

Serbia says it's ready for Russian vaccine production

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Medical workers wearing protective gear walk at Belgrade Fair makeshift vaccination center in Belgrade, Serbia, Tuesday, Feb. 9, 2021. China is ready to consider "vaccine cooperation" with Central and Eastern European countries, President Xi Jinping said Tuesday in a meeting held by video link with European leaders. Serbia has received 1 million doses of a Chinese-developed coronavirus vaccine and Hungarian and Chinese vaccine developers are cooperating. (AP Photo/Darko Vojinovic)

Serbia is ready to domestically produce the Russian Sputnik V vaccine after successfully using it and a Chinese-developed shot in its inoculation campaign, officials said Thursday.

A team of Russian experts arrived in Serbia on Thursday to evaluate technical details of the arrangement, which many see as another Serbian step away from a proclaimed goal of streamlining its foreign policies and actions with the European Union before eventually joining the bloc.

Russia's ambassador to Serbia denied politics is involved in the so-called vaccination diplomacy.

"Russia does not think at all about global confrontation or bidding" over the supply of vaccines, Aleksandr Botsan-Kharchenko said.

Serbia, a country of 7 million, so far has vaccinated some 550,000 people, mainly with the Chinese Sinopharm [vaccine](#) and Sputnik V, and to a lesser extent with the Pfizer-BioNTech shots

Although formally seeking EU membership, the populist Serbian leadership has cultivated close ties with China and Russia which are vying for influence in strategically important Balkan region.

Serbian government minister Nenad Popovic said the first stage of cooperation with the Russian Sputnik V producer would include the import of raw materials, packaging and distribution at home and abroad.



A medical worker wearing protective gear waits for people to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, at Belgrade Fair makeshift vaccination center in Belgrade, Serbia, Tuesday, Feb. 9, 2021. China is ready to consider "vaccine cooperation" with Central and Eastern European countries, President Xi Jinping said Tuesday in a meeting held by video link with European leaders. Serbia has received 1 million doses of a Chinese-developed coronavirus vaccine and Hungarian and Chinese vaccine developers are cooperating. (AP Photo/Darko Vojinovic)

"The full production cycle will take nine to ten months," Popovic said, adding that quantities could also be produced for export.

Both the Chinese and Russian vaccines have yet to be approved by the European Medicines Agency. But with delays in the deliveries of

Western-made vaccines, several European states, including EU members, are mulling the use of Sputnik V.

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