



European Commission - Speech [Check Against Delivery]



Remarks by Commissioner Stella Kyriakides at the press conference on key actions for a united front to beat COVID-19

Brussels, 19 January 2021

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we stand before you with a message of unity, solidarity and coordination. This pandemic has tested our resilience as a Union like nothing before. We all remember too well the first days of this pandemic. The unilateral actions, the border closures, the restrictions in the movements of essential goods.

We have come a long way. Through unity, coordination, and solidarity, we can defeat the pandemic.

The success that is our Vaccines Strategy is the strongest testament to this. This is our shield against the pandemic, and a shield for all citizens.

The fact that now, 10 months into this pandemic and 6 months after we presented the Vaccines Strategy, citizens are being vaccinated with two safe and effective vaccines across the EU in what will become the biggest mass vaccination exercise at this scale and speed speaks volumes.

It speaks about the value of investment in our scientific excellence, trust in our capacity to produce innovative medical products at scale, and to share the benefits between us equally.

About how 27 are stronger than one. About how one is as important as 27, regardless if they come from a big or a small Member State. About the concrete added value that this Union can bring to the lives of each and every citizen.

About how a united Europe can play a strong geopolitical role with its belief in humanism, solidarity and multilateralism.

Solidarity is the second element, because no one is safe unless everyone is safe. No one can put an end to COVID-19 unless the virus is eradicated everywhere. Our Vaccines Strategy was never about the EU first, it was always about giving a fighting chance to everyone, including our neighbours and low-income partners.

Very soon, we will be able to announce our donations of vaccines to the rest of the world. Vaccine donations will be the central geopolitical issue of 2021. Europe will not shy away from its moral and political responsibilities.

Team Europe has already mobilised over €850 million in support the global initiative to ensure equitable access to safe and effective vaccines of COVAX. We are COVAX's biggest donor.

None of this would have been possible had we not worked in solidarity. This solidarity needs to be further reinforced to ensure that *everyone* overcomes the challenging weeks and months ahead.

Coordination is the third essential element, because the problems we face with the virus cannot be addressed in isolation.

At least three new variants are raising cause for concern because of how fast they spread. If we do not act now with determination, we might not be able to contain the risk of a potentially harsher third wave of infections.

Numbers are already worryingly high across the EU and hospitals are under a lot of pressure. We cannot be complacent. And while vaccines are being rolled out at increasing speed, it will take time until it reaches all Europeans.

We are calling on Member States to do more genomic sequences of these variants. To share the information at EU level with partners. If we do not test and sequence, we are blind.

We stand ready to support them: to increase capacity for sequencing; to mobilise funds to purchase genome-sequencing equipment. To make available the ECDC sequencing capacity, and to complement national capacity.

Our leaders are meeting in two days to discuss COVID-19 coordination. What we would like to see transpiring from this discussion is a united front to beat COVID-19. This is our call to them.

Today only with the two vaccines authorised so far and made available at the same time and at the same conditions to everyone, more than 80% of the EU's population can be vaccinated.

We have used the negotiating strength of 27 Member States and 450 million people to ensure the broadest portfolio of safe and secure in the world, in unity. And more will come I hope in the coming weeks. The opinion of the European Medicines Agency on the AstraZeneca vaccine can come by the end of this month already. The vaccine of Johnson and Johnson is also under rolling review.

Today we have common recommendations on testing, we have joint procurements for the purchase of medical equipment and supplies, we have interoperable contact tracing apps, a coordinated approach to free movement, to mention just a few important achievements of the last months.

I have said this to you many times already. We are racing against time, not against each other. On the contrary, it is a race that we in the EU are running together, as a team and in unity. As a team, it is important to set clear and ambitious targets. And as a united team, it is important to support each other to achieve these targets.

Vaccinations need to speed up.

This is why we are calling on Member States to meet the vaccination targets we have set out in this Communication.

These targets are achievable. We will help Member States achieve them in any way we can.

In addition to maximising vaccine production and access, we are supporting securing the supply line of vital medical equipment needed for vaccination via EU Joint Procurement, such as needles and syringes.

We are also asking Member States to update their testing strategies over the coming weeks to reflect the new variants and incorporate the use of rapid antigen tests. Also here we are supporting the scale up testing capacity via direct purchases and joint procurements.

Ladies and gentlemen, huge challenges lie ahead of us during the coming weeks.

Our unity will be our strength, the past year has shown this very clearly.

This is the only way to begin to see the end of the beginning, and to embark on the beginning of the end.

I am sure that EU Heads of State and Government will hear this call on Thursday.

Thank you.

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Press contacts:

[Stefan DE KEERSMAECKER](#) (+32 2 298 46 80)

[Darragh CASSIDY](#) (+32 2 298 39 78)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)