

Brussels, 24 February 2021

Declaration from Members of the European Parliament to urge the Commission and Member States not to block the TRIPS waiver at the WTO and to support global access to COVID-19 vaccines

We, Members of the European Parliament, urge the European Commission and the European Council to review their opposition to the TRIPS waiver proposal at the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which serves to enable greater access to affordable COVID-19 health technologies, including vaccines, in particular for developing and middle income countries. This call comes in view of the European Council meeting of 25 February 2021 and the crucial decision to be made by all Member States at the WTO General Council on 1-2 March 2021.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the need to ensure global open access to COVID-19 health technologies and to rapidly scale up their manufacturing and supply has been widely acknowledged. However, despite efforts and statements made by the European Commission and several heads of state in support of treating COVID-19 medical products as global public goods, this has not yet translated into actionable realities.

In this context, the EU's open opposition to the TRIPS waiver risks exacerbating a dangerous North-South divide when it comes to affordable access to COVID-19 diagnostics, personal protective equipment, treatments and vaccines. The WTO decision on a potential waiver offers a crucial and much-needed act of effective solidarity, as it is an important step towards increasing local production in partner countries and, ultimately, suppressing this pandemic on a global scale. As the Commission President has repeatedly stated, no one is safe until everyone is safe.

Besides the removal of potential legal barriers to production of health tools, enabled by the TRIPS waiver, the sharing of know-how and technologies with GMP manufacturers from third countries is essential. Pharmaceutical companies must play a proactive role in this regard. Thus far, the EU strategy has mostly focused on domestic production. In view of the difficulties of manufacturers to deliver the committed doses to the EU and the EU's export control mechanism, it is crucial to enable production outside the EU.

As stated by the European Commission, the challenges of the 21st century call for more multilateral governance and rules-based international cooperation. The EU must step up its leadership and ensure it promotes a genuine multilateral system of solidarity, supporting all countries to respond efficiently to the pandemic. While we acknowledge the Commission's support to the COVAX facility, the unwillingness shown at the WTO to consider all options to scale up global production of vaccines and to engage in a substantive dialogue with a growing number of sponsors of the TRIPS waiver is very concerning.

We, members of the European Parliament, therefore call on the Commission and the Member States not to block the proposed TRIPS waiver, and to engage into a constructive dialogue with partner countries, in order to enable their local production capacities and increase their access to COVID-19 treatments.

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