Since the start of the coronavirus outbreak, Germany has reported 50,000 positive cases and 281 deaths, making its mortality rate one of the lowest in the world at 0.4%. By contrast, the rate stands at 10% in Italy and 4% in China. A discrepancy of this magnitude cannot be solely attributable to differences in methods for counting deaths, population age or the number of swab tests performed, or to underestimated case numbers. Another explanation worth investigating is a possible correlation with pneumococcal immunisation campaigns. Germany has been offering the pneumococcal vaccine to citizens over 60 since 2017 and intense catch-up efforts already appear to be underway.

Interviewed on NDR info, virologist Dr Drosten from Charité University Hospital in Berlin explained that influenza was known to suppress the lungs’ immune cells, increasing the risk of secondary bacterial pneumonia. Therefore, if we want to keep deaths down, we should be trying to protect all citizens from secondary pneumonia. The pneumococcal vaccine could both prevent the bacterial superinfection and provide a degree of protection against the virus.

In view of the above, could the Commission:

1. ask Germany to say whether it believes that the pneumococcal vaccine is helping to prevent serious cases/deaths from COVID-19?
2. comment on the current state of Europe’s stockpile of the PCV13 and PPV23 vaccines?
3. give an assessment of the importance of the BCG vaccine used against tuberculosis (see findings in the Netherlands).