Reviewer's report

Title: Tobacco Control in the Russian Federation: A Policy Analysis

Version: 4 Date: 7 September 2012

Reviewer: Andrey Demin

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The question posed by the authors is well defined.

The methods used are appropriate and well described.

The data are sound in terms that available sources of information are used. However quality of sources is variable and this should be clearly stated. For example recent GATS and GYTS provide reliable information for international comparisons. Majority of references used by the authors are English language ones originating from sources outside Russia. Plan of actions on tobacco control which was adopted with the Concept is not mentioned. Only a few of many available important MoH documents are used. The key Russian local sources are lacking, for example, Civil Chamber policy report on tobacco, issued in 2009 www.oprf.ru/files/tabakokurenie.doc; a book on tobacco policy by N.F. Gerasimenko and A.K. Demin, numerous policy publications at the website of the Russian Public Health Association raoz.ru, and others. Maybe it would be helpful also to use the recently published volume “Russia: Deal is Tobacco. Investigation of Mass Killing” by A.K. Demin and co-authors, 550 pp. Industrial sources are used without comment, such as Russian Tobacco Media Group, which is promoting industry interests.

The manuscript adheres to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition.

The discussion and conclusions are well balanced and adequately supported by the data. Review of the basic Government Concept and the Plan which are far from ideal, for example by SWAT, could be of interest.

Conclusion on the need to monitor and denormalize tobacco industry, exposing and preventing conflict of interest based on FCTC Article 5.3. is lacking in the manuscript.

Limitations of the work should be stated in terms of the following important factors, not mentioned in the manuscript, as shown in current publications, including “Russia: Deal is Tobacco. Investigation of Mass Killing”:

- Russia turned into global stronghold of tobacco industry, attenuating WHO efforts to control tobacco epidemic,
- tobacco market in Russia is not transparent.
- Russian tobacco scene is criminal, and this is an important policy factor, not
considered by the authors.

- Dominating industry role in the policy process and its collaboration with the state are outlined not adequately. The largest 5 foreign tobacco companies provide over 95% of tobacco production in Russia worth over $10 bn annually and have been leading in policy development since USSR dissolution.

- Analysis of the role of such policy actors as WHO, including office in Moscow, BGI, international NGOs deserves inclusion in the manuscript.

The abovementioned points might be considered as Major Compulsory Revisions (which the authors must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached).

The authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished.

The title and abstract accurately convey what has been found.

The writing is acceptable.

Other points that might require consideration and revision:

Tobacco supply. First paragraph. So called “Russian Tobacco Rebellion” is a minor phenomenon exaggerated by the industry for its benefit, scaring the leaders and the public with invented “political and criminal risks” of tobacco control. In the volume “Russia: Deal is Tobacco” the fact is described that Boris Yeltsin, the leader of the main tobacco producer in the USSR – Russian Socialist Federative Socialist Republic, ordered to close overnight on pretext of “renovation” 24 of 26 tobacco factories operating then in Russia, making inevitable physical shortage of tobacco products and resulting public discontent and penetration of foreign companies. Thus this shortage was hand made and has nothing in common with current measures corresponding to WHO FCTC, despite disinformation of the industry.

First paragraph. There should be mentioned that the reason for the industry to shift to local production was Russian default of 17 August 1998, which decreased dramatically profitability of imports.

Last paragraph. The share of Donskoy Tabak is decreasing due to increasing role of foreign companies; South Ossetia and Abkhazia are negligible in terms of consumption compared to other regions and might not deserve mention.

Health Effects. First paragraph. MoH data on improving vital statistics in Russia has been published recently and should be cited and commented.

Policy Process and Policy Actors. First paragraph. Not only limitations on advertisements, but also many other important effective measures were removed from the draft law due to industry pressure, as shown in available policy publications, for example, Andrey Demin. Osnovnie strategii i deyatelnost transnacionalnyh tabachnyh kompaniy i ih soyuznikov v Rossii. (Major strategies and activities of transnational tobacco companies and their allies in Russia (in

Warnings on the pack remained small – I believe that the exact size should be specified - 4% of the pack.

Second paragraph. BAT employee Mr. Leonid Sinelnikov hiding under the cover of expert of Ministry of Agriculture, was exposed to the international community at the INB meeting in Geneva, Switzerland in March 2003 by civil society activist, President of Russian Public Health Association Andrey Demin.

Same paragraph: FCTC signing is not a prerequisite to joining FCTC. Russia did not sign in the specified period of time, but joined FCTC a few years later.

Fourth paragraph. Formally Mr. Ivan Savvidi, former director of Donskoy Tabak, being Deputy, was not owner of Donskoy Tabak, having had transferred his shares to other persons; this gentleman was not reelected at the recent Duma elections. However at the recent Duma elections the leading industry lobbyist, former head of Council of issues of development of tobacco industry established in Russia by foreign tobacco companies, Ms. Nadezhda Shkolkina was elected as a member of the ruling party “United Russia”. In 2009 she was openly selected and praised by the industry sources as the best GR manager of the industry in Russia. This is also a real policy factor.

Fifth paragraph. The claim was rejected by the court.

Policy Content. Monitoring. GYTS 1999 was conducted by Russian Public Health Association; GYTS 2004 – by MoH.

Tobacco Cessation Programs. Third paragraph. In Russia, besides NRT and Varenicline, Tabex (Cytizine) is registered drug for treating tobacco dependence, it is purchased over the counter, cost of pack for a course is less than 8 USD and it has been used in USSR and other countries of the former Socialist system since mid-1960s. Recently Cytizine is in the focus of international attention as an effective, available, safe and efficient product, the most promising for use on a global scale in large scale state supported interventions, including in low and medium level economies.

The same paragraph. Quit line already operates, and is based in Saint Petersburg.

Advertising, promotion and sponsorship bans. First paragraph. Tobacco industry budget is much higher in Russia, according to our research it exceeds 1 bln USD annually on all forms of promotion including PR and GR.

Second paragraph. New draft bill.

Conclusions. First paragraph. Not only past, but current experience suggests this.
Table 1. A column “expected resistance from the industry” could be introduced. Last row “Only secondhand smoke” related to “Vulnerable populations” - is unclear.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.