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WEEKLY EU HEALTHCARE NEWS UPDATE

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WHO STALLED THE INVESTIGATION OF COVID-19 ORIGINS

The World Health Organization's investigation concerning the origins of COVID-19 has stalled due to ongoing difficulties in collaborating with China, which has refused to provide necessary access and data. The sensitive studies conducted there were intended to pinpoint the source of the pandemic.

At the beginning of 2021, an international group of experts sent by the WHO traveled to Wuhan. Together with Chinese researchers, they reviewed the evidence on when and how the virus could have emerged, as part of phase one. The report was released two months later outlining four possible scenarios, the most probable being that SARS-CoV-2 spread from bats to humans, possibly through an intermediate species. Phase one was designed to lay the groundwork for a second phase of in-depth studies to pin down what happened in China and elsewhere.

However, two years after that high-profile trip, the WHO has abandoned its phase-two plans. In the report published by "Nature", Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove, COVID-19 technical lead at the WHO was quoted saying that the WHO had abandoned its plans for Phase II of the COVID origin studies: "There is no phase two," she reportedly said. While WHO protocols had called for extensive follow-up studies in China, "that plan has changed", she added, saying: "The politics across the world of this hampered progress on understanding the origins."

Meanwhile, in the U.S., Republicans have launched an investigation into China and the origins of the pandemic.

Source: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-00283-y>

URSULA VON DER LEYEN SUED BY THE NEW YORK TIMES OVER HER REFUSAL TO PUBLISH TEXTS WITH PFIZER'S CEO

Almost two years after European Commission President admitted to The New York Times that she negotiated a COVID-19 vaccine deal with Pfizer boss Albert Bourla through text messages, the newspaper is suing the EU institution over its refusal to make the texts public.

The New York Times, the first media to have brought the affair to light in April 2021, filed its case against the European Commission on 25 January, though it has only been visible on the public register of the EU Court of Justice since Monday (13 February). The lawsuit follows an inquiry from European Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly which identified maladministration in the Commission's attempts to originally recover the text messages, following a public access request by netzpolitik.org journalist Alexander Fanta. The Ombudsman's investigation found that the Commission did not explicitly ask the President's office to look for text messages.

Earlier, Germany's Bild daily filed a series of lawsuits against the Commission seeking the disclosure of documents related to negotiations to buy the COVID-19 vaccines made by Pfizer/BioNTech and AstraZeneca. In response, the Commissioner for Transparency Věra Jourová claimed that the text messages may have been deleted, due to their "short-lived, ephemeral nature."

While several of its petitions were thrown out by the courts, Bild did obtain some documents relating to the talks, including email correspondence starting in June 2020. However, no information on von der Leyen's prior contacts with Pfizer CEO Bourla came to light as a result of litigation.

Source: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/02/14/ursula-von-der-leyen-sued-new-york-times-refusal-disclose-pfizer/>

WHO: EARTHQUAKES IN TURKEY, SYRIA ARE THE 'WORST NATURAL DISASTER' IN EUROPEAN REGION IN A CENTURY

The twin earthquakes that devastated south-central Turkiye and northern Syria on 6 February are one of the greatest disasters in 100 years in the Europe region. To help the victims, the organization has launched a \$43M appeal to support the earthquake response, with likely more to come.

At least 39,000 people have died in Turkey and Syria since last week's earthquake, with UNICEF saying the final death toll would be "a terrifying figure". Reuters reported United Nations relief coordinator Martin Griffiths explained that the reported death toll is likely to "double or more".

With water and sanitation facilities being hit, concerns are mounting over health issues, including the spread of infectious diseases. Healthcare facilities have also been gravely damaged.

According to the Turkish authorities, an estimated 80,000 people are in hospital, placing a huge strain on the health system, itself badly damaged by the disaster," Kluge said. "We have initiated the largest deployment of Emergency Medical Teams in the WHO European Region in our 75-year history," he underlined. Their goal is to support the damaged medical facilities, focusing on the high number of trauma patients and those with catastrophic injuries.

Source: <https://www.dw.com/en/turkey-syria-earthquakes-worst-natural-disaster-in-a-century/a-64696911>

Thank you for your attention!

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