

The EU's Covid vaccination failure – an Irish perspective

Professor Anthony Coughlan, Emeritus Professor of Trinity College Dublin, gives an Irish perspective on the EU's Covid vaccination failure. While the EU dithers over approving the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, Brexit Britain's newfound freedom has allowed it to race ahead in vaccinating its population.

"We don't want national solo runs and think the most effective protection for us can be reached with a European approach."

– German Chancellor Angela Merkel, quoted in report by Derek Scally
in the *Irish Times*, 6 January 2021

"I think we have to be creative. It seems like the EU doesn't have a robust plan to have adequate vaccine supply for the whole EU population in a timely fashion. The Government maybe has to think about going to the UK for further supply, and to do it as part of an all-Ireland plan. It would make sense to have vaccines both north and south of the border in a synchronized fashion."

– Prof. Jack Lambert, Professor of Medicine and Infectious Diseases, Mater

Hospital, Belfast (*The Sunday Times*, 10 January, page 6)

"[Professor] Mills accepted that Ireland has been a bit slower than other countries [as regards vaccinating against Covid-19], but he also believes that supply will be the major hurdle to overcome. 'And we have absolutely no control over that, it's in the hands of the EU authorities. Most of the rest of Europe is struggling as it is. It's very frustrating for the public, as well as doctors.' "

– Prof. Kingston Mills, Professor of Experimental Immunology, Trinity College Dublin quoted in report in the *Sunday Business Post*, 10 January, page 15

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine which the EU Commission has ordered – although seemingly in insufficient amounts – costs between €12 and €15 a shot. By contrast, Britain's Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is being provided on a not-for-profit basis by its manufacturers for around €3 a shot, and is already being rolled out on a mass scale in Britain and Northern Ireland.

Yet the EU authorities have still not even got round to approving the British vaccine for use in EU Member States. The EU Commission has even slapped down the Irish government's plans to take delivery of the vaccine before approval, in order to be able to roll it out the second that approval is granted. Why should Ireland have to wait for EU approval in any case? It is not required by any EU treaty.

The rate of vaccination in Northern Ireland just now is seven times what it is in the Republic. It seems safe to say that Irish people are currently dying, many others are suffering, and many more will die and suffer in the coming period, because of Chancellor Merkel's insistence that the EU should be in charge of the anti-Covid vaccine programme – rather than individual Member States like Ireland taking the necessary steps to protect their own citizens.

The last thing the Brussels people want to acknowledge in the first month of Brexit is that, thanks to its new-found independence, Brexit Britain has gained a significant health lead in the current crisis facing humanity. But the chart below, showing vaccination rates in the UK, Ireland and the EU as a whole, tells its own story.



If Ireland's politicians had not been so venomously hostile to Britain over Brexit, they might have negotiated with London quite some time back to have the whole island included in the Oxford–AstraZeneca roll-out – using a vaccine that is available at a fraction of the cost of the other available vaccines. But that would have meant our politicians breaking with 'Team EU'. Perhaps it may still not be too late for them to pluck up courage to do that?

It looks as if this catastrophic Covid crisis is an excuse for another power-grab by Brussels at the expense of its Member States, facilitated by Mrs Merkel's ultra-Europhilia. The Brussels bureaucracy is notoriously inefficient. Getting more supranational power for itself is always its priority. The EU Commission sees Covid-19 as another 'beneficial crisis' to enable it expand its health powers under Art. 168 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TfEU).

As for Chancellor Markel's stricture on 'solo runs', one can think of quite a number of solo runs that she and her

Government made during her time in office: for example, helping to topple the government of Ukraine in 2014 and stimulating a civil war in that country; insisting on the bailout by taxpayers of bond-holders in bankrupt Irish and other EU banks during the currency crisis of 2012; or the savage bullying of Greece during its currency crisis. And now, to top it all, we find out that Germany itself did a 'solo run' on Covid vaccines back in September, when it struck its own deal to secure an extra 30 million doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, outside of the common EU purchasing programme.

It is time Irish voters questioned the spineless willingness of Irish politicians to go along with such blatant double standards in this matter of life and death.