European Data Centre Association

Statement on COVID-19

During times of change and crisis stark differences become visible and warrant consideration. Take the role of communications and information technology during the current uncertainty caused by COVID-19. The role of cloud and internet based communications is used and needed everywhere – the use of video conferencing, ecommerce, logistics, remote working, and digital entertainment have changed radically over the past months and yet the majority of online applications and services continue to work. The Economist recently reported the role of remote doctor's consultations as critical for China's handling of the COVID-19 such that they were able to help get critical patients to hospital while using AI based models to track the progression of the disease.

What if we did not have the access to these amazing tools? What if they stopped working? What most people fail to realise during a chat, or a video call, is how much human intervention is needed to continue to reboot servers, install new equipment and upgrade networks. IT and network data infrastructure staff are unsung heroes keeping us all connected for work, emergency, information and entertainment. However, not all countries consider the internet, data centres and clouds as critical national infrastructure. Therefore, many IT companies are confused as to how to manage internet based infrastructure services including maintaining on-site staff in data centres.

The European Data Centre Association wants to first thank all of its members' operations staff – you deserve credit for building a resilient service that has coped with the recent events without major interruption. We also want to call on European and national governments to consider the issues around maintaining a robust internet and how they can provide support. For example:

- Some governments already treat cloud and datacentre services as critical national infrastructure like the telephone or power. We urge Europe and each European country to adopt this policy. In the meantime, all governments should treat internet, cloud, data centre and other IT infrastructure as essential services during this crisis.
- Some countries maintain services for families of critical workers – such as keeping schools open for children or helping with transportation when public services are shut. All countries should adopt this for internet based service providers' technical and operations staff.
- Where infrastructure providers are building out new services, special dispensation should be offered to them to continue building works as this will be the critical national infrastructure of tomorrow and should not be delayed.

The European Data Centre Association is happy to discuss the issue with government agencies and the press.

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