

SMOKE OF THE MOTHERLAND

By Anastasia Osipova P



When the school bell rings, 15-year-old Lida Serbina and her classmates all rush out for a break. And a smoke.

Lida [Her name has been changed to protect her identity. - Ed.] is like any other girl her age. She has long hair, wears jeans and is a bit shy when meeting new people. She wants to be a doctor when she grows up.

Lida started smoking when she was 12. The rest of her friends were doing it and she would have been an outcast if she had not, she said. Now half of her classmates smoke, Lida said. For her, smoking is a social trap.

"I want to quit, but I can't," she said. "I think it's only possible if all smokers stop doing it at once."

Lida is hardly alone. Thirty percent of Russian teenagers have tried their first cigarette by age 12.

Like elsewhere in the world, Russian teenagers start smoking because of peer pressure, out of a desire to mimic adults

"The smoke of the Motherland is sweet and pleasant for us..."

Alexander Griboyedov,
Woe from Wit

"Smoking is harmful, but there are no non-smokers."

Russian proverb

and as a form of protest. But in Russia youth are also encouraged in their habit by billboard ads and the accessibility of cigarettes. Though tobacco sales are legally forbidden to children under 18, in fact anyone can buy cigarettes, especially at the ubiquitous street stalls. (Large stores are more cautious and would not be as likely to sell a pack of cigarettes to a minor.) What is more, cigarettes are cheap. In Russia, a pack of cigarettes retails for about 20 cents, while in Germany a pack costs about \$10. In Norway \$15.

According to the World Health Organization, Russia ranks first in the world for the number of young people smoking: 33 percent of teenagers light up regularly. Russia's Ministry of Education estimates that about 50 percent of boys and 40 percent of girls smoke in the senior grades of school.

Adult statistics are just as alarming, but teenagers, as always, are on the cutting edge.

An estimated 400,000 Russians die each year from smoking-related diseases, according to Professor David Zaridze, director of the Moscow-based Institute of Carcinogenesis. Conservative estimates put the total number of smokers in the country at about 50 million, or over one-third of population (see box, page 52). About 63 percent of smokers are men, 30 percent are women and 22 percent are teenagers over 15. And, in recent years, smoking rates have been continually on the rise, especially

among women and teenagers. "As for men, it is stable, because it can't get worse: from 60 to 70 percent of them smoke [depending on region]," Zaridze said.

It might be hard to believe today, but there was a time when Russia was a non-smoking country.

Historic records show that English merchants brought the first tobacco to Russia in 1585. The first Russians to try it were residents of the port town of Arkhangelsk. Soon its use had spread so widely that Patriarch Filaret Romanov asked his son, Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich, to ban trade of tobacco, which he did in 1634 (some assert that the Great Moscow Fire of that year was caused by a smoking accident). In 1650,

HARD FACTS

Russian GDP: \$1.46 billion

Smokers among:

