the so-called Orange Revolution further exposed the country's deep political, ethnic, cultural, and economic divides. The new president, Viktor Yushchenko, vowed to unite the nation, but he has had little success to date. Just 18 months after he took office, Yushchenko was forced to appoint as prime minister his bitter rival after the president's party was bested in parliamentary elections.

Tobacco control developments are in many ways a microcosm of the political upheavals over the past few years. Most of the developments are positive: With strong support from the Yushchenko government, the Verkhovna Rada (parliament) passed a relatively comprehensive tobacco control law in September 2005 and ratified the FCTC six months later. Yet there have been other decisions that are puzzling in their inconsistency, and ultimately represent a step backward from the perspective of tobacco control advocates. In January 2006, for instance, the parliament rejected a bill that would have required health warnings to occupy 45 percent of the total space of cigarette and tobacco product advertisements.

Tatiana Andreeva, a tobacco control advocate who works out of the Alcohol and Drug Information Centre, was not particularly surprised by the divided nature of recent tobacco-related developments in Ukraine. “When a country has to deal with other things,” she observed, “it’s not easy to focus on tobacco. It’s not seen as a priority by officials and politicians.” She said she believes tobacco control efforts will begin to bear significant fruit only when government members are accountable to the public in a more transparent and direct way. “We first need improved democratic processes so that policymakers feel they have a responsibility to help people survive,” she said. “Advocacy efforts will be much more effective only after stability and the beginning of a democratic tradition. Right now, however, society is not prepared or ready for the kind of advocacy seen in many other countries.”

Andreeva’s realistic analysis of the impact of tobacco-related advocacy in Ukraine has influenced but not limited her efforts. She and a small yet growing number of advocates, including those working locally, have played important roles in moving tobacco control forward—as witnessed by the FCTC ratification. Occurring during the middle of the political crisis, the ratification offered proof that targeted advocacy can work at the national level even when the government appears dysfunctional or paralyzed by dissension. Furthermore, the crisis had eased by the time the treaty formally entered into force in Ukraine in September 2006. It may very well be that the first solid support structures of the democratic framework, which Andreeva believes is a prerequisite for effective advocacy, have been erected.

Perhaps more important, however, are developments at the local level, where tobacco control advocates are not waiting for guidance or leadership from national authorities in Kyiv. For example, the Parity Foundation has parlayed grant funding into policy change in Cherkassy, a city of about 300,000 people in central Ukraine. In 2004, Cherkassy became the first Ukrainian municipality to ban smoking in public places. The Parity Foundation, a small yet determined NGO led by Serhiy Honchar, remains committed to devising and carrying out strategies to reduce tobacco use in its home city. At the same time, it has initiated a project to assist NGOs in five other municipalities across Ukraine in their efforts to push for similar policy changes.

Smoking prevalence and the legal framework

Smoking has long been ingrained in Ukrainian society. Yulia Honchar, a colleague of her husband Serhiy at the Parity Foundation, noted that it is not uncommon for children as young as 10 years old to begin smoking regularly, often because they are emulating their parents or peers.² By 14 or 15, she added, many of them are addicted. According to a 2005 report from the International Centre for Policy Studies, far more men (67 percent) smoke regularly than do women (20 percent).³ This

contributes to the wide gender gap in life expectancy, a demographic trend that several of Ukraine's neighbors in Central and Eastern Europe also are experiencing. Nearly 100,000 Ukrainians die each year from smoking-related diseases, the majority of them middle-aged men.⁴

The 2005 tobacco control law was a victory for tobacco control advocates who have long called attention to these dire statistics. Its effectiveness is difficult to determine because the first of its provisions only came into force in October 2005, with others taking effect in stages through 2009. On paper, though, the law contains some important and useful elements. One notable provision requires public establishments such as bars, cafes, and restaurants to provide a nonsmoking area of at least 50 percent of the total space. Individuals who light up in nonsmoking areas face fines of up to US\$17. However, owners of such establishments face no fines at all if they fail to comply with the law mandating the nonsmoking area.

The new law does not regulate tobacco advertising; instead, it contains a provision stating that tobacco advertising is regulated by the national law on advertising. That law currently prohibits tobacco advertising on TV, radio, in publications aimed at minors, and in cinemas and theaters.

Andreeva and her colleagues have welcomed the new tobacco control law, but they also say they intend to seek amendments strengthening the law. For example, they would like public establishments to be completely smoke-free.

Moreover, Andreeva said, FCTC ratification and recent moves toward political stability may pave the way for higher tobacco taxes and a greater commitment to health promotion funding at the national level. Certainly there is significant room for changes in tax policy. In October 2006, the average cost of a pack of cigarettes was less than 3 hryvnas (about 60 U.S. cents) throughout Ukraine. That was about the same price as a loaf of bread in most of the country.

