

TRANSPARENCY IS A FUNDAMENTAL PILLAR FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE EU VACCINES STRATEGY



We welcome the progress achieved so far within the EU Vaccines Strategy, the joint procurement initiative for vaccines against COVID19. It is indeed praiseworthy that the EU speaks with one voice in the negotiations with the pharmaceutical companies.

We agree with Commissioner Kyriakides that “transparency creates trust and trust is key.”[1] Transparency guarantees accountability and scrutiny, both crucial for ensuring confidence in vaccines, the public’s trust in the overall handling of the pandemic, good governance, the safeguard of public health and the protection of patient safety.

In addition to our list of asks put forward earlier this autumn,[2] we would like to clarify our current requests with a view to increasing transparency in the EU’s exchanges, negotiations and deals with pharmaceutical companies, and to propose a new framework of transparency for future joint procurement negotiations:

We welcome the commitment undertaken by Commissioner Kyriakides to establish a reading room to grant access to a select few Members of the European Parliament to redacted versions of the contracts signed with companies once all negotiations are completed. To this end, the Commission needs to present a detailed timeline and explain in advance what sort of information will be kept from Members of the European Parliament.

This positive first step can, however, by no means be considered as sufficient to ensure the transparency around the advance purchase agreements on vaccine candidates that European citizens can expect and to which they are entitled.

We agree with Director General Sandra Gallina that reading rooms have not been “a resounding success.” [3] Previous experience points indeed to the fact that reading rooms are most relevant and helpful while the negotiations are ongoing, not ex post. Hence, we invite the Commission to provide MEPs with secure access to the documents in relation to ongoing negotiations.

[1] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-11-12-ITM-006_EN.html

[2] <https://epha.org/transparency-is-needed-to-reap-the-full-benefits-of-the-eus-investment-in-its-vaccines-strategy/>
<https://www.eu-patient.eu/COVID-19/epf-covid-statements/patients-safety-must-take-precedence-in-eu-coronavirus-vaccination-deals/>
https://www.beuc.eu/publications/beuc-x-2020-110_ensuring_access_to_safe_effective_and_affordable_covid-19_vaccines.pdf

[3] https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/committee-on-environment-public-health-and-food-safety_20201029-1345-COMMITTEE-ENVI_vd

As regards the contracts already signed for which the negotiations are concluded, they should be accessible to any citizen based on the right of access to EU documents. If commercial aspects of the deals can only be disclosed retroactively, confidentiality cannot preclude the timely publication of redacted versions of the contracts which, we recognise, contain sensitive provisions that have patient safety and public health implications such as the liability-compensation provisions.

National Parliaments should have access to these contracts in their entirety as part of their right and duty to scrutinize all aspects of the EU response to the COVID19 pandemic

Building on the success story of the EU Vaccines Strategy, the European Commission should seize the opportunity and set a positive precedent for transparency and good governance by informing the companies in advance that any deals resulting from future joint procurement initiatives will eventually be published. Member States and the European Commission should use their leverage and bargaining power in setting this as a prerequisite for future negotiations. This is particularly important when public health is in question and when public funds de-risk the R&D and manufacturing process, as it is currently done in the vaccines development process against COVID19. Eventual, meaningful transparency (even if its application is retroactive) will change the dynamic in the negotiations, boost governments' negotiating power and will dispel any mistrust and suspicion.

Supporting Organisations

1. Access to Medicines Ireland
2. AIDES, France
3. AIM - International Association of Mutual Benefit Societies
4. ALTER-EU
5. Altroconsumo, Italy
6. BEUC, The European Consumer Organisation
7. Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations (SOMO)
8. Consumer Association the Quality of Life-EKPIZO
9. Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO)
10. ECL Access to Medicines Task Force
11. European AIDS Treatment Group (EATG)
12. European Alliance for Responsible R&D and Affordable Medicines
13. European Institute of Women's Health (EIWH)
14. European Patients' Forum (EPF)
15. European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
16. France Assos Santé
17. Global Health Advocates, France
18. Grupo de Ativistas em Tratamentos (GAT)
19. KEI Europe
20. International Society of Drug Bulletins
21. La Ligue Contre le Cancer, France
22. Mario Negri Institute
23. Médecins du Monde
24. NoGracias, Spain
25. Observatoire de la transparence dans les politiques du médicament (OTMeds)
26. Organización de Consumidores y Usuarios (OCU), Spain
27. Pharmaceutical Accountability Foundation
28. Prescrire
29. Public Eye
30. Salud Por Derecho, Spain
31. Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME)
32. T1International
33. Test Aankoop/Test Achats
34. Transparency International EU
35. Transparency International Health Initiative
36. TranspariMED
37. UFC-Que Choisir (France)
38. Universities Allied for Essential Medicines Europe (UAEM)
39. Wemos

Supporting Individuals

Ellen t' Hoen, Director, Medicines Law & Policy
Sarah Steingrüber, Curbing Corruption