

Ban on smoking

(on the prohibition of smoking in public places)

Ladies and gentlemen,

We all know it's bad for you. Smoking causes lung cancer, cardiovascular disease, cancer of the mouth, emphysema, etc., etc., etc.

There is also evidence to show that it's bad for those around you. So-called "passive smoking", where non-smokers inhale the smoke that is in the air around a smoker, has almost as many bad effects as inhaling the smoke directly.

I might add that it is a dirty habit. The smell of tobacco smoke gets into everything – clothes, furniture, rugs, curtains. Ashtrays full of day-old cigarette butts *stink* – the smokers themselves don't notice this, but their wives and husbands and children certainly do! Smoking gives you bad breath. It colours your teeth brown and your fingers yellow with nicotine.

And it's expensive. It is government policy in most developed countries to discourage smoking by taxing cigarettes. The price of a pack of cigarettes has gone up noticeably over the last few years, and it will probably rise even more.

But even so. These last few years, when so much else was going wrong, was it really necessary to prohibit smoking in *all* public indoor spaces?

For four years now, we in Greece have been relentlessly bombarded by bad news. Everyone is anxious, everyone is worried about the future. And, of course, everyone has cut back on expenses. Restaurants, taverns and cafeterias are among the businesses that suffered most. The first things people will try to economize on are little everyday luxuries such as going out for dinner.

The total ban on smoking hit these businesses especially hard. When you can't even have a cigarette after dinner, there's even less reason to go out for a cup of coffee or a meal – or even for a drink: you can't even smoke in the bars anymore.

The tavern owners have responded by creating eating areas that are technically open-air, covered and enclosed with transparent plastic sheeting. They have even discovered some ingenious ways of heating these enclosures. But it isn't very pleasant to sit out there on the pavement, in your winter coat, trying to eat with stiff fingers in the rainy and chilly winter weather, just to be able to smoke a few cigarettes.

It's not a problem in the summer, of course. All my smoking friends are busily lighting up and puffing away at outdoor tables right now. I tell them they had better hurry up and smoke while they can. New York City has banned smoking anywhere in public, indoors or outdoors. Soon, someone is certainly going to do that in Europe, too.

Thank you.

(425 words)