

Vaccine stock in Italy stirs EU suspicions

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AstraZeneca on Wednesday denied reports it was stockpiling coronavirus vaccines in the EU to export to Britain, after Italian inspectors found 29 million doses in a manufacturing plant.

The discovery fuelled concerns in Brussels that the firm was not being transparent about its production, and came on the same day the bloc tightened its export control mechanism amid a row with the UK over

supplies.

But AstraZeneca said 16 million doses in the plant in Agnani in central Italy were destined for the EU and the other 13 million for the Covax programme, which supports [poorer countries](#) and has Brussels' support.

EU officials did not dispute the numbers.

"There are no exports currently planned other than to Covax countries," an AstraZeneca spokesperson said.

The doses destined for Europe were waiting for inspection before being dispatched, and were expected to be delivered by the end of April.

Media reports alleged that the firm planned to ship the vaccines to Britain.

European capitals are irritated that the UK-based company managed to supply its British commitment smoothly, while falling far short of its promised deliveries to the EU.

But a British government source denied that any of the Agnani doses were expected in the UK, and an Italian government official said they appeared to be destined for Belgium, a hub of vaccine production and distribution.

The Italian plant performs "fill and finish", the process of putting vaccines produced elsewhere into vials and properly packaging them.

"We suspected that AstraZeneca had more [production capacity](#) in Europe than they had accounted for," a European official told AFP, adding that industry commissioner Thierry Breton had asked Italy to investigate.

The official said the EU would now check where the vaccines were set to be delivered to, and whether they were originally produced in plants authorised by the European Medicines Agency.

The reports come as the EU said it would bolster rules on Covid-19 vaccine exports, making authorisations contingent on destination countries behaving fairly in return.

EU officials said the scheme is not a "vaccine export ban" and does not target any country in particular—though they called out AstraZeneca for falling far short on its deliveries to Europe.

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