

Final Activity Report

September 2003 – March 2004

The second part of the fellowship was mostly dedicated to the analysis of earlier collected materials and advocacy on different levels.

In September, at last, there was a possibility for me to see the draft laws on smoking in public places and comments to them made by different Ministries. By that time both drafts had been discussed in Government meetings. One of them (prepared by the Ministry of Justice) was rejected, and the second was resent to the drafters (National Lawmaking Centre) for redoing. Reading the drafts established that, regrettably, the drafters were not familiar with existing international experience, the documents of the World Health Organization (and even the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control) and the prepared drafts – still being adopted would hardly change the situation to the best.

The familiarization with Ministries' comments permitted us to get convinced once again, that the main opponent of any amendments to the law related to tobacco is the Ministry of Agriculture, and other Ministries (such as Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, which are supposed to be interested in protection of citizens health) manifest a neglecting attitude to smoking.

Contacting the employees of the National Lawmaking Centre (which was not easy at all, as they were concerned by tobacco industry opposition), I offered them assistance in collecting necessary information and draft expertise. An extensive file was prepared by me (around 80 pages) with different materials including translation of European Union documents review on tobacco control. During the last two months the draft law prepared by the Center was reviewed by several specialists (including my international mentor Judith Watt and the law expert in health issues of the draft "Health Promotion and Disease Prevention" Lutz Steinhaus), who recommended to withdraw this draft and to draft instead some amendments to existing tobacco related laws to reinforce them. The draft was withdrawn from examination in December and the work on drafting amendments to existing laws began.

In October Moldova was visited by Judith Watt and Cornel Radu-Loghin with the purpose to evaluate the possibilities of advocacy for strengthening tobacco control policy. Being responsible for their program in Moldova, I organized meetings with the Ministry of Health, National Lawmaking Centre, Department of Public Health Program (Soros Foundation Moldova) and the round table discussion "Current state of tobacco control in Moldova and its future", in which journalists, representatives of youth and women NGOs and Moldovan Institute for Public Policy participated. The discussion proved that strengthening tobacco control and protection of non smokers are positively favored by the representatives of public organizations and mass media. At the same time, they skeptically evaluated the possibility of some changes in the policy of the Government, because they considered that too many officials are related with tobacco industry and import of cigarettes in Moldova.

In November and December I participated in three seminars, organized by youth non government organizations "Young and Free" and the Students League from Balti, which work on the project to prevent drugs addiction and to promote healthy life style. I prepared the presentations on "Framework Convention on Tobacco Control – first international treaty fighting for public health", "Why transnational tobacco companies organize youth antismoking campaigns" and "Tobacco control policy in EU and in Moldova: ways to overcome difficulties", as well as a range of publications to aid the tobacco control activists.

Beginning with February, at the request of the representatives of the Project “Health promotion and disease prevention”, which is implemented in Moldova with the financial assistance of the EU, I helped in organizing the campaign “Quit & Win” in pilot district Cahul, as well as organized several seminars for local decision makers on the possibilities and ways of establishing smoke free work places in the district. By joint efforts we prepared the strategy of organizing of the competition “Smoke free class” in schools, as well as declaring the local hospital - “Smoke free hospital”.

Beginning with October 2003 my actions were mostly dedicated to advocacy activity directed to signing the FCTC by Moldova. I prepared and sent out to different mass media and Members of the Parliamentary Commission on Healthcare special bulletins regarding main provisions of FCTC, materials for the working group of the Ministry of Health dealing with preparation of the Convention for signature, several meetings were held with the Members of the Parliamentary Commission on Healthcare, assistance to journalists was granted in preparing publications on the FCTC and its importance for public health.

This activity brought the expected results – in spite of a rather strong opposition on behalf of tobacco industry and importers of tobacco products, on June 29, 2004 Moldova signed the Convention.

During the fellowship I monitored the publications on tobacco, tobacco industry and smoking, the majority of which were later placed in the MedNet portal.

I also cooperated with Dr. Anna Gilmore (European Centre on Health of Societies in Transition - ECOHOST, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine) and my colleague Cornel Radu-Loghin in writing the article “Pushing up smoking incidence: a review of transnational tobacco company plans for a privatized tobacco industry in Moldova”, which was accepted for publication in the magazine «Lancet».

In March I participated in the final seminar Fellows-2003.