



HOUSE OF LORDS
European Union Committee

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22 July 2020

Rt Hon Alok Sharma
Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

Dear Alok,

EM 9021/20: Communication from the Commission: EU Strategy for COVID-19 vaccines

Thank you for your Explanatory Memorandum (EM) on the above Communication, which was considered by our Environment Sub-Committee on 22 July 2020.

We note your decision not to participate in the EU's COVID-19 vaccine procurement strategy.

One of the reasons you gave is that you would not be able to take part in the governance of the scheme or the negotiating team, so could not be confident that the scheme would meet UK needs. Under the terms of the Withdrawal Agreement, during the transition period, UK experts can participate in certain meetings upon invitation, albeit without voting. Based on your discussions with the Commission, what degree of participation in governance meetings and negotiations would have been possible, and why did you believe this was insufficient to secure the UK's interests?

When answering a Private Notice Question on Monday 13 July, Lord Callanan stated: "We would have had no say on what vaccines were procured nor on their price, quantity or delivery schedule, nor even on whether they would be made available to people in this country."¹ The last of these statements does not tally with the population-based allocation principle that would apply to Member State participants in the scheme. What led you to have concerns in this regard?

As you will be aware, your decision not to participate was the subject of widespread media coverage. These reports included further reasons that were not detailed in your EM,

¹ Column 1414: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2020-07-13/debates/E512358A-245A-452F-9CC3-EB15110D9951/EUCoronavirusVaccineProgramme>

specifically that joining the EU scheme risked delaying access to a vaccine by three to six months; and that you did not expect significant cost savings to arise from negotiating with vaccine developers as part of a larger bloc. Please clarify whether you believe either of these rationales to be true, and if so, on what grounds.

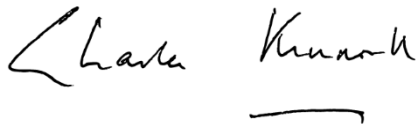
Because the EU's vaccine strategy is being funded by the 2020 budget, to which the UK has contributed, the UK is paying into the scheme despite your decision not to take part. Was this a factor in your decision-making process?

Please clarify whether, had you decided to participate in the scheme, the UK could have remained involved beyond the end of the transition period.

You noted in your EM that the devolved administrations had been consulted in preparing the EM, and that although the matter itself is reserved, they have an interest relating to their responsibilities. Did the devolved administrations support your decision not to participate in the EU's vaccine procurement scheme? How did you take their views into account in reaching your decision?

The Committee continues to take an active interest in this matter and we look forward to a response in 10 working days.

I am copying this letter to Sir William Cash MP, Chair of the Commons European Scrutiny Committee; Jessica Mulley, Clerk to the Commons Committee; Les Saunders and Donald Harris, Cabinet Office.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lord Kinnoull', with a horizontal line underneath.

Lord Kinnoull
Chair of the European Union Committee