Pakistan’s Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) recently awarded the tender for tobacco tracking and tracing in the country to a company linked to the tobacco industry’s ineffective track and trace system, Codentify. This is concerning for public health because the tobacco industry has a vested interest in controlling, and trying to undermine, tobacco tracking and tracing.

Tracking and tracing is a requirement of the Illicit Trade Protocol, an international treaty aimed at tackling the tobacco black market. It allows authorities to track tobacco products through the supply chain and trace them back to a point of origin which is a crucial way of controlling the tobacco industry’s currently massive supply chain.
The story of tobacco track and trace implementation in Pakistan so far mirrors that of the European Union (EU), where several organisations involved in its track and trace system have longstanding links with the tobacco industry. Inexto even held meetings with various EU member state government divisions prior to the EU’s track and trace system being implemented. The EU, in addition to also facing criticism from health organisations such as the Framework Convention Alliance (FCA), also faced a legal challenge (which has since been dismissed by the European Court of Justice) from the ITSA over the EU system’s compliance with the Illicit Trade Protocol.

These examples demonstrate the need for Parties to the Illicit Trade Protocol to be vigilant and alert against tobacco industry efforts to gain influence over their track and trace systems. Parties should require full transparency when tendering, contracting and implementing their own track and trace systems and, crucially, ensure that no organisations with links to the tobacco industry, the development of Codentify, or Inexto are allowed to contribute.

To find out more about the tobacco industry’s efforts to influence tracking and tracing and ways governments can fight against this, read STOP’s brief, “Protecting Your Country’s Tobacco Track and Trace System From the Industry”, or read the short summary here.