COVID-19 EU Briefing 04 March 2021

General

Digital Green Pass

- FT reports that European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen’s plans for a “Digital Green Pass” have met their first obstacles during an EU ambassadors meeting.
- France and Belgium were among the countries that pushed back on the idea, arguing it would discriminate against younger travellers who are last in line for a vaccine.
- The biggest sticking point was the decision by countries including EU member states such as Hungary to use Russian or Chinese vaccines not approved by the European regulators.
- Diplomats said the commission informed ambassadors it would rename the planned “digital green pass” to merely a “green certificate”.

COVID-19 Vaccine

- The European Medicines Agency has started a rolling review of Sputnik V (Gam-COVID-Vac), a COVID-19 vaccine developed by Russia’s Gamaleya National Centre of Epidemiology and Microbiology.

Slovakia:

- Slovakian Prime Minister Igor Matovic bypassed his coalition partners and ordered in shipments of the Russian Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine. Matovic made his decision despite demands from his party’s partners not to use the Russian vaccine until it is registered by the European Union’s medicines watchdog EMA.
- The Czech Republic and Slovakia, both under severe pressure from the coronavirus pandemic, will each receive an extra 100,000 doses of Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

Fiscal Policy Guidance

- The European Commission has adopted a Communication providing Member States with guidance on the conduct of fiscal policy in the period ahead. In order to ensure favourable fiscal conditions, the Commission suggest continuing applying the general escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact in 2022 and to deactivate it as of 2023.

Member States

Greece

- Greece has extended a lockdown and tightened restrictions in more areas of the country to stem the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.
- The lockdown in the wider Athens region, where intensive care units have faced severe pressure, has been extended by a week to March 16.
- Also, the government imposed tighter curbs on movement, including on outdoor exercise, and has restricted supermarket shopping to a 2-km (1.2-mile) radius from people’s homes.
Germany

- Chancellor Angela Merkel and German state leaders have agreed a phased easing of coronavirus curbs along with an “emergency brake” to let authorities reimpose restrictions if case numbers spike again.
- Under Wednesday’s five-stage plan, up to five people from two households will be allowed to meet from March 8, with children under 14 exempt.
- Retailers can reopen provided case numbers are below 50 cases per 100,000 people over seven days in the relevant region.

Belgium

Belgium’s Superior Health Council (SHC) announced on Wednesday that the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is safe and effective enough to use in people over 55.

Source: DeHavillandEU