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President of the European Commission

Opening ceremony of the World Health Summit

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Vielen Dank Professor Pries.

Und herzlichen Glückwunsch für die Übernahme der Präsidentschaft des Weltgesundheitsgipfels.

Dear Dr Tedros,

Lieber Jens Spahn,

Distinguished guests,

It is an honour for me to be, once again, a patron of the World Health Summit.

You might remember when we met one year ago, I told you about the first steps that we had taken to increase cooperation inside Europe.

The world was caught off guard by COVID-19.

No country was truly prepared to tackle a health emergency on this scale.

One year ago, we didn't even know whether a safe and effective vaccine would be available.

We had to learn how to scale up vaccine production.

And we had to implement the largest vaccine program ever.

Today more than 75% of adults in the European Union are fully vaccinated.

We have delivered more than 850 million doses to European citizens.

And in parallel, we have shipped more than 1 billion doses to the rest of the world.

We were the only region to do that.

I promised that every second dose produced in Europe will be exported. And we kept that promise, and delivered to 150 countries so far.

So this was European solidarity at its best.

And there is a second success story. Thanks to the European Digital Covid Certificate travel is possible again.

43 countries from 4 continents logged into our Digital Certificate. And 27 more are lining up to join.

But we are not out of the woods yet.

The year since we last saw each other has been unbelievably hard.

And at the same time, it has been very enlightening and incredibly productive.

Politicians and the public have understood that national solutions alone are not enough to fight a pandemic.

And even more importantly: We have understood that mutual preparedness is everything in a global health crisis.

The European Union drew its lessons and acted.

We have created a new Health Emergency preparedness and Response Authority, in short HERA.

HERA's task is to better prepare for health emergencies, to detect them promptly, and to respond collectively.

Its scope reaches from the collective procurement of protective equipment for example, medicines and vaccines, to coordinating the rules for testing and quarantine.

HERA is ready to launch early next year.

Now what are the tasks of this new authority?

In normal times – we call this the preparedness phase - HERA will work to assess health threats.

To detect them at an early stage, including by innovative methods.

For instance, today we can predict the spread of COVID-19 in a community by monitoring the wastewater.

HERA will invest in that, in sharing data through the new European Health Data Space, and in assessing new and emerging biological threats.

Such as those connected for example to the melting of permafrost or the destruction of biodiversity.

Or take the increasing threat of antimicrobial resistance.

While the word is still focused on fighting COVID-19, this risk is progressing silently.

If our medicines do not work anymore, many lives will be lost.

But we need to see even further.

Bioterrorism or the unintentional release of pathogens are real scenarios that require better preparedness as well.

HERA will make use of all the available knowledge and intelligence.

HERA's task is to identify threats early on and make sure that we have the necessary medical countermeasures available.

HERA will be a watchtower safeguarding public health.

In crisis times, HERA will be given special powers.

For instance, to coordinate action with our Member States through a Health Crisis Board - because we need fast and decisive decision

making - or to procure medical equipment, medicines, vaccines or critical raw materials, to tackle the crisis.

HERA will support the development of state of the art diagnostics that can be readily modified.

But also high-end medical devices such as the next generation of portable ventilators.

And HERA will work on new, flexible technologies for even better vaccines.

You all know, the demand is huge.

HERA will help to bridge gaps in the existing European health system and take cooperation to a new level.

Let me give you some examples.

It will work on pan-European clinical trials.

It will create a network of European production sites for critical medical countermeasures, which then can be activated quickly in case of emergency.

And it will work with private companies to address the bottlenecks in our supply chains.

In early 2022, we will launch work on 'ever ready' industrial production capacities to manufacture vaccines and medicines rapidly in case of a crisis.

And finally - I do not need to explain to you that global cooperation is vital: Cross-border health threats need cross-border responses.

So HERA's horizon will be wider than our Union.

Another of HERA's core tasks will be to join forces with its international counterparts.

We have already started to build bridges to the work of the WHO and of BARDA in the United States.

We are in contact with third countries in our neighbourhood such as the UK, Switzerland and the Western Balkan countries.

Our aim is to form a core group that will lead to a truly global network of HERAs.

And more will come with the African CDC, with the future African Medicines Agency.

And of course with other global players such as CEPI, GAVI and the philanthropic foundations.

Beyond such cooperation, I am convinced that we need a global standard for health preparedness.

This is why I organised, together with the G20, the Global Health Summit in Rome earlier this year.

With the Rome Declaration, the world has endorsed a set of guiding principles for global preparedness.

And preparedness is now at the centre of our Union's action.

And of course, the importance of this new endeavour must also be reflected in its resources.

Therefore, I have proposed an unprecedented 50-billion euro budget over seven years for our health preparedness mission.

Our Union, our Member States, and of course the private sector have a role to play and a contribution to make.

Europe stands ready to contribute and invest in pandemic preparedness - at home and worldwide.

Ladies and gentlemen,

for over twenty years now, the World Health Summit has been the spearhead of international cooperation on health.

Today, finally, there is broad consensus.

We must improve our preparedness and our ability to respond to health crises. So let's make it happen.

I wish all of you a very fruitful World Health Summit.

Thank you very much.