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Mr Ondřej BENEŠÍK
Chair of the Committee on European Affairs
of the Poslanecká sněmovna
Sněmovní 4
CZ – 118 26 PRAGUE 1

Cc Mr Radek VONDRÁČEK
President of the Poslanecká sněmovna
Sněmovní 4
CZ – 118 26 PRAGUE 1

Dear Chair,

The Commission would like to thank the Poslanecká sněmovna for its Opinion on the Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council "A united front to beat COVID-19" {COM(2021) 35 final}.

The Commission takes seriously the concerns expressed by the Poslanecká sněmovna regarding supplies of vaccines and would like to recall that, by early June, about 305 million doses had been delivered, with more than 258 million administered, according to the ECDC Vaccine tracker[1].

The Commission is working closely with manufacturers to increase production in Europe and to accelerate the delivery of vaccines. In order to ramp up production capacities for vaccines, a Task Force on Industrial Scale-up, led by Commissioner Breton, in cooperation with Commissioner Kyriakides, has been set up[2]*. The Task Force has three main work streams: to eliminate bottlenecks in current production and accelerate and upscale where feasible; to adjust vaccine production to virus variants; and to work on a structural plan for faster response to biohazards at the European level.*

While precise figures for future deliveries cannot be provided at this stage, the Commission expects more than 300 million doses to be delivered in the second quarter of 2021 (by end of June).

In addition, the Commission would like to note that the European Medicines Agency is carrying out a rolling review of CureVac's vaccine. Furthermore, follow-up contracts have already been signed with two companies (BioNTech-Pfizer and Moderna) and the Commission is also actively pursuing exploratory talks with Novavax. Member States are considering whether and how to proceed with Valneva.

[1] https://qap.ecdc.europa.eu/public/extensions/COVID-19/vaccine-tracker.html#uptake-tab
[2] https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/public-health/eu-vaccines-strategy_en

When it comes to the export of vaccines outside the EU, the Commission introduced an export authorisation mechanism on 30 January 2021 for a limited period of six weeks. It was recently extended, with a broad support from Member States (including the Czech Republic), until 30 June 2021.

The main objective of the mechanism is to tackle the lack of transparency of vaccine exports from the EU. This helps ensure timely access to COVID-19 vaccines for EU citizens in accordance with contractual agreements with vaccine suppliers in the EU. If a company does not honour its commitments by not delivering the agreed doses to the EU, it is legitimate for the EU to refuse the exports. This is why the Commission supported Italy's decision to reject an export authorisation request from AstraZeneca at the beginning of March. In general, the exports from AstraZeneca under the mechanism have been very limited in number and have only concerned materials for clinical trials and samples. This being said, as AstraZeneca delivered less than 10% of its contractual commitments for the first quarter of 2021, the EU expects this company to increase its undertaking and catch up on its deliveries before it can export from the EU.

European citizens may not understand why vaccines are going to other countries while production from other countries has not been coming to the EU. On 24 March 2021, the EU therefore strengthened the mechanism to preserve the security of our supply chains, by introducing the principles of reciprocity and proportionality as additional criteria to be examined before authorising exports. The situation in the destination countries is now also considered, in particular whether countries that have production capacities of their own are restricting exports, or whether the epidemiological situation is less serious in these countries than in the EU and whether they are further advanced in the vaccination of their citizens. As the Commission has tightened the criteria for authorising exports, the risk of circumvention increases. That is why the new act includes those neighbourhood countries which are not low and middle-income countries in the scope of the regulation.

The Commission remains fully committed to international solidarity and still exempts exports to low and middle-income countries and supplies through COVAX from the strengthened mechanism. Exports to EU overseas countries and territories also remain unconditionally exempted. In parallel, the Commission is promoting the ramping-up of production capacity inside and outside the EU, and supports the work of the WTO in this respect.

The Commission hopes that these clarifications address the issues raised by the Poslanecká sněmovna and looks forward to continuing the political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

Maroš Šefčovič
Vice-President

Stella Kyriakides
Member of the Commission