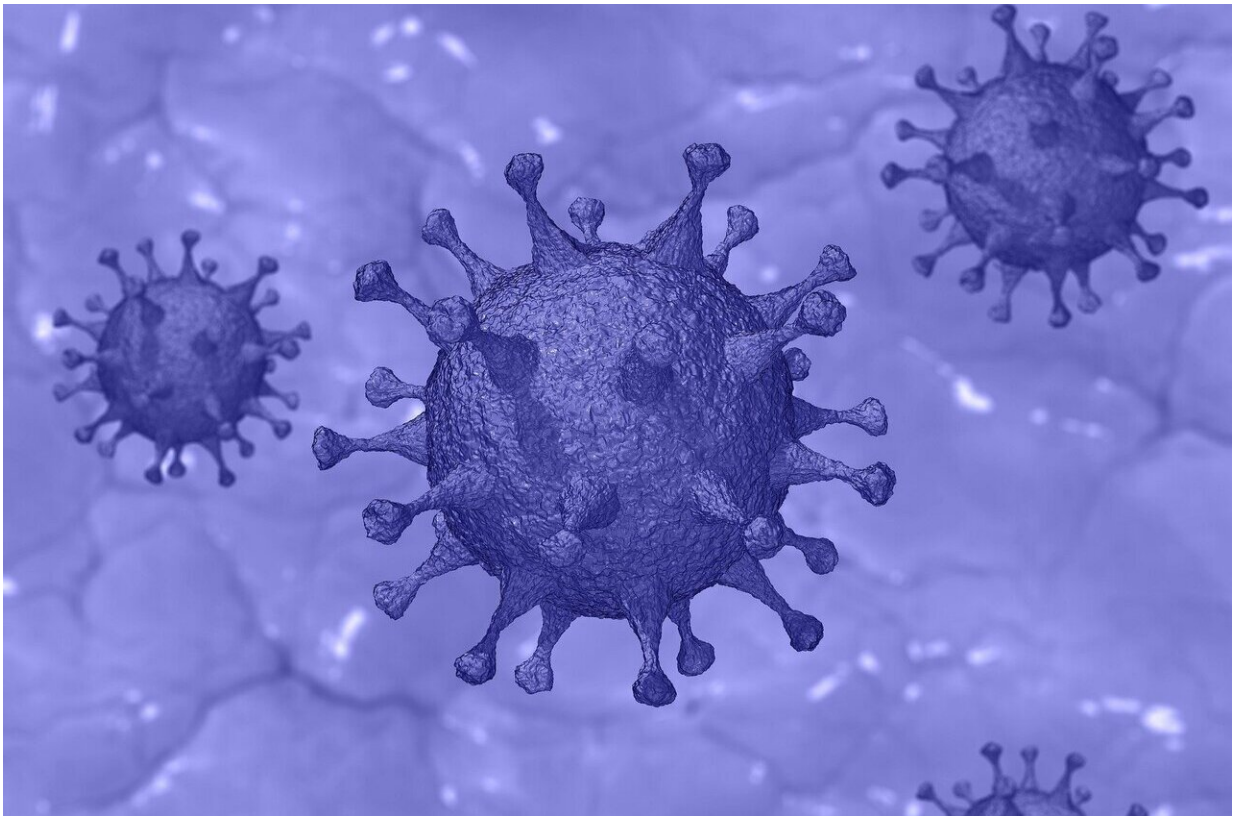


Austria, Denmark look beyond EU to Israel for future vaccine

March 2 2021, by Samuel Petrequin and Geir Moulson



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Austria and Denmark have further dented the European Union's already fragile coronavirus vaccine solidarity by announcing plans to team up with Israel to produce second-generation vaccines against COVID-19

variants.

Chancellor Sebastian Kurz plans to visit Israel with Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen later this week and confer with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on [vaccine research](#) and production cooperation. Kurz said Tuesday that his country and Denmark intend to stop relying solely on the European Union for [coronavirus](#) vaccines.