Local advocacy at the forefront

At the local level, the Parity Foundation's success in Cherkassy is all the more surprising considering that the city is home to a tobacco factory that provides tax revenues to the national government and employment to numerous local residents. Serhiy Honchar stressed that changing people's attitudes and behavior will not happen immediately, but that even incremental steps are important and will eventually lead to full compliance. As an example, he pointed out that people in his office building in Cherkassy do not always go outside to smoke, as the law requires. However, they no longer smoke in their offices, tending to gather in more isolated stairwells instead.

Since the passage of the 2004 law banning smoking in public places in Cherkassy, the Parity Foundation has continued to work with government officials and

other local entities to raise awareness about tobacco use and control. Among its activities in Cherkassy over the past year were the following:

- ▶ Organizing a roundtable with local authorities to coordinate plans for tobacco control. All local TV channels covered the event in news programs.
- ▶ Helping draft a letter to the Ukrainian president, sent from Cherkassy city officials, spelling out the harmful effects of cigarette smoking and urging him to support tobacco control efforts.
- ▶ Printing brochures and posters spelling out the provisions of local smoke-free regulations, and indicating where citizens can file complaints about violations.
- ▶ Organizing a citywide soccer tournament for teams of young people aged 10 to 12. The tournament's motto, "Champions do not smoke," was the basis for an accompanying information campaign aimed at young people at or nearing the age when many might consider smoking.
- ▶ Persuading city authorities to consider reduction of cigarette smoking as a key part of efforts to improve the air quality.

Many of these activities are relatively simple to initiate and carry out and cost little money. Yet in Cherkassy at least, they have had a huge impact on policy reform. Believing that such activities will work elsewhere in Ukraine, the Parity Foundation began a 12-month project in July 2006 to train and assist staff at NGOs in five other Ukrainian municipalities. The first step focused on soliciting proposals from interested NGOs across the country and then evaluating the organizations' commitment and ability to meet project requirements. The openness of local government officials to civil society engagement was also a factor, given the project organizers' desire to have valuable short-term impacts. NGOs were eventually chosen in Kher-son, Kirovograd, Rivne, Sumy, and Uzhgorod. The ultimate goal is for the NGOs to become effective tobacco control advocates and serve as additional models for other cities and regions.

In the fall of 2006, the Parity Foundation conducted training workshops for the NGOs in Cherkassy, and assisted them in organizing roundtables on tobacco use and control in each city. Participants at those roundtables included government officials, members of the media, private-sector business leaders, health and social welfare authorities, and staff from other NGOs. The roundtables sought to raise awareness about the impact of tobacco use among all members of society; build support for smoke-free workplace laws; and lay the groundwork for other initiatives that could

reduce tobacco use and improve compliance with national and local regulations. With support from the Cherkassy organization's experienced team, the other NGOs are gaining valuable expertise in how to initiate successful media campaigns and ensure that tobacco control remains a high public health priority in their municipalities.

Next steps and objectives

The impact of these local developments, although potentially widespread, undoubtedly would be heightened by more extensive commitment at the national level. If the Orange Revolution fulfills its prodemocracy potential, Andreeva argued, tobacco control advocates' ability to advance their agendas will be greatly improved.

Andreeva also identified several short- and long-term objectives for her organization and other tobacco control advocates. One key objective is to collect locally relevant evidence. Andreeva noted that even when citizens and government officials realize tobacco may be bad for individual health, they are ambivalent about tobacco control because they believe tobacco is good for the economy. "This is a huge misunderstanding," Andreeva said. "We need updated evidence showing the real impact of tobacco on the economy." As elsewhere, that impact is almost certain to be negative when taking into account the health-related effects of tobacco use.

Other objectives identified by Andreeva:

- ▶ Improve communications, both with the media and among civil society groups engaged in tobacco control.
- ▶ Build national and regional coalitions among NGOs and other stakeholders, including government agencies. Such coalitions can help maximize available resources for all members.
- ▶ Increase the availability of direct assistance and services for smokers. Easily accessible smoking-cessation information and resources are crucial to the future of tobacco control, according to Andreeva.

Andreeva's objectives may not be fulfilled everywhere in the country for several years. However, the Parity Foundation has already moved toward meeting many of them in Cherkassy, including collecting evidence of the impact of smoking; initiating sophisticated communications strategies; building coalitions among key stakeholders in government and elsewhere; and working to raise awareness among young people. Eventually legislators and government officials at the national level will be forced to pay closer attention to these local changes and the people working to establish tobacco control throughout the country.

Notes

1. Andreeva's comments throughout this case study are based on an interview conducted in July 2006.

2. Comments throughout this case study from Serhiy and Julia Honchar are based on an interview conducted in October 2006.

3. See http://www.icps.com.ua/doc/Tobacco_in_Ukraine_ENG.pdf.

4. Peto R., Lopez A., Boreham J., Thun M. (June 2006). *Mortality from smoking in developed countries, 1950–2000*.