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Brussels, 26 March 2021

Dear Capt. Ardillon,

Thank you for your letter of 18 January 2021 on facilitating vaccination processes for seafarers. The Commission shares your concerns regarding the importance of including seafarers in vaccination schemes, as they ensure the global supply chain.

Seafarers are the workers transporting our food, medicines as well as energy products and ensuring the global supply chain. Transporting 75% of EU trade, shipping keeps us connected to the rest of the world and our economies afloat.

As essential workers, seafarers are listed as one of the categories that should be exempted from travel restrictions. This has been stressed in the Commission Communication of 8 April 2020, which underscores that Member States should allow seafarers to transit and travel.

The Commission Communication of 15 October 2020 on preparedness for COVID-19 vaccination strategies and vaccine deployment, also lists transportation workers as a priority group to be considered by Member States for vaccination against COVID-19. It is however important to note that, in line with Article 168 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the responsibility for organising and delivering health services and medical care, including for vaccinations strategies and services, lies with EU Member States. Each EU Member State is therefore responsible for the deployment of the COVID-19 vaccines and for defining the priority groups that should be considered for vaccination first.

Capt. H. Ardillon  
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Ensuring the immunisation of seafarers holds additional challenges due to the global nature of the sector and working patterns. Seafarers who are EU residents will be covered by Member States' vaccination campaigns. Yet, it is unclear how and where inoculations will happen for seafarers from third countries. Some of the main labour-supplying States have not yet begun vaccinating or have ordered a limited number of doses, often of vaccines that have not (yet) been licensed in the EU. We are discussing these issues with Member States and industry representatives at working level as well as with the International Maritime Organisation.

Furthermore, vaccines not approved in the EU may be included in the list of WHO prequalified vaccines if they meet WHO standards of quality, safety and efficacy. They can then be considered acceptable, in principle, for procurement by UN agencies. However, the inclusion in the list does not imply any approval by WHO of the vaccines. The EU is currently discussing this with WHO and other actors such as the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) how to address the entry of people vaccinated with vaccines not licensed in the EU.

No region of the world is safe until we are all safe. Ensuring that no one is left behind is a key objective. In this context, the EU is co-leading the international collaborative effort needed to fight the pandemic. As part of this, the EU also supports countries in need covered by the COVAX-facility, including key labour-supplying countries.

It will take time before most seafarers travelling for crew relief are immunised. Until then, safe crew change practices and protocols, such as those contained in the Neptune Declaration of 23 January, supported by a broad coalition from the shipping industry and beyond, are essential for ensuring smooth maritime transport and facilitating safe seafarer mobility and crew changes.

We would like to assure you that we are fully committed to taking all steps to protect the health of our citizens.

Yours sincerely,



Adina Vălean



Stella Kyriakides