

Pfizer and BioNTech – a Great Transatlantic Success Story

Interview with Kathrin Klär-Arlt, Director Policy Affairs, Pfizer Germany

In the United Kingdom the COVID-19 vaccine by Pfizer and BioNTech has already been approved and also in Canada the first of many freezer-packed COVID-19 vaccine vials have arrived. In a few weeks, also the European and German citizens will have the opportunity to be immunized against the coronavirus with the BioNTech and Pfizer vaccine – the latter also being a member company of AmCham Germany. Therefore, AmCham Germany interviewed Kathrin Klär-Arlt, Director Policy Affairs, at Pfizer Germany on the joint vaccine development, common interests and challenges American and German businesses share, the attractiveness of Germany as a business location and on how transatlantic cooperation can be improved.

How does the joint vaccine development between Pfizer and BioNTech affect the future of transatlantic business relations?

Our vaccine success story with the German company BioNTech is a great transatlantic success story. The cooperation and its outcome underscore what can be achieved through strong transatlantic relations. I am extremely proud to be part of Pfizer in these exciting times.

Transatlantic business relations and trade between the United States and the European Union is a core pillar of the global pharmaceutical industry. Built on innovation, R&D, and manufacturing investments on both sides of the Atlantic, the pharmaceutical industry has been able to respond to the unprecedented COVID-19 health challenges.

The development of both COVID-19 treatments and vaccines was possible thanks to a range of established structures and networks. It is important to note that pharmaceuticals are the second largest German export product to the USA, just behind vehicles and machines. I am convinced that our shared commitment to combat our common health challenges drives our partnerships and our success.

How should transatlantic cooperation be improved in the future in order to further strengthen projects like Pfizer is already doing today?

The transatlantic cooperation isn't self-evident and must be nurtured for it to succeed. Many patients around the world depend on the transatlantic economy for their supply of medicines. To ensure we can continue to meet patient needs and drive innovation, we must be mindful. There are some critical points that should be addressed to further strengthen the transatlantic bond between the US and Europe.

For example, in an already challenging global trade environment, we must stand up for free trade and avoid export restrictions. These can impact patients outside Europe and the US and risk retaliation that could likewise impact patients in Europe and the US. Setting the right framework is essential to foster the transatlantic relationship and deepen our economic partnership. Another key point is to support innovation through high Intellectual Property standards in EU Free Trade Agreements and championing them within the EU. This would further encourage investments into R&D for much-needed new treatments.

I feel strongly that transatlantic partnerships drive innovation. We must work together and build the best conditions possible so that these partnerships can prosper.

Can you describe the common interests and also challenges both American and German companies are currently facing in the healthcare and life sciences sector?

American and German companies are currently facing a common challenge around goods and services. There's a growing discussion for the relocation of production capacities and calls for purely domestic supply chains. In our globalized world, this is clearly not advisable and the logic behind the suggestion is misleading. As an example, more than 75 percent of innovative and patent-protected active ingredients used in Europe are, in fact, already produced in Europe today. The growing concerns against global supply chains is a big challenge.

Experience has shown that geographical diversity is essential to build resilient global supply chains. This diversity enables manufacturers to make adjustments as needed, ensure stability, and avoid potential shortages and disruptions. Pfizer's number one priority is to deliver our breakthrough medicines to patients. But our ability to meet patient needs around the globe, especially during times of crisis, depends on our ability to maintain supply chains and innovation networks that are both flexible and resilient.

Pfizer operates one of the most sophisticated supply chain systems in the industry, with more than 40 Pfizer-owned sites and more than 200 suppliers globally. This provides capacity, flexibility, and ensures the highest safety and quality standards.

I also see an opportunity to further leverage transatlantic relations and our common goals to reduce bureaucracy like the mutual recognition of Good Manufacturing Practices.

What does Pfizer expect from the German government with regards to the attractiveness of Germany as a business location?

Germany is already a leader when it comes to rapid access to innovative drugs. Patients in Germany have the fastest access to new treatment options in all of Europe. We must do everything possible to maintain this high access standard in the future.

Aside from its internal policies, Germany must support incentives that expand innovation at the EU level. It will be crucial for Germany and Europe to push for high intellectual property standards since these are the basis for research and investment.

Research, development, and production in Germany and Europe should be more systematically networked. This would lead to a greater buildup of key capabilities and resources in Germany. In addition, to attract biotech and startup companies, the federal, state and local governments should pursue targeted, future-oriented industrial policies with attractive and easily calculable trade and corporate tax rates.

In order to ensure Germany's competitiveness, the standards of supervisory authorities need to be harmonized within Germany and also throughout Europe. In Germany alone, considerable competition-distorting differences can be seen in inspections, the formulation of inspection reports, and licensing practice.

I think most of these points are critical to a wide range of companies, not only the healthcare sector. Having a common industry strategy should be a priority of the current and the next German governments.

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