

EU says US stand on patent virus waiver is no 'magic bullet'

May 8 2021, by Raf Casert and Barry Hatton



German Chancellor Angela Merkel puts her face mask on after a press conference after the informal EU summit and the EU-China summit in Berlin, Germany, Saturday, May 8, 2021. Merkel reiterated her stance that the shortage of vaccines worldwide would not be solved by a waiver of patents, as suggested by U.S. President Biden. (John MacDougall/Pool Photo via AP)

European Union leaders cranked up their criticism of the U.S. call to waive COVID-19 vaccine patents Saturday, arguing the move would yield no short-term or intermediate improvement in vaccine supplies and could even have a negative impact.

On the second day of an EU summit in Portugal, the European leaders instead urged Washington to lift export restrictions if it wants to have a global impact on the pandemic.

"We don't think, in the short term, that it's the magic bullet," European Council President Charles Michel said. French President Emmanuel Macron insisted that giving any priority now to a discussion of intellectual property rights "is a false debate."

Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, home to many Big Pharma companies, went the farthest of all, cautioning that relaxing [patent](#) rules could harm efforts to adapt vaccines as the [coronavirus](#) mutates.

"I see more risks than opportunities," Merkel said. "I don't believe that releasing patents is the solution to provide vaccines for more people."

Instead, the leaders joined previous EU calls for U.S. President Joe Biden to start boosting U.S. vaccine exports as a way to contain the global COVID-19 crisis, insisting that move was the most urgent need.

"I'm very clearly urging the U.S. to put an end to the ban on exports of vaccines and on components of vaccines that are preventing them being produced," Macron said.



French President Emmanuel Macron speaks with the media as he arrives for an EU summit at the Crystal Palace in Porto, Portugal, Saturday, May 8, 2021. On Saturday, EU leaders hold an online summit with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, covering trade, climate change and help with India's COVID-19 surge. (Violeta Santos Moura, Pool via AP)

He mentioned the German company CureVac, saying it could not produce a vaccine in Europe because the necessary components were blocked in the United States. Hundreds of components can go into a vaccine.

Merkel said she hoped that "now that large parts of the American population have been vaccinated, there will be a free exchange of (vaccine) ingredients."

"Europe has always exported a large part of its European (vaccine) production to the world, and that should become the rule," the longtime German leader said.

While the U.S. has kept a tight lid on exports of American-made vaccines so it can inoculate its own population first, the EU has become the world's leading provider, allowing about as many doses to go outside the 27-nation bloc as are kept for its 446 million inhabitants.

The EU has distributed about 200 million doses within the bloc while about the same amount has been exported abroad to almost 90 countries. Former EU member Britain has acted similarly to the U.S.,



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, center, and Portugal's

Prime Minister Antonio Costa speak at the conclusion of an EU summit at the Crystal Palace in Porto, Portugal, Saturday, May 8, 2021. On Saturday, EU leaders held an online summit with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, covering trade, climate change and help with India's COVID-19 surge. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco, Pool)



French President Emmanuel Macron speaks with the media as he arrives for an EU summit at the Crystal Palace in Porto, Portugal, Saturday, May 8, 2021. On Saturday, EU leaders hold an online summit with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, covering trade, climate change and help with India's COVID-19 surge. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco, Pool)



Portugal's Prime Minister Antonio Costa, left, European Council President Charles Michel, center, and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen participate in a media conference at an EU summit in Porto, Portugal, Saturday, May 8, 2021. On Saturday, EU leaders held an online summit with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, covering trade, climate change and help with India's COVID-19 surge. (AP Photo/Luis Vieira)



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, right, and European Council President Charles Michel participate in a media conference at an EU summit in Porto, Portugal, Saturday, May 8, 2021. On Saturday, EU leaders held an online summit with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, covering trade, climate change and help with India's COVID-19 surge. (AP Photo/Luis Vieira)



European Council President Charles Michel arrives for an informal dinner event during an EU summit at the Crystal Palace in Porto, Portugal, Friday, May 7, 2021. European Union leaders are met for a summit in Portugal on Friday, sending a signal they see the threat from COVID-19 on their continent as waning amid a quickening vaccine rollout. Their talks hope to repair some of the damage the coronavirus has caused in the bloc, in such areas as welfare and employment. (AP Photo/Luis Vieira, Pool)



European Council President Charles Michel arrives for an EU summit at the Crystal Palace in Porto, Portugal, Saturday, May 8, 2021. On Saturday, EU leaders hold an online summit with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, covering trade, climate change and help with India's COVID-19 surge. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco, Pool)



German Chancellor Angela Merkel attends a press conference after the informal EU summit and the EU-China summit in Berlin, Germany, Saturday, May 8, 2021. Merkel reiterated her stance that the shortage of vaccines worldwide would not be solved by a waiver of patents, as suggested by U.S. President Biden. (John MacDougall/Pool Photo via AP)

"First of all, you must open up," Macron said in addressing the United States. "First of all, the Anglo-Saxons must stop their bans on exports."

The EU is trying to regain the diplomatic initiative on vaccines after Biden put it on the back foot with his surprising endorsement of lifting patent protections on COVID-19 vaccines, seeking to solve the problem of getting shots into the arms of people in poorer countries.

Macron and other EU leaders have insisted that production capacity first must be ramped up by reconverting factories so they can quickly start producing vaccines through a transfer of technology.

"Today, there is not a factory in the world that cannot produce doses for poor countries because of a patent issue," Macron said.

Developed nations should also increase [vaccine](#) donations to [poorer countries](#), the EU leaders say in arguing that talking about patent waivers alone won't cut it.

"We are willing to go into that discussion, but then we need a real 360-degree view on it," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said.

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Citation: EU says US stand on patent virus waiver is no 'magic bullet' (2021, May 8) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-05-eu-patent-virus-waiver-magic.html>

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