



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EUROPEAN CIVIL PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN AID
OPERATIONS (ECHO)
Disaster Preparedness and Prevention
Civil Protection Horizontal Issues

MEETING REPORT

VIDEO CALL ON COVID-19 BETWEEN COMMISSIONER JANEZ LENARČIČ AND [REDACTED], MICROSOFT [REDACTED]

1. DATE AND LOCATION

23 April 2020, 1730 CET

Video call (Microsoft Teams)

2. ATTENDEES

Mr Janez Lenarčič (Commissioner for Crisis Management), [REDACTED]

Microsoft: [REDACTED]

3. CONTEXT

The video call took place at the request of [REDACTED], who reached out to Commissioner Lenarčič to show interest to be involved in finding solutions in health, research and crisis management tools.

The objective of the meeting was to explore the possibility of using any of Microsoft activities to support the current Commission efforts in responding and recovering from COVID-19 impact and enhance EU resilience, prevention and preparedness for this and similar emergencies.

4. DISCUSSION OUTLINE

[REDACTED] stressed the importance of starting the work on resilience for future crises with similar magnitude and impact, focussing on the importance of building the infrastructure for the next crisis. To this extent, Microsoft is engaging in discussions with political leaders and international organisations (like WHO) to make societies more resilient. He also referred to other impacts of the crisis, such as on human rights.

Commissioner echoed the need to build up resilience. He highlighted that this is the first global pandemic after 100 years, and that the world was not prepared for such magnitude. He presented ongoing and upcoming actions in his portfolio in response to the COVID-19 emergency, such as Emergency Medical Teams mobilisation, repatriation of EU citizens, and increase of the availability of medical equipment for Member States under rescEU.

Commissioner explained that Commission President is putting a great effort in coordinating the Commission Services, which are all very active in the crisis response. He also referred to the need to coordinate with Member States, as the Commission only has a supporting competence in the domain of health and civil protection.

Asked to explore the potential of applying cutting-edge Microsoft technologies to improve the effectiveness of ECHO Situation Awareness team, Mr [REDACTED] indicated the company [REDACTED] as possible candidate for the purpose. He flagged data-maps overlapping and the use of geospatial data to monitor and track epidemic spreads (hotspots). He also referred to the successful collaboration with WHO, for which a global data platform was developed.

The discussion focussed on the three followed areas proposed by Microsoft.

4.1. Protect public health: Using technology tools and data to protect public health

4.1.1. Contact Tracing Apps

To de-escalate COVID-19 crisis, it is critical to interrupt cross-border infection chains. Member States, supported by the Commission, adopted an EU toolbox on contact tracing applications to ensure interoperable contact-tracing applications.

[REDACTED] expressed himself in favour of a decentralised approach, that is, data kept at device level instead of being centralised on the cloud. A decentralised solution would guarantee higher user privacy, and higher security if a malicious attempt had to be addressed to one single centralised data storage. He opined that there is no real need of a centralised data set because, for contact tracing, authorities would access data only if users are tested positive. He added that it is crucial to define common privacy principles and data fields that specify which data are to be collected and how. In his view, for the success of contact tracing at European level it is essential that the Commission leads the process of definition of the interoperability criteria. He indicated that many competent companies exist to develop such apps, and that Microsoft would step in if specific technical design should be required.

4.1.2. Clinical Management Support System (CMSS)

The Commission is working to facilitate knowledge sharing between clinicians dealing with COVID-19 across the EU through the COVID-19 CMSS. This includes establishing EU-wide registries to facilitate research.

[REDACTED] reported that in the US, Microsoft has helped to make accessible the great amount of research material generated on clinical results through a common dataset that anyone can query. In support of CNSS, he mentioned that Microsoft has created chat bots to identify good candidates to participate in clinical trials to support WHO

efforts. He advocated a more global approach to collect data based on a European approach as building block.

4.1.3. Data collection on epidemiology

The Commission's Joint Research Centre's (JRC) epidemiological model and data collection delivers daily trends on the virus' spread in Member States. The model includes mobility data from Google and Apple for each Member State.

Asked whether it would be possible from Microsoft to contribute to data collection, ██████ said that Microsoft contribution would be less relevant than Google's and Apple's, which possess the best data on mobility. However, in analogy with what has been done with geospatial analytics, Microsoft tools can use data sourced by Google and Apple for data analysis and visualisation to help public to understand trends.

4.1.4. Artificial Intelligence (AI)

In Spain, Microsoft has worked with healthcare providers to apply machine learning to predict which patients are most likely to develop more severe symptoms, using AI algorithms' output to define healthcare strategies on a case-by-case basis. Machine learning will also be impactful on research to develop treatments of vaccines.

AI can be used to relieve the work of human being. In this crisis, the general concern about "AI eliminating people's jobs" is reverted because there is no sufficient work force available to execute the required amount of tasks. ██████ mentioned a couple of examples of AI-based chat bots that are substituting human interviewers to identify whether somebody should be tested for COVID-19, or to identify whom should participate in clinical trials for the development of vaccines or therapeutics. The number of scenarios for similar applications is and will be growing. Together with technological challenges, an increased use of AI during COVID-19 crisis carries privacy, data protection and ethical AI concerns. The Commission is well placed to develop the framework to defend those principles.

4.2. Promote an inclusive economic recovery: sustaining economic and societal activity in the short-term and promoting an inclusive recovery for the long term

Commission support to hard-hit SMEs consists of EUR 1 billion from the EU budget to incentivise banks to provide working capital loans to companies, and in the mid/long-term InvestEU programme will play a central role in ensuring economic recovery.

██████ acknowledged that SMEs are the backbone of the economy and it is important to find the right solutions to protect them. Microsoft has granted an initial six months of free access to its offer of productivity solutions to support them. Today, online collaboration has become central to productivity. While in the first weeks of the crisis it has been necessary to expand capacity for online work, at present products' features are being innovated on a weekly basis to take into account the evolved needs of companies' mutated way of working.

For the next two years, [REDACTED] envisioned a hybrid economy where some people will go back to work and some others will still work from home. This scenario requires a level of digital capability that SMEs may not have yet. Microsoft will soon announce a new initiative to upgrade people's digital skills with new content and certification.

Microsoft is engaged in making the use of these tools inclusive, especially for vulnerable population like people with disabilities.

The impact of COVID-19 on developing countries is still unknown. These countries without the help of Europe, North America and other countries will most probably not be able to withstand COVID-19 impact. Critical to support health care systems and global leadership of WHO. Microsoft works with organisations like Doctors without Borders to enable so that they have tools for effective remote work.

Microsoft is also working on addressing education challenges in developing countries during this crisis through a partnership with UNICEF to create a global learning platform. The platform has been rolled out in Ukraine, Kosovo and Timor Leste, and it is soon going to be expanded more globally to the southern hemisphere. Greater challenges will be to meet the needs for a very high number of devices as quickly as required and ensure better connectivity for digital access. Most likely, to cope with the current limited infrastructure capacity of most developing countries, content will have to be delivered in a low-bandwidth way.

Commissioner confirmed Commission's support to WHO, and praised Microsoft for the initiative with UNICEF, raising that UNICEF is one of DG ECHO's key partners in humanitarian operations, and highlighted the importance of education in emergency.

[REDACTED] concluded showing more optimism for global leadership coming from Brussels rather than from the United States.

4.3. Preserve trustworthy technology: Providing strong protection for cybersecurity, privacy and digital safety throughout this crisis

4.3.1. Hackathons

Commissioner mentioned the #EUvsVirus hackathon of 24-26 April organised by the Commission. [REDACTED] confirmed that Microsoft would do what is possible to join.

5. NEXT STEPS

- ECHO [REDACTED] to organise a meeting with [REDACTED] to explore the use of [REDACTED] technologies to improve the effectiveness of ECHO Situation Awareness team.
- ECHO [REDACTED] to obtain more information on UNICEF's partnership on global learning platform with Microsoft.
- [REDACTED] to liaise with Microsoft to invite them to the #EUvsVirus hackathon.

- Other follow-up by Commission services as appropriate.

Signed

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