



but the vaccines that have been developed include the Pfizer BioNTech version that was developed in Germany, and produced mainly in Belgium but first licensed by the UK on December 2nd (by the EU on the 20th). Then there is the Oxford AstraZeneca (a UK Swedish conglomerate) vaccine, which was developed by scientists in the UK, and is largely produced here and in Belgium. Again, it was licensed by the UK on December 30th. (This has yet to be licensed by the EU.) The problems with the delivery of both seem to be in the low production quantities in these Belgian facilities.

The EU member states are up in arms. They were bullied into handing over the ordering and licensing procedures for the vaccine to Brussels and the European Union. This was to show solidarity (read: fealty) and for the European Union to prove that their disasters from the first lockdown, where they stood paralysed by the glare as the virus ripped through Italy and Spain were things of the past. Sadly, on a matter of absolute importance, the sclerotic central bureaucracy has failed. The stark reality is that thousands of European citizens will die as a result.

As the French CEO of AstraZeneca, Pascal Soriot, has put it:

*'Actually, there's nothing serious about it. But look, the sites that have the lowest productivity in the network are the sites that are supplying Europe. The UK agreement was reached in one, three months before the European one. As you could imagine, the UK government said the supply coming out of the UK supply chain would go for the UK first. Basically, that's how it is. In the EU agreement it is mentioned that the manufacturing sites in the UK were an option for Europe, but only later.'*

In a sideswipe at the behaviour of European politicians trying to queer the pitch for the UK and for others he is very clear:

*'for Europe to say they are going to control exports is the contrary to what they said a few months ago, that they were*

*going to give access to ever bod .'*

National governments are being blamed by their citizens for these failures, and the sight of a newly independent Britain acting effectively, is just too much for some to bear.

Earlier this week (25 January), the trusted German financial newspaper *Handelsblatt*, in what appears to be a fit of pique, claimed the AstraZeneca vaccine was only effective for 8% of over 65s. This produced a furious response from the firm and the UK. The German Health Ministry has had to slap the newspaper down: the 8% referred to the number of over 65s the vaccine had been tested upon, not its efficacy rate. *Handelsblatt* is now blaming the government for the mixed messages. The spat shows quite the necessity to do the UK down. It is a matter of humbled vainglory.

Worse news for the EU came from France on Monday, where the prestigious, Paris-based, Pasteur Institute has thrown in the towel. It had to admit that its vaccine was no more effective than standing around with no medical assistance, in fact, it was worse. This combined with the French firm Sanofi estimating that its vaccine will not be ready until the end of 2021 despite having well over \$100m pumped into its program by the EU has caused national soul searching on the banks of the Seine.

One German lawmaker, Dr Gunnar Beck, a member of the European Parliament, said, It is a nightmare for the EU that Brexit Britain's vaccine scheme is working better than the EU's. As he put it:

*' the slow, d sfunctional approach has been a huge failure for the Co ission. he were deter ined to control this at EU level, the ust be held to account as uch as national govern ents are. Outside the EU, the UK has been able to fast-track approval, purchase doses and start protecting their citizens.'*

All this has to hurt, which leads us to the situation where we the European Commission, the German, Spanish, and other European governments are trying to strong arm AstraZeneca into possibly diverting vaccines meant for the UK to the EU. This action, against a friendly neighbour, has precedent. In March last year one French company, Valmy SAS, was forced by French customs officials to divert an order back to France for PPE from the UK's National Health Service. And the battle for protective masks amongst European nations, supposedly driven by fraternity and brotherly love was unedifying, to say the least. That system too was supposed to be managed by the central bureaucracy and resulted in demonstrations in several countries against the EU itself. Now, with the European vaccine crisis we may slowly be seeing that while the EU may be effective during normal times at accruing power to itself, when things are hard it is clear that it is the nimbler, independent nations that can best serve their populations.

When that the message gets through to the peoples of Europe, the internal pressures and differing national priorities will make it very hard for Mrs von der Leyen and her cohorts to reassert control. The exile options are still open for her, however. Sadly, the virus has hit Elba, where last week they reported 8 new cases of the virus. St Helena, mind you, is