



Pfizer CEO Pulls Out of Testifying to EU Parliament COVID Panel – POLITICO

Description

Pfizer Chief Executive Albert Bourla has pulled out of an appointment to testify before the European Parliament's special committee on COVID-19, at which he was expected to face tough questions on how secretive vaccine deals were struck.

The decision follows an audit report into the EU's vaccine procurement strategy published earlier in the month that raised new questions about contact between Bourla and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen that preceded a multibillion-euro vaccine contract.

The head of the U.S. pharmaceutical giant, the largest supplier of COVID-19 vaccines to the EU, was scheduled to appear before the panel on October 10. The committee is meeting with key officials involved in the EU's vaccine procurement process to draw lessons on how to respond to future pandemics. Other pharmaceutical executives have addressed the committee, including the CEO of Moderna and senior officials from AstraZeneca and Sanofi.

The committee's chair, Belgian MEP Kathleen Van Brempt, told POLITICO she "deeply regrets" the decision taken by Pfizer.

After a visit to BioNTech's headquarters last week, Van Brempt had said in a written statement that she looked forward to discussions "with other CEOs" including "Mr. Albert Bourla, the CEO of Pfizer" on October 10.

The report, by the European Court of Auditors, found that von der Leyen had been directly involved in preliminary negotiations for the EU's biggest vaccine contract, for up to 1.8 billion doses of the BioNTech/Pfizer vaccine, which was concluded in May 2021. This was a departure from the negotiating procedure followed with other contracts, where a joint negotiating team made up of officials from the Commission and member countries conducted exploratory talks.

The EU watchdog also noted that the Commission refused to provide records of the discussions with Pfizer, either in the form of minutes, names of experts consulted, agreed terms, or other evidence.

Already in 2021, the New York Times reported on the seemingly-cozy relationship between Bourla and

von der Leyen, with the two exchanging text messages in the run-up to the deal.

Contacted by POLITICO, a spokesperson for Pfizer said the company's president of international development markets, Janine Small, would attend the committee hearing. "She has been identified as best placed to support the committee in meeting their objectives," the spokesperson said.

By Carlo Martuscelli

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