



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
has written an article for the Tagesspiegel
newspaper, published on 18 November 2020**

The latest news from the Mainz company Biontech and its American partner Pfizer, and from the US concern Moderna, is truly cause for celebration. Initial trial results indicate more than 90 percent efficacy against coronavirus for both vaccines, which are based on the revolutionary mRNA technology. More effective, therefore, than most experts expected the first generation of COVID-19 vaccines to be. At the same time, other vaccine candidates using different immunisation strategies are also making impressive progress, not least that of the Tübingen-based company Curevac. Approval for several vaccines now seems to be within reach. The production of hundreds of millions of doses is already under way. We have good reason to hope that in the coming year we will gradually be able to lift the tough restrictions imposed to contain the pandemic. That is a light at the end of the tunnel of our sorely tried patience.

Yet before that is possible, we not only need to overcome huge logistical and medical challenges, from mass production of the vaccine, through distribution under difficult conditions, to correct vaccination. The "vaccine moment of truth" ahead of us will also pose a challenge to politicians and to us as citizens. The basic prerequisite for the success of such an unprecedented vaccination campaign is understanding, trust and optimism from all of us. However, we have a long way to go before we return to normality. Yet whether as many lives as possible can be saved also depends on our level of insight and the wisdom we have.

That goes first and foremost for our own society. Who should be given priority when it comes to receiving the vaccine? Members of the Standing Committee on Vaccination, the German Ethics Council and the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina have drafted recommendations to this end. Particularly in the first few months, when there will not be enough doses of vaccine for everyone, those who belong to at-risk groups due to underlying health problems or

because of their age, as well as healthcare workers, should take precedence. If we follow those recommendations, it will be possible to prevent many serious cases and deaths, and we will be able to protect the people who are particularly at risk because of the nature of their work. This approach is based on the realisation that more lives could be saved by the proper distribution strategy for the vaccine than without such rules.

An even greater challenge is to ensure that this insight is also embraced at international level. Within the European Union we have pooled our resources in order to improve our chances of gaining access to as many promising vaccine candidates as possible. But almost half of the world's population live in states which do not have the means to procure the status of preferential customers with the producers. As a result, in poorer but no less needy countries only a small percentage of the population will be vaccinated while in richer countries a disproportionately high percentage will be vaccinated.

In the face of the virus, we are without doubt a global community. COVID-19 does not distinguish between nationalities or skin colour. But are we also in a position to provide a response as an international community? If so, we ought to realise that it is in our own enlightened interests to first vaccinate some people in all countries rather than all people in just a few countries. This is not only an act of solidarity. A pandemic which is stemmed at home but not defeated abroad will continue to rob us of lives, but also of prosperity. Not to mention the danger of the virus mutating elsewhere, which would then put us at risk once again.

As early as last spring, Germany and Europe put forward important ideas for an international initiative coordinated by the WHO to ensure globally fair, transparent and affordable access to vaccines. By the end of next year, two billion vaccine doses are thus to be provided for more than 90 low or medium-income countries. But by no means all the large countries have contributed what they can to this Covax initiative.

Simply by signing the contract with Biontech, the European Union has obtained access rights to up to 300 million doses of vaccine. If other vaccines are approved, which is likely, this number will increase considerably. Germany and Europe now need to send a political message that they are willing from the outset to pass on a proportion of these contingents in order to give protection to healthcare workers in the poorer countries of the world as quickly as possible.

We can be proud of the fact that, thanks to the impressive achievements of Özlem Türeci, Uğur Şahin and their team, a crucial contribution to overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic will come from Germany. But we would have reason to be even prouder if we were to have the insight and the wisdom to be a role model for the world in

this situation. A model of the close cooperation based on solidarity that defines our European Union. And an example of how we Europeans envisage a world in which international cooperation is more than paying mere lip service, where it is literally life-saving.

Rarely in the history of humankind have the fruits of international cooperation that save lives and underpin prosperity and the cold consequences of an "every man for himself" policy been so blatantly laid out in front of us as they are now in this COVID-19 pandemic. If we fail here, how can we remain confident that we as the international community can win the battle against the much more complicated threat of climate change? Conversely, if together we succeed in thwarting COVID-19 throughout the world in the coming year, we can stride forth with new optimism also when it comes to finding an effective response to human-induced climate change. The fact that at this time we have good reason to hope that the United States under President Biden will join such an initiative should be an additional incentive for us now to send the right political signal.