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

Thank you for your letter dated 9 September on the UK's decision not to participate in an EU joint procurement initiative on vaccines.

The rationale for the Government's decision not to participate in this initiative was set out in my letter to you of 10 August. Decisions concerning UK participation in EU joint procurement schemes for which we are eligible during the Transition Period are made on a case by case basis and take into account the arrangements relating to UK contributions to the 2020 EU budget.

The Government considered both the potential advantages and disadvantages of UK participation. The European Commission asked for a decision before it had completed any negotiations with vaccine companies, which meant it was not possible to compare specific terms and prices. However, in addition to discussions with counterparts in the Commission, my officials engaged vaccine businesses and experts to gain insights into companies' likely pricing strategies and determine whether joining the scheme would be in the UK's best interests.

We concluded that we could not justify participation in this scheme, not least because the UK would have had no say in decisions concerning which manufacturers to negotiate with, or the price, volume, and the delivery schedule, unlike the 27 EU Member States who all participate in the Steering Group. We would also be bound to end our negotiations with individual vaccine suppliers as soon as the EU decided to start such negotiations, restricting our ability to pursue our own supply agreements.

The UK has secured access to 6 different candidates – 5 of which since our decision not to participate in the EU procurement scheme – and committed in total over £360M to support finding and manufacturing a vaccine in the UK.

Yours sincerely,

THE RT HON ALOK SHARMA MP
Secretary of State for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy