

Hungary procures 'large quantities' of Russian vaccine

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Hungary said on Friday it had reached a deal to buy large quantities of Russia's Sputnik V virus vaccine, even though it has not been approved by the European Union.

The deal comes a day after Hungary became the first EU member to break ranks and approve Sputnik V, as well as the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine.

"Hungary has concluded with Russia an agreement to buy in three phases large quantities of the Sputnik V vaccine; the contract has been negotiated, and signed during the night," Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto said in a video statement on his Facebook page after meeting the Russian health minister in Moscow.

He added more details would be given "during the day".

Hungary has repeatedly criticised what it says is the slow pace of vaccine approval and procurement by EU authorities.

"We should face the fact that something has gone wrong with the EU," nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban said in a weekly radio interview on Friday.

"If there is no vaccine from the Union, let it come from elsewhere. It is not possible that Hungarians die because of this."

According to regulations from the EU's Amsterdam-based European Medicines Agency (EMA), a national regulator may grant a temporary licence for a vaccine in an emergency situation.

Only two vaccines have so far been approved by the EMA: Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna.

The EMA is currently evaluating the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine and has said a decision on its approval could come before the end of next week.

On Wednesday Russia filed an application for registration for Sputnik V with the EMA.

However the EMA said the vaccine was "not undergoing a rolling review".

Russian praise

The Sputnik doses still need a final sign-off from a Hungarian public health authority, so no date has been given for the first jabs.

Russia registered Sputnik V—named after the Soviet-era satellite—in August, months ahead of Western competitors but before the start of large-scale clinical trials, which left some experts wary.

"Hungary is the first EU country to realize all the advantages of Sputnik V vaccine," Kirill Dmitriev, CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund, said in a statement.

In a later press briefing Dmitriev said the Hungarian decision was an example of the way "vaccines should be separate from politics... vaccine decision should be based on just safety".

The Hungarian government also said this week it had "effectively agreed to receive one million vaccines immediately" of the Chinese-made Sinopharm jab, pending approval by Hungarian inspectors currently in Beijing.

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