

EU not backing COVID vaccine patent suspension at WTO

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The EU on Friday submitted a proposal to the WTO for a multilateral pact aimed at boosting production of COVID-19 vaccines, but which calls for compulsory licensing deals rather than suspending patents.

The European Commission reiterated the reservations that it holds about the temporary lifting of patents, as requested by India and South Africa, and now backed by Washington.

"In reality, the main problem at this moment relates to the lack of sufficient manufacturing capacity to rapidly produce the required quantities," commission Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis said in a statement.

"The objective must be to ensure that any available and adequate manufacturing capacity anywhere in the world is used for the COVID-19 vaccines production."

Brussels urged members of the World Trade Organization to "ensure that COVID-19 vaccines, treatments and their components can cross borders freely".

It also called for an increase in vaccine production and making sure "those countries most in need of vaccines receive them at an affordable price" and facilitating "the use of compulsory licensing" within a WTO framework protecting intellectual property.

The EU has come out strongly against the US position on patents, repeatedly emphasising that the European bloc has exported as many

COVID vaccine doses as it has kept for itself, while the United States has sent abroad very little, prioritising its own population instead.

"Vaccine-producing countries should be ready to export a fair share of their domestic production," it said, in its statement.

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