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Changes in industry interference in policy in the United Kingdom 2017-2020

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Background:

The Tobacco Industry Interference (TII) Index evaluates the implementation of FCTC Article 5.3. The first edition of the Global TII Index was published in 2019, included 33 countries, and covered the years 2017-2018. A second edition, covering 2018-2019, is scheduled to be published in October 2020. This paper reports on findings of the Index for the UK, the changes observed between 2017 and 2020, and the resulting policy recommendations.

Methods:

The UK Index was based on a questionnaire covering different forms of tobacco industry interference. Lower scores indicate better compliance with Article 5.3. In order to complete the questionnaire, an expert consultation was conducted with UK's leading tobacco control specialists. This was supplemented by a scoping review of academic literature, media websites, government websites, and the Tobacco Tactics resource.

Results:

In the 2019 Index the UK has achieved the lowest score among 33 countries surveyed. Strengths of the UK system included the exclusion of TI from government bodies that set public health policy and from FCTC COP delegations; the obligation of the government to publish information on all meetings with TI; and guidelines stipulating that its diplomats must not engage on behalf of TI. Nevertheless, weaknesses were also identified; including only partial implementation of the above obligations, the absence of an effective lobbying register, and the ongoing involvement of parliamentary consultative bodies, individual politicians and political parties with TI and affiliated organisations.

Discussion:

The change of government in the UK in 2019, the shifting policy framework resulting from Brexit, and the increasing use by the tobacco industry of third parties to access policymakers, bring new challenges to the maintenance of robust Article 5.3 compliance. The presentation will analyse how this has affected the change in the UK's performance between the 2019 and the 2020 Tobacco Industry Interference Index.

Key messages:

- The need to strengthen transparency regulations for policymakers.
- A need for continued monitoring against an agreed framework in the light of very fluid political developments.