

Georgia



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Industry Participation in Policy Development

The tobacco industry (TI) has significantly increased its influence over public health policymaking, particularly through close engagement with Parliament, key ministries, and regulatory bodies. Several government agencies, including the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, Ministry of Finance, and the Business Ombudsman's Office (BOO), have routinely supported TI proposals. These included delaying plain packaging regulations and approving a 50 percent excise tax reduction on products such as raw tobacco, hookah, snus, and chewing tobacco in May 2024.

2. Industry CSR Activities

Despite Georgia's ban on all forms of tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship, the TI actively sponsored and promoted activities disguised as corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Philip Morris International (PMI), through the Institute of Social Research, funded at least 10 seminars and conferences targeting medical professionals, including family doctors, dentists, oncologists, and cardiologists. These events promoted heated tobacco products (HTPs), e-cigarettes, and oral tobacco products such as snus and ZYN under the guise of "tobacco harm reduction."

3. Benefits to the Industry

Between 2023 and 2025, the Georgian government granted regulatory and financial advantages to the TI, undermining public health policies and contradicting commitments under the WHO FCTC. Implementation of the plain packaging law was postponed multiple times, initially scheduled for

2018, then delayed to 2023, 2024, and ultimately April 1, 2025, following lobbying by PMI, the American Chamber of Commerce, and other industry allies.

4. Unnecessary Interaction

From 2023 to 2025, the government engaged in unnecessary and non-transparent interactions with the TI, in violation of Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC. Industry representatives regularly met with senior officials, including the Prime Minister, Chairman of Parliament, and Ministers of Finance, Economy, and Health. These meetings were held behind closed doors, and no agendas, records, or outcomes were disclosed to the public.

5. Transparency

Despite obligations under Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC and Georgia's Law on Tobacco Control, government interactions with the TI lack transparency. For example, meetings between officials and TI representatives, including those from Parliament, the Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health, BOO, and the Office of the Prime Minister, are not publicly disclosed. While the BOO acknowledged holding four meetings with industry representatives between 2023 and 2025, no information was provided about agendas, participants, or outcomes.

6. Conflict of Interest

Georgia does not prohibit political contributions from the TI or its affiliates to political parties, candidates, or election campaigns. There is also no requirement for disclosure of such contributions. No mechanisms exist to



monitor or prevent conflicts of interest involving officials or their relatives holding positions within the TI. Although no public records confirm such ties, this likely reflects a lack of disclosure obligations rather than the absence of conflicts.

Georgia lacks safeguards to mitigate conflicts of interest between public officials and the TI, creating opportunities for undue influence over policymaking.

7. Preventive Measures

Georgia has yet to implement preventive mechanisms recommended under Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC. The country lacks mandatory transparency provisions, a code of conduct, disclosure requirements, and awareness-raising programs. Without these safeguards, the TI continues to undermine public health policy.

Eastern Company submits records on production, manufacture, market share, and revenues. However, expenditures related to philanthropy, lobbying, and other activities are not collected or disclosed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Adopt the long-overdue Governmental Decree on “Protecting State Policy Related to Tobacco Control in Public Institutions and Establishing Rules for Communication Between Public Officials and the Tobacco Industry,” first submitted in 2018 and updated in 2022.
2. Establish a comprehensive code of conduct for public servants at all levels of government. This should prohibit the acceptance of gifts, financial or in-kind support, and other contributions from the TI.
3. Introduce mandatory transparency and reporting mechanisms requiring the TI to disclose data on marketing expenditures, lobbying activities, political contributions, revenues, and CSR programs. This information should be publicly accessible.
4. Develop and implement capacity-building and awareness programs for officials, parliamentarians, and regulatory bodies on their obligations under Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC and the risks of TI interference.
5. Enact a ban on political contributions from the TI and its affiliates to political parties, campaigns, and candidates, and create mechanisms to prevent conflicts of interest between current or former officials and the TI.