Men: 67%

Women: 30%

Pregnant women: 48%

7th and 8th graders: 8-12%

9th and 10th graders: 21-24%

Smokers who quit within 5 years of starting up: 35%

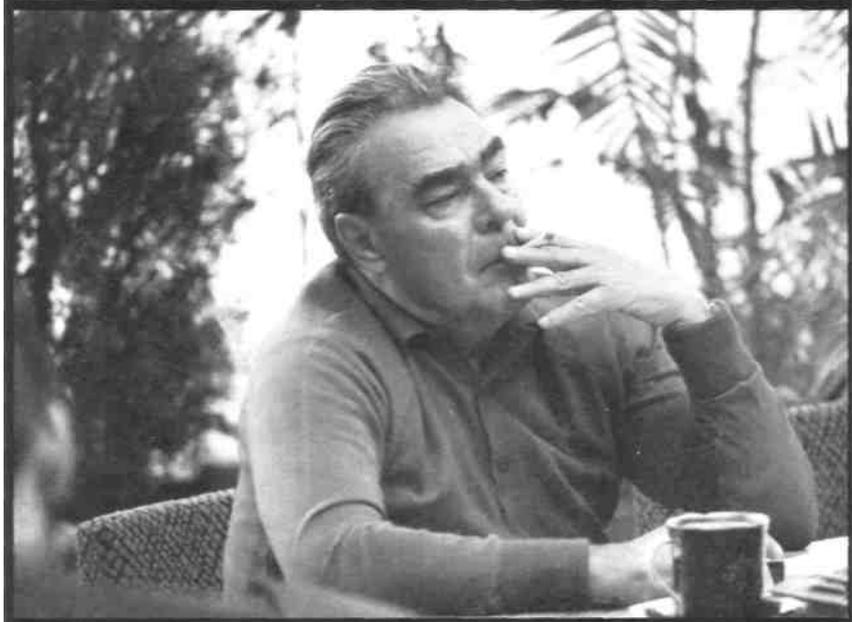
Main reason youths quit: price

Cigarettes smoked in Russia each year: 375 billion

Percent of Russian mortalities due to smoking-related illnesses: 30%

Sources: RosStat, Izar-Tass

the British Tobacco Trade Company, founded during the reign of Ivan the Terrible, was shuttered. In 1655, Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich ordered that someone caught smoking could be put to death. But in practice, smokers "only" had their noses cut. The situation changed only when the young Tsar Peter I came to power.



As the people go, so too their leaders. Stalin had his pipe, Brezhnev his cigarettes. Lenin also reportedly smoked as a youth, but kicked the habit.

During his Grand Tour of Europe, Peter William III traveled to Utrecht to meet Peter the Great. Peter spent several months in Holland, studying and opening markets in Russia. The trade in shipbuilding and other trades. There, tobacco - grown in the colonies of Virginia and Maryland - was quite important for the Dutch craftsmen presented him with a box of pipes. But, as some British historians point out, Peter had long known falling tobacco prices in Europe, Britain what and how to smoke. One of his closest friends - the Scottish general Patrick Gordon, who helped the future emperor secure the throne in 1689 - was a heavy tax revenues. Peter arrived in Britain in January 1697 and soon thereafter, on

Diplomacy to start up the tobacco trade February 11, signed a decree on tobacco trade. It began when Great Britain's King George II delivered-

ies to Russia. English merchants were granted a monopoly on the tobacco trade for two to seven years and agreed to pay a tax of four kopeks per pound on imported tobacco. Russia also received £20 thousand as a one-time payment for the monopoly license. Over the next two years, by September 1699, some 1.5 million pounds of tobacco were legally shipped to Russia.

Soon Russia launched its own production of tobacco. Peter the Great invited in foreign growers and started up first tobacco plantations in Mal-rossiya (present-day Ukraine). The tobacco grown there was of such high quality that it was even exported (the internationally-renowned Davidoff cigar has its roots in Ukraine in the 20th century; the Davidoff family emigrated from there in 1911 and set up their first tobacco shop in Switzerland). In 1716, the first Russian tobacco manufacturing plant was founded in Akhtyrka, and soon factories sprouted up in St. Petersburg and iTCMud MOSOTW. % <i>vt тел-А-ТМй ren-tury, Moscow had four large tobacco factories with some 250-1,000 staff.

Naturally, Bolsheviks nationalized tobacco factories after the revolution of 1917. It took them 10 years to return production to pre-revolutionary levels, however. During World War II many tobacco factories were evacuated to the Volga region, the Urals and Siberia, and, after the war, tobacco plants sprouted in both the original and the evacuation sites.

Toward the end of the Soviet era, economic stagnation fed drastic drops in domestic cigarette production. Shortages ensued and, with the breakup of the USSR and central economic planning, there were even cigarette riots in some cities.

Faced with falling international demand in industrialized nations (much as was the case 300 years before for the British crown), international tobacco companies saw huge pent-up demand in the East and had been carefully plotting their entry into Eastern Europe and the USSR since at least the early 1980s.

"When the Soviet Union collapsed and die market opened to foreign com-

panies, these tobacco companies saw Russia and the rest of the Former Soviet Union as a massive opportunity," wrote Dr. Anna Gilmore of the European Centre on Health of Societies in Transition, in a study of the problem. "Male



**International tobacco companies
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smoking rates were already amongst the highest in the world and they hoped to increase female smoking rates - thus the market was ripe."

Like millions of other state-run busi-

nesses in the country, domestic tobacco companies were not prepared to fend for themselves when Soviet-era subsidies ended and the centralized tobacco import and distribution system broke down. Some went bust and others were privatized and transformed into joint stock companies.

"Moreover, there was pressure from the International Monetary Fund and others for tobacco companies, like other companies, to be privatized," Gilmore wrote. "No differentiation was made between privatizing a tobacco company and a company selling a harmless product such as vacuum cleaners, and tobacco companies benefited from this mistake."

Philip Morris came to Russia in 1993; it now operates two factories in Russia. In 2003, the company's brands accounted for over 21 percent of all Russian cigarette sales. British American Tobacco entered the market in 1994, and within 10 years owned four factories.

Russia doubled after the advent of foreign tobacco companies, and their market share has increased from nothing (except smuggled or hard currency store sales) prior to 1990 to reach 50-100 percent in different markets across the former Soviet Union, according to Gilmore's study.

