

The Honorable Mircea Geoană
Deputy General Secretary, NATO
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Belgium

By email: mgeoana@nato.int / Mircea.geoana@nato.int

Madrid. December 3rd, 2023

Dear Deputy General Secretary Geoană:

As president of the Spanish NGO Nofumadores.org (Non-smokers.org) and public health and tobacco control advocates, I'm writing to express the grave concern of our organization that NATO and the NATO Defense College Foundation are partnering with tobacco giant Philip Morris International on its [Balkan and Black Sea Perspectives Conference](#) on December 7.

We respectfully but strongly urge NATO to decline from co-sponsoring and participating in this event, and urge your partners to do the same.

Philip Morris International (PMI) has continued to do business in Russia since its invasion of Ukraine, even as other multinational corporations have ceased doing business there. Philip Morris [paid almost \\$4.8 billion in taxes](#), including [over \\$200 million in income tax](#), to Russia's budget for last year, making it the largest transnational taxpayer in the country and helping to fund the unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. The Ukraine government's National Corruption Prevention Agency has [added Philip Morris](#) to its list of international sponsors of war.

As an agency concerned with peace and security in Europe and North America, and offering critical support to Ukraine, it is unconscionable for NATO to partner with Philip Morris while the company continues to operate in Russia, earning profits and helping fund Russia's immoral invasion.

Tobacco companies are simply unlike any other business: Their industry is built on a product that addicts and kills its consumers when used as intended. For decades – and continuing today – PMI and other tobacco companies have marketed their deadly and addictive products to children and other vulnerable populations; deceived the public about the devastating consequences of tobacco use; fought proven measures that reduce tobacco use and save lives; and sought to legitimize themselves as responsible corporate citizens even as they spread death and disease across the globe and opposed real solutions.

By associating with PMI, NATO, the NATO Defense College Foundation, and all participants of this conference run the risk of being seen as colluding with a partner in Russia's unprovoked and continued invasion of Ukraine.

Besides, any type of partnership with the tobacco industry also goes against the spirit of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and in particular Goal 3: "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages." which includes target 3.a that calls on countries to "Strengthen the implementation of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in all countries, as appropriate." For this reason, the United Nations Global Compact, the world's largest business sustainability initiative, instituted an exclusion for tobacco companies in 2017 because "tobacco products are in direct conflict with UN goals, particularly with the right to public health, and undermines the achievement of SDG 3."

We understand that illicit trade – part of the conference program – is a real issue. However, the tobacco industry has historically benefited from cigarette smuggling and [has even participated in it directly](#). Experience shows that illicit trade can be controlled by strong tax administration, customs and law enforcement, and tougher penalties for violators. We strongly recommend not including tobacco companies in the development of policies and strategies to confront illicit trade.

The people of Ukraine, and all Europeans, deserve better than seeing NATO partner with a company that profits from addictive, deadly products and that is filling Russia's war chest. We urge NATO to end this partnership immediately.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns.

Sincerely,

Raquel Fernández Megina

President of Nofumadores.org (Spain)

Treasurer of ENSP (European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention)