

Maria Jufereva-Skuratovski's speech on behalf of ALDE group on "Covid passes or certificates: protection of fundamental rights and legal implications"
20 April 2021

Honourable President, colleagues,

We have to remind ourselves that vaccine passports are nothing new. We have been using them for travelling internationally for a long time already. However, we have come to a point where a passport is not only for travelling anymore, but it is also considered for access to our everyday services. In Israel, for example, vaccinated people are already using an app on entry to gyms, pools, and cultural venues. The particular question in respect of Covid-passes concerns the mutual recognition of such passes worldwide, and not only within the European Union. Another particular question raises in terms of danger of discrimination for those countries, which do not have yet enough access to covid-vaccination. We have to keep in mind all these issues to ensure equality.

This brings us to the question of non-discrimination in access to public, parapublic and private services by people who cannot, do not want for different reasons or will not be vaccinated. We may come to face a really complicated situation when people who refuse to or cannot be vaccinated demand that all services and freedoms be guaranteed to them as well. At the same time, we have to ensure the protection of personal data while implementing the use of Covid-passes, in order that such certificates would not be turned into an additional surveillance measure.

As an Estonian citizen, I am a firm believer in digital solutions. Signing documents electronically and voting online are pillar stones of our society. So I have no doubt that there is a solution that will help us travel and access vital services while keeping health risks at a low level and also protecting our sensitive data. But I think people who want to use paper should not be forced to use digital tools in this case, and this solution also should be available for them.

The European Commission has presented a proposal to create a Digital Green Certificate to facilitate the safe free movement of citizens in the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic. A Digital Green Certificate will act as digital proof that a person has been vaccinated against COVID-19, received a negative test result or recovered from COVID-19. The Certificate will be free and accessible either digitally or via paper format. It will come with a QR-code with a digital signature to protect it against falsification and it will contain necessary key information.

We should support fast proceedings and implementation of a digital certificate of vaccination in order to return to "normality". However, in the same way we must ensure that the basic freedoms of citizens and human rights are not violated because of insufficient access to vaccination.

We need to offer our citizens an effective and transparent digital solution that will meet all necessary requirements in respect of basic human rights and freedoms. At the same time, governments have to continue with the necessary steps to stop the further spread of the Covid-19 virus.