Translation

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PRESS CONFERENCE

Monday, 1 February 2021, 7.32 p.m., Berlin

Subject: Conference of the Federation and the Länder to discuss vaccine supply

Speakers: Federal Chancellor Dr Angela Merkel, Governing Mayor Michael Müller, Minister-President Dr Markus Söder

STATE SECRETARY SEIBERT: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. The Federation, Länder, industry representatives and commissioners from the European Commission have held discussions on vaccine supply. The Federal Chancellor, Governing Mayor of Berlin and the Minister-President of Bavaria will now brief you about this meeting.

FEDERAL CHANCELLOR DR MERKEL: Ladies and gentlemen, yes, we held these discussions today. Mr Seibert already mentioned who was involved, so I don't intend to reiterate that now. These were really important discussions for the Federation and the Länder as they brought us up to speed in terms of our collective level of knowledge. In my view, they were very valuable and also insightful. Let me say first of all that everyone understands – this is in the public interest of each and every citizen – the urgency of the question as to how we continue with the vaccine roll-out and what we can achieve at every stage of the process.

I'd like to start by saying a big thank you to those who are working on a daily basis to produce vaccines for us. You are treading entirely new and unknown paths, and so you cannot make predictions for any longer period of time. For our part, we have made it clear that the greatest level of reliability is important to us all – especially for the Länder because the available vaccine has to be administered, of course. This therefore isn't only about producing the vaccine, but also about getting it to the Länder and to the people. I'd also like to thank those who suggested that these discussions be held as I believe that this has achieved important momentum that will stand us in good stead in our further work.

And now we have questions that are of interest to everybody. In addition, we have to contend with mutating viruses, which means that the danger and aggressiveness of the virus could increase even more. We shouldn't forget that our discussion isn't taking place in the context of normal, everyday life, but against the backdrop of a lockdown in which schools and kindergartens aren't operating normally, in which businesses are closed, cultural events aren't taking place, travel isn't possible and members of the

public have to accept restrictions. We all know that vaccinations constitute a large part of the path out of the pandemic, hence the urgency of the matter, of course.

This is, I believe, about three questions, which we also discussed today in various different formats. The first question is are the quantities that were pledged really arriving? Are things proceeding according to plan? Secondly, we are, of course, asking ourselves how we compare with other countries. We've heard various reports from Israel, the US and from the UK. This is why representatives from the European Commission also took part in our discussions. The third question is what do we want to keep in place in the approach that we're currently taking, and what do we want to change or upgrade? I'd like to address each of these questions in turn.

Firstly, there's the issue of reliability for the deliveries by the companies for the different quarters of this year. We must make a distinction here between the commitments of vaccine producers whose vaccines have already been approved – this applies to BioNTech/Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca – and two additional vaccine producers – that also took part in today's discussions, namely Johnson & Johnson and CureVac – which both anticipate applying for approval in the second quarter or the beginning of the third quarter of the year, but which have yet to receive the green light. Their delivery quantities are already in the pipeline – they are also producing up front, for which they have received money from the European Commission, i.e. also from the German taxpayer – but we cannot yet firmly factor them in.

This means that we're essentially dealing with a situation in which we have a minimum scenario, which we can now count on reasonably well, and an optimal scenario, i.e. if all vaccines are approved. For both scenarios – the figures have yet to be published by the Health Ministry, should you not yet have them to hand – we can say that we can keep to our statement that we will be able to offer every citizen a vaccination by the end of the third quarter, i.e. by the end of the summer. However, the manufacturers also told us today that things can always happen in production – none of them have any experience of this yet – which they are unable to foresee. But I believe that the figures for the quarters as a whole are quite relevant.

There are about nine million children in Germany; the current vaccines are not approved for them. The vaccine made by Moderna is, I believe, approved from age 16, the vaccine manufactured by BioNTech from 18. Other than that, there are no approved vaccines for children yet. These will come on stream in the summer months at the earliest. That means that, with a population of 83 million, we essentially need a vaccine supply for about 73 million people. If you look at the numbers for the individual quarters, you can see that even if Johnson & Johnson and CureVac aren't approved, based on the numbers we have now, vaccines can be made available to everyone. If the other two vaccines are also approved, then we would even have a larger supply.

We also have to ask how this compares with other countries. In this context, it goes without saying that we also discussed the question as to which production sites are supplying Europe. In this regard, you have to understand that the US, owing to its "War Act", has a situation in which it essentially exports virtually nothing to third countries. So that means that vaccine production at US production sites is basically operating to meet domestic demand. Europe is thus restricted to using its own sites. Fortunately, these sites do exist; we can be happy about that. Moreover, increasing numbers of partnerships are being entered into, such as by CureVac and Bayer today; but that

won't matter until the third or fourth quarter, or until early 2022. However, Europe doesn't have an infinite number of such sites, which means that our production capacities are limited, especially in the first quarter – things will get much better in the second quarter.

