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Tobacco Industry Progress Report

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National News

International News

National News

(1) Romanian Customs Chief Under Judicial Control

The **president of Romania's Customs Authority (AVR), Mihai Savin, has been placed under judicial control for 60 days in a case involving allegations of intellectual forgery and complicity in the use of false documents.** Prosecutors conducted searches at the central customs headquarters in Bucharest and in Galați, while the National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA) separately carried out raids at the Constanța Border Customs Office in a corruption-related investigation.

We remind you that Savin was appointed head of the Romanian Customs Authority in January by Prime Minister Ilie Bolojan following the dismissal of former president Bogdan Bălan. The developments are likely to attract attention from industries dependent on customs enforcement and anti-illicit trade measures.

(2) Latest Anti-Smuggling Operations

Romanian border police, customs authorities and economic crime investigators reported multiple enforcement actions targeting illicit tobacco trade across several regions in recent days.

At Bucharest's Henri Coandă International Airport, authorities discovered approximately **43,800 undeclared cigarettes and 1 kilogram of hookah tobacco** in the luggage of Romanian and Vietnamese nationals arriving from Turkey and Jordan, with one individual also investigated for attempted bribery after allegedly offering money to border and customs officers.

Separate BLITZ operations carried out between 11–15 May in Giurgiu and Dolj counties resulted in the seizure of more than **107,000 cigarettes** concealed in vehicles, luggage and hidden compartments on routes linking Bulgaria, Turkey, Romania and the Czech Republic.

In Buzău, economic crime investigators conducted three searches linked to the illegal possession and sale of cigarettes outside the fiscal warehouse system, uncovering more than **280,000 cigarettes of various brands.** Authorities confirmed that the seized products lacked proper fiscal documentation or carried foreign tax stamps, with several criminal investigations opened for contraband and illegal handling of excisable goods.

International News

Europe

(1) Spain Raises Tobacco Prices Again

Tobacco prices in Spain have increased again following new adjustments affecting cigars, cigarillos, rolling tobacco and pipe tobacco.

The revised prices, published on 8 May 2026 and effective the following day across mainland Spain and the Balearic Islands, continue a broader 2026 trend of frequent incremental increases rather than large one-off adjustments. Under the updated structure, cigarillo prices generally range between EUR 0.22 and EUR 0.35 per unit, while some 250g rolling tobacco packs now reach around EUR 45.90. Pipe tobacco prices have also risen across several formats, including 999g packs priced at approximately EUR 75. Spain's pricing framework allows manufacturers and importers to submit revised price lists for approval and publication multiple times throughout the year.

(2) Germany Plans Disposable Vape Ban

Germany's Environment Minister Carsten Schneider is preparing legislation to ban the sale of disposable e-cigarettes, with a draft bill expected later this year. The proposal is primarily based on environmental and fire safety concerns linked to improperly discarded single-use devices and lithium batteries, which can cause fires in waste and recycling systems, while refillable vaping products would remain unaffected. The initiative follows earlier support from the Bundesrat and previous federal backing for tighter regulation. Despite the planned restrictions, Germany's legal e-cigarette market reportedly grew by around 25% in 2025 to approximately EUR 2.4 billion. Separately, amendments to Germany's Electrical and Electronic Equipment Act (ElektroG), effective from 1 July 2026, will require all retailers selling e-cigarettes to accept returns of used devices and strengthen consumer information obligations.

(3) Health Groups Urge Stronger EU Tobacco Tax Rules

A coalition of European public health and civil society organizations has sent a joint letter to the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union **warning that ongoing negotiations on the revision of the EU Tobacco Tax Directive (TTD) risk weakening key public health measures**. Signatories including Smoke Free Partnership, European Cancer Organisation and European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention argued that proposals to reduce minimum excise rates, weaken indexation mechanisms and extend transition periods could undermine efforts to reduce tobacco and nicotine consumption, particularly among young people. The groups stressed that the revised Directive is central to achieving EU public health goals under Europe's Beating Cancer Plan and warned that delaying

implementation or lowering tax thresholds for cigarettes, heated tobacco and emerging nicotine products could maintain product affordability and slow progress on reducing smoking prevalence. The coalition also rejected claims that higher tobacco taxes drive illicit trade, arguing instead that illegal markets are primarily linked to weak enforcement and governance failures.

USA

(1) U.S. Seizes Illegal E-Cigarettes

The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids has welcomed the recent **seizure by U.S. Customs and Border Protection of more than 18 million unauthorized e-cigarette products valued at over \$175 million**, describing the action as an important step in preventing illegal vaping products from entering the U.S. market. The operation involved coordination with multiple federal agencies, including the FDA and the Department of Justice, and targeted products not authorized under the federal PMTA framework. **The organization called for continued enforcement across the entire supply chain**, including manufacturers, importers, distributors and retailers involved in unauthorized sales. Anti-tobacco advocates argue that many illegal e-cigarettes are marketed in youth-oriented flavors and contain high nicotine concentrations, contributing to youth uptake. According to the group, around 1.4 million U.S. minors still use e-cigarettes, with nearly 90% consuming flavored products, most commonly fruit flavors.

(2) FDA Updates Enforcement Priorities for ENDS and Nicotine Pouches

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (**FDA**) **has issued new guidance on enforcement priorities for unauthorized electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) and oral nicotine pouches**. FDA states that it generally does not intend to prioritize enforcement against products with PMTAs accepted for scientific review, including certain supplemental applications pending for more than 180 days. For non-tobacco-flavoured ENDS products, the FDA said applications must include sufficient data demonstrating that the products may be appropriate for the protection of public health. While all unauthorized tobacco products remain illegal under federal law, the agency said **enforcement will focus on products posing elevated risks, including those with youth-appealing branding, high nicotine content, inadequate child-resistant packaging or safety concerns**. The FDA also plans to publish a public list of manufacturers and products covered by the enforcement discretion framework and confirmed that the new policy replaces its revised April 2020 ENDS guidance.

The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids criticized the move, arguing that it could allow unauthorized flavoured nicotine products to remain on the market and weaken efforts to reduce youth use.

World Health Organization

(1) WHO Warns on Nicotine Pouch Growth

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** has warned about the rapid global expansion of nicotine pouches, citing concerns over youth uptake, addiction risks and the lack of consistent regulation across many markets. According to the organization, **global retail sales of nicotine pouches exceeded 23 billion units in 2024, increasing by more than 50% year-on-year**, with the market valued at nearly US\$7 billion. WHO noted that **around 160 countries still lack specific regulatory frameworks for nicotine pouches**, while 16 countries have banned the products and 32 have introduced some form of regulation, including restrictions on flavours, advertising and youth access. The organization also raised **concerns about marketing strategies it says are designed to appeal to younger consumers**, including flavoured products, influencer campaigns, sports sponsorships and discreet packaging, with some products reportedly containing nicotine levels of up to 150 mg. **WHO is calling for broader regulation of nicotine pouches and related products**, including advertising controls, age-verification systems, nicotine caps, taxation and mandatory health warnings.