

Pfizer sues Poland over COVID-19 vaccine

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Pfizer has escalated its dispute with Poland over surplus Covid-19 vaccine doses ordered under a giant contract with the European Union.

The case was filed this week in Brussels. Pfizer asked for 6 billion zlotys (\$1.5 billion) for the 60 million doses that the Polish government rejected after it stopped receiving vaccines in April 2022. Warsaw was obliged to buy its share of vaccines in based on a controversial contract that the European Commission had signed with Pfizer in 2021 on behalf of EU countries.

The bloc ended up ordering 1.1 billion doses under the contract, saddling EU states with a surplus of vaccines as the COVID-19 pandemic petered out. The EU prosecutor's office has announced an investigation into the procurement process amid allegations of corruption and secret deals.

Polish officials have called into question European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's role in concluding the deal. Von der Leyen admitted to communicating privately with Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla for weeks during contract negotiations, but the European Commission said last year that it could not find her message exchanges with the manager. The first hearing in Pfizer's lawsuit is scheduled for December 6. Earlier this year, the company offered to give the EU more time to complete minimum vaccine purchases under a binding contract, but insisted the bloc must pay for the number of doses in full specified in the contract. Poland refused to sign a revised agreement with the drug maker.

Polish Health Minister Katarzyna Sojka told broadcaster TVN24 on Wednesday that there was some hope of resolving the Pfizer

lawsuit „in a positive way.” She noted that Warsaw is not alone, as other EU states will face similar lawsuits.

Pfizer decided to proceed with the legal action „following a prolonged breach of contract and a period of discussions between the parties,” a company spokesperson told Politico.

Millions of Poles have refused to receive the Covid-19 vaccine and Warsaw stopped deliveries of the drugs as the influx of Ukrainian refugees in early 2022 strained government finances.

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