Secondly, the EU has not opted for emergency approvals. We know that the UK, for example, approved AstraZeneca's vaccine within 24 hours. I think there are good reasons why the EU stuck to the EMA's approval procedure, because this is also about trust at the end of the day. This isn't an emergency approval, but a provisional approval, so it has a different quality.

Thirdly, we have decided – as the head of the Standing Commission on Vaccination told us again today – to administer the second vaccination at the interval specified by the EMA. This means that the second vaccination will be administered after a specific number of weeks. Discussions are also being held as to whether it is possible to deviate from this. We haven't yet reached a decision on this deviation because we believe we should work on the basis of information from the experts.

A further issue is the fact that there are countries – Israel, for example – that approach data and the digital transformation in a much different way. This is an issue where data protection plays a major role. We will doubtlessly keep on holding discussions about this in the years to come. I personally think that we should make as many gestures in a spirit of trust as possible, similar to the app, so that people also place their trust in the vaccination, and firmly uphold data protection here.

A final point. The European Union negotiated for a very long time partly because liability issues were at stake, and decided to take the entire issue of liability to the political level and not to leave any of this matter to the manufacturers. This is a decision on which the European Commission enjoys my support. There has also been a lengthy debate about these liability issues; because if something were to happen, it would have a very big impact – here in Germany at any rate, but also in many other European countries. That's why the path has indeed been slower in some places. But I think there are also good reasons why it has been slower.

Following our discussions today, what do we want to keep in place, and what do we want to change? We want to continue to do everything in our power to promote trust, as I just mentioned. A genuinely important point that we have always had in our minds is the free movement of goods. The manufacturers were at pains to point this out to us once again today. You can create greater transparency, but the supply chains – into the European Union, out of the EU and back in again – are very closely interlinked. A great many steps are required before a vaccine is produced.

And then we want to continue to stick to the prioritisation specified by the Standing Commission. I believe that transparency throughout the vaccination process continues to be the number-one priority.

We want to change one thing because the Länder have rightly said that we need good management for when vaccination appointments can be issued to members of the public. We have put in place a national vaccination strategy, which was developed by the Federal Minister of Health in cooperation with the Länder. This national vaccination strategy will now also include a national vaccination plan, in accordance with which we

will define what this means to the best of our knowledge, based on delivery dates and volumes. Where it isn't yet possible to make forecasts – no manufacturer is telling us today for the second quarter what their delivery volumes will be each week, and the manufacturers have also told us very clearly why this isn't possible – we will engage in modelling. We're going to model whether supplies will arrive at the same time each month or whether they're going to arrive maybe at the end of the month, and develop these different scenarios simultaneously to achieve greater certainty in terms of how invitation management can be handled for people in the country – in accordance with the priority list of the Standing Commission on Vaccination. I believe that there was consensus on this issue today. We agreed that the Minister of Health, who is developing the national vaccination plan together with the Ministers of Health of the Länder, will update us on the progress made on this plan at the next conference of the heads of government of the Länder.

The good news is that, as far as BioNTech is concerned, we now know the delivery dates – until 22 or 23 February; for the other two vaccines, this is only until 17 February. That's not long when inviting members of the public, especially if they're very elderly people. We have, I think, also made it very clear to the manufacturers that every additional week for which they can forecast deliveries is welcome. But they, for their part, have made it clear to us, and I think that's understandable, that they cannot promise more than what they believe to be honest. I think the issue of transparency, but also the issue of honesty – what we can and cannot promise in a process such as this – are very important.

A final point. Of course, we also asked ourselves where we can be of assistance. There are a number of areas in which we have been asked to help out. We – the Federal Minister for Economic Affairs together with the German Chemical Industry Association – will develop a platform via which we will make two areas in particular transparent, namely ampoule and stopper production. This might sound a bit trivial, but if you haven't got anything to put the vaccines into, then you'll be in trouble. This also applies to the instruments used for vaccination, i.e. syringes and the like. These are things that need to be looked into. The same goes for sensitive substances and how we can explore the full scope for stepping up production even further. There are intermediates that are so strategically important that, if you had more of them, you could produce larger numbers of vaccine doses, but no manufacturer has these right now. If we as politicians can support this, then we will do so. There will be no lack of money and commitment, but, of course, this also depends on the technical resources available.

So, overall, there's clarity about the quarterly deliveries, so there's clarity surrounding the robustness of, as things currently stand – I can't say more than this – the promise that we will be able to offer a vaccine to each and every citizen by the end of the summer, i.e. at the end of the third quarter; the end of the summer is 21 September; even if Johnson & Johnson and CureVac don't get approval, as well as clarity about how "just in time" production is. However, the Federation and the Länder will endeavour at the political level to use modelling to set out as best as possible how to achieve the greatest degree of reliability with respect to forecasting deliveries. Thank you very much.

FEDERAL MINISTER MÜLLER: …