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MEPs call for lifting of intellectual property rights for Covid-19 vaccines

TRIPS waiver

This morning, the results of yesterday's votes on a TRIPS waiver have been announced, with MEPs having adopted a Green amendment expressing clear support for a temporary lifting of intellectual property rights on Covid-19 vaccines and other related medical products. The resolution on Meeting the Global Covid-19 challenge also calls for increased production and manufacturing capacity in developing countries. Parliament now expects the Council and the European Commission to defend this position internationally, supporting a temporary lifting of intellectual property rights at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and to start negotiations as soon as possible. This signal from the Parliament comes at the right time, as the TRIPS Council has now announced to start text-based negotiations on the waiver, which the EU has not endorsed to date, despite of broad international support.

Sara Matthieu MEP, Greens/EFA shadow rapporteur on the resolution, comments:

"At present, only about 10% of the EU's global exports have been shipped to the least developed countries, and less than 6% of the world's population has been vaccinated, while 70% of the European population is expected to be vaccinated within the next month. Most of the doses manufactured in the EU have been exported to rich countries. As several variants have and will continue emerging worldwide, reaching herd immunity at the global level is not a question of charity. It is the only way of tackling the pandemics. No one is safe until we are all safe.

"In order to vaccinate as many people as possible worldwide, especially in developing countries, we need to give them the means to produce their vaccines. This means supporting the request for a temporary lifting of intellectual property rights at WTO level, which the Greens/EFA Group succeeded in obtaining from Parliament last night. But this lifting is only one condition among others. Combined with technology transfers through the WHO knowledge pool, this paves the way for scaling up production and ensuring global access to COVID treatments.

"Today only 40% of production capacity is used worldwide, and that needs to change urgently. The waiver is an essential tool to scale the production of COVID treatments and medical equipment worldwide. The current strategy, based on charities such as COVAX, has failed profoundly.

"While some countries are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, the situation in South Asia and Latin America is extremely worrying. Given the scale of this crisis, we cannot limit ourselves to a logic of charity, where developed countries satisfy their own needs before responding to those of the poorest countries. The Greens/EFA Group also insisted that vaccines should be free of charge. It would be unacceptable for citizens in the poorest countries to pay for vaccinations while those in the richest countries have free access to them. Global vaccination is key to ending the pandemic.

"Finally, the resolution demands that future purchase agreements are fully disclosed, and that those contracts contain transparency requirements for suppliers, as well as provisions on technology transfer, non-exclusive licensing, and a cost-profit analysis per product."

More:

On 2 October 2020, South Africa and India are applying for a temporary waiver of certain obligations under the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). This is to allow any country to produce Covid-19 vaccines. The WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights is a multilateral agreement that facilitates trade in knowledge and creativity. It frames the intellectual property regime in terms of innovation, technology transfer and public welfare.

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