Today, some 80 tobacco companies operate in Russia, and about a dozen of them dominate the market, such as BAT Yava, Nevo-Tabak, Tabakprom, Donskoy Tabak, Balkanskaya Zvezda, and BAT Russia, according to the Russian Statistics Bureau. The output of Russia's 10 largest tobacco companies increased by eight percent in 2005, to reach 360 billion cigarettes annually. Russia is now the world's third largest cigarette producer (tied with Japan), after the U.S. and China.

International tobacco companies have also imported Western-style marketing techniques, with which they have influenced greater numbers of Russians, especially women, to smoke. The focus on filtered and light brands, which are easier to smoke - particularly for new smokers - and which lead smokers to

SMOKING AD BAN

FEDERAL LAW "ON ADVERTISING" (passed March 13, 2006)

Article 23. Advertising of Tobacco, Tobacco Products and Smoking Paraphernalia

1. Advertising for tobacco...should not:

i. contain assertions that smoking is a significant contributor to social acceptance, professional, sporting or personal success or that it improves one's physical or emotional well-being;

ii. condemn abstention from smoking;

iii. be aimed at minors;

iv. use images of minors.

2. Tobacco advertising», should not be placed:

i. in television or radio programs, in films or videos;

ii. in printed publications, audios or videos aimed at minors;

iii. on the first or last pages of newspapers», or magazines;

iv. —on fixed stands— mounted on rook or outside walls and other construction elements of buildings, construction... {this point came into effect only as of January 1, 2007};

v. on any form of public transportation;

vi. in, and no closer than 100 meters from buildings and facilities for children, education, hospitals, sanitarium, military organizations, theaters, circuses, museums, houses of culture, concert and exhibition halls, libraries, lecture halls, planetaria—.

3. Tobacco advertising— must always include a warning of the harms of smoking, and such warning should occupy no less than 10 percent of the advertising space.

light up more often, is thought to have had a major impact.

These companies have also been purposeful about making a public stance against youth smoking. Anatoly Vereshagin, head of public relations for JTI (which Vereshagin said has a 19.4% market share, making it the third largest Russian tobacco company), said JTI has two companies that work to combat youth smoking: "Your Choice" and "My Choice." The former deals with training salespeople. "It carries out propaganda aimed at following Russian law," Vereshagin said, "because it is dif-



ficult for a salesgirl, for example, to refuse to sell cigarettes to minors. The level of knowledge of Russian law is rather low; people don't always understand that such sales are a crime." The latter company works in schools and carries out various anti-smoking competitions among students.

Meanwhile, the government's anti-smoking policies have failed to keep up with the impact of international tobacco companies. International tobacco companies have used the legal confusion over cigarette advertising to firmly establish their brands. Researchers estimate that, by the mid-1990s, up to half of all billboards in Moscow and 75 percent of plastic bags in Russia carried tobacco advertising.

When laws aimed at limiting tobacco advertising and consumption did start being drawn up in 1993, Russian law enforcement rendered them ineffective. Draft laws were also subject to heavy lobbying by big tobacco. Thus, Gilmore noted that the 2001 bill on Limitation of Tobacco Consumption had an advertising ban cut out of it, on the grounds that such required a special law. The bill also allowed actors to smoke in movies, if it is "an integral element of the artistic design."

On March 13, 2006, the Duma passed a new law on advertising, which sets rules on cigarette promotion (see box at left).

"The new advertising law is as bad as the previous one," said Kirill Danishevsky, a consultant at the Open Health Institute. "It still leaves a sufficient window for promotion of tobacco products, and was probably written largely by industry representatives. It is as bad as the law on "limiting smoking in public places," which actually *allows* smoking in schools, hospitals, sports and other public centers in designated places, not specifying what a designated place is."

"The government needs to realize that enacting effective measures to reduce tobacco use will not just be good for the health of its population, but also for its economy," wrote Gilmore. "It needs to stop listening to the tobacco industry and its front groups and listen instead to its public health experts."

Some changes may already be taking place. Many companies in Moscow do not hire smokers. In some universities, like the Rostov Institute of Service, Business and Law, smoking is forbidden on campus both for students and staff. Finally, cafes for non-smokers are beginning to appear, as well as designated areas for non-smokers in cafes that allow smoking.

But even if the government does take effective measures to bring down smoking rates, tobacco companies will do well off the tobacco trade in Russia for many years to come. "The future for the tobacco companies in Russia," Gilmore wrote, "is still very optimistic." RL