COVID-19 EU Briefing 26 February 2021

General

EU Summit

- Following the first day of their meeting, European Council members published a joint statement highlighting the need to urgently accelerate the authorisation, production and distribution of vaccines, as well as vaccination campaigns.
- On vaccination certificates, they agreed to continue to work on a common approach, but more work needs to be done on digitalisation and on cooperation with the World Health Organisation. **EC President Von de leyen noted** that “Member States will need to move fast with the implementation if we want such a ‘green certificate’ to be in place by this summer”.
- On his part, **French President Emmanuel Macron said** that “If we manage to reopen certain places, we cannot condition their access to vaccination, even though we would not even have opened vaccination to the youngest”.
- In any case, they still support that non-essential travel should be restricted.
- Finally, they pledged their efforts to continue sharing vaccines with third countries.

COVID-19 Vaccine

- Representatives of the pharmaceutical industry involved in the development, production and delivery of the Covid-19 vaccines had a debate on Thursday with the ENVI and ITRE Committees.
- Most MEPs questions were directed at AstraZeneca CEO Pascal Soriot as they sought greater clarity on vaccine deliveries and explanations for ongoing shortages. The AstraZeneca chief said the company will provide the EU with 40 million doses in the first quarter of this year.
- Some MEPs asked whether an EU export ban on vaccines would help Europe compared to other countries that have introduced export bans.

COVID-19 Vaccination Disinformation

- The **European Commission** has published the latest reports by Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Twitter, TikTok and Mozilla, signatories of the Code of Practice on Disinformation. The reports provide updates on the measures taken by the platforms in January 2021 to fight disinformation on COVID-19 vaccines.

Safe & Clean Travel

- Transport MEPs adopted a draft resolution on establishing an EU strategy for sustainable tourism by 47 votes in favour and 2 against, urging EU countries to include the tourism and travel sectors in their recovery plans and consider temporarily reducing VAT on these services.
MEPs want a common vaccination certificate, which could become an alternative to PCR tests and quarantine requirements, once there is sufficient evidence that vaccinated persons do not transmit the virus, or mutual recognition of vaccination procedures.

Economic Response to Pandemic

- Member of the Executive Board of the ECB, Isabel Schnabel, was interviewed by LETA on the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Schnabel recognised that decisive fiscal and monetary responses had supported a strong economic rebound following the first wave of infections.
- Additionally, she noted the marked shift towards greater digitisation of the economy and the potential benefit for productivity growth.
- Schnabel maintained that economic growth in 2021 remained likely to be in the area of 3.9% with the economy returning to pre-crisis level by mid-2020.
- She also noted that low interest rates were driven by long-term structural trends and were not expected to reverse

Member States

Belgium

- Belgium's Consultation Committee discusses only a limited number of relaxations including an outdoor social bubble of up to 8-10 people and the return to work of non-medical contact professions.
- The ban on non-essential travel is also on the table.

Italy

- The EU should speed up vaccinations to slow the spread of coronavirus mutations, said Italy's new prime minister, Mario Draghi, during his first European Council which was held online on Thursday. According to Draghi, the vaccine delivery plan for this year's second and third quarters presented by European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen is not reassuring.

France – Germany

- France and Germany agreed on Thursday to require coronavirus tests for workers commuting across their shared border, aiming to avoid a full closure of the frontier while controlling the outbreak’s spread.

Source: DeHavillandEU