As part of its strategy, the EU has six contracts for more than 2 billion doses of vaccines, with Moderna, AstraZeneca, Sanofi-GSK, Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer-BioNTech and CureVac. It is in negotiations with two other manufacturers, but only three vaccines have been approved for use so far in the bloc.

Amid delays in production and deliveries of shots, the rollout of vaccines to the EU's 27 member states is lagging far behind that of Israel and some other countries including the U.S. and Britain.

According to the EU, almost 33 million doses of vaccine have been given so far, but only 11 million Europeans have been fully vaccinated. Israel, a country of 9.3 million people, has immunized over half of its population since late December.



Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz speaks behind a plastic shield at a press conference at the federal chancellery in Vienna, Austria, Monday, March 1, 2021. The Austrian government has moved to restrict freedom of movement for people, in an effort to slow the onset of the COVID-19 coronavirus. (AP Photo/Ronald Zak)

Kurz said in a statement to the Austria Press Agency that it was right in principle to take a European-wide approach to inoculations, but maintained that the European Medicines Agency, the EU medical regulator, has been too slow to approve vaccines and pointed to companies' delivery shortfalls.

"We must prepare for further mutations and should no longer be dependent solely on the EU in the production of second-generation vaccines," he said.

Kurz said Austria and Denmark "will no longer rely on the EU ... and will in the coming years produce doses of second-generation vaccine for further mutations of the coronavirus together with Israel as well as researching jointly treatment possibilities," APA reported.

Asked whether the move would undermine the EU's vaccine strategy, EU Commission spokesman Eric Mamer said all member states want to continue to be part of it,



Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen gives a coronavirus media briefing in the Mirror Hall of the Prime Minister's Office in Copenhagen on Wednesday Feb. 24, 2021. Frederiksen announced the first phase of arrangements to reopen society from national lockdown restrictions because of the COVID-19 virus. (Jens Dresling/Ritzau via AP)

"The point is that none of the member states has signaled in any way that they want to receive less doses based on our EU vaccine strategy," he said. "What certain member states are looking at is how to prepare the future. We will continue with our vaccine strategy exactly as before and continue to adapt as the situation evolves."

Mamer added that, with 27 [member countries](#) and a population of 450 million, the EU faces a much bigger challenge than Israel.

"It's not as if you can take one model and simply stick it on the European Union and say: That's what you should be doing," Mamer said, adding that each country is in charge of its own vaccine rollout strategy.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said she does not consider the plan to join forces with Israel as a breach of European (vaccine) cooperation.



A testing station in a school hall as pupils return to school at Dueholmskolen, Denmark, Monday March 1, 2021. The older students are returning to school classes Monday, with COVID-19 quick testing twice a week in an effort to re-start some normal life. (Bo Amstrup / Ritzau via AP)

"I think we are best off being in European cooperation in the field of vaccines as well," she said.

The EU secured vaccine doses for its member states collectively but its members can also decide to negotiate separate agreements as long as they don't compete with the advance purchase agreement sealed by the EU's executive arm.



This photo from Facebook page of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán shows him receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, making him the only leader of EU to receive the vaccine produced in China, in Hungary, Sunday, Feb. 28, 2021. Hungary have agreed to purchase 5 million doses of the vaccine developed by Sinopharm, enough to treat 2.5 million people. (Viktor Orbán Facebook via AP)

Several member states have openly criticized the EU for the slow rollout and considered using vaccines developed in China and Russia although they have not been approved by the European Medicines Agency. On Sunday, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán got the Sinopharm shot, after recently saying he trusted the Chinese vaccine the most.

In a Twitter post, Kurz praised EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen for her role in securing [vaccine](#) doses for the whole bloc. "But

now we must prepare ourselves in time for further dangerous COVID-19 mutations," he wrote. Kurz added that experts expect annual vaccinations for some 6 million Austrians.

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