



**European Committee
of the Regions**

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT APOSTOLOS TZITZIKOSTAS
OPENING SPEECH ON "#EUvsVIRUS HACKATHON"
WITH COMMISSIONER MARIYA GABRIEL AND DG RTD
24 APRIL 2020

Thank you Commissioner Gabriel for your kind invitation.

Congratulations for organizing this great event.

A warm welcome to all the participants from all across Europe,

the universities, the local tech communities, the companies, the startups, the health providers, the problem solvers and the creative minds,

who responded to this call for action, and will be contributing with creative ideas to develop novel solutions to tackle the Coronavirus challenge.

The Committee of the Regions is enthusiastic to support the innovative thinking, in this "EU versus Virus" Hackathon,

and counts on the European Commission to ensure follow up to the best projects through the new European Innovation Council Covid - platform.

Today, and since the outbreak of the pandemic,

thousands of regional and local leaders are on the front line in the battle to limit the spread of the virus and its impact on the ground, in our regions and cities, our towns and villages.

The dedication and professionalism are testified by actions taken from all corners of Europe.

In a similar spirit as this virtual Hackathon enabled by digitalization, digital tools and innovation, have been a strong ally in our effort to help citizens and the local communities cope with the crisis:

Local Assemblies go Digital like in Oulu, Finland.

New Apps have been launched to help people get personalized medical recommendations by doctors,

by the City of Madrid, in Spain and by the Region of Central Macedonia, in Greece, my Region.

Public Services are offered online like in Bialystok, in Poland.

“TeleEduka” to support students has been launched by the Region of Murcia (Μούρθια), in Spain.

Virtual visits to SMEs and Family Businesses have been organized in the Province of Overijssel, in the Netherlands.

And many more good practices are available on CoR's COVID19 exchange platform, which is created as part of our Action Plan, to support regional and local communities share experiences and good practices.

In this Action Plan, the Committee of the Regions also proposed to Establish a European Emergency Health Mechanism, which is now supported by the European Parliament too.

Dear Friends,

The unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 shock, requires immediate measures and a bold social and economic recovery plan for the European Union,

built on solidarity, sustainability, resilience and social justice,

with the Regions and Cities in the forefront,

and in line with the European Green Deal and Digital Transition Agenda.

This crisis has also shown that in addition to adequate health services, our regions rely on crucial broadband connectivity, ICT-infrastructure and digital skills.

Digital literacy skills and high-speed Internet are still lacking in parts of Europe.

Although numerous EU regions and local authorities experiment with new technologies, not all have managed to support the necessary digital services, such as online, distance teaching and learning and other digital services.

Therefore the CoR renews its call for an adequate co-funding from the next MFF.

We need to invest more to save lives today,
and increase our resilience for tomorrow.

Europe has to be stronger than this virus.

We must show that we can beat this virus at all levels.

Thank you all. Thank you very much.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVER