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Answer given by Mr Várhelyi
on behalf of the European Commission
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The European Court of Auditors report 28/2016¹ recommended continuous improvement of collaboration in times of crises as well as regular testing and exercising between the Commission services and the agencies.

In line with this report, the ‘Blue Orchid’ exercise tested internal procedures and communication channels between the Commission and the European Centre for Disease Prevention (ECDC) in a crisis situation².

The scenario was designed to reflect the initial response to the importation of a single case of pneumonic plague into a Member State as being a likely future scenario based on past pandemics³.

Key elements were to test the channels of communication between the Commission and the ECDC, including Information Technology (IT) tools such as the Early Warning and Response System, video/audio-conferencing and formal requests between the institutions.

The specific lessons and conclusions that have been learned from the exercise included the need for improvement of the functioning of IT back-up services, to build up a common IT technology platform between the institutions, as well as to improve communication procedures and protocols.

These lessons learned have assisted the Commission and the ECDC to better respond to the COVID-19 pandemic⁴.

The Commission and the ECDC have not published information on this internal exercise.

¹ https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR16_28/SR_HEALTH_EN.pdf.

² In the implementation of Decision (EU) 1082/2013 on serious cross-border threats to health and repealing Decision No 2119/98/EC: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2013/1082>.

³ As example, but evidence not limited to this reference: <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/severe-acute-respiratory-syndrome-sars-annual-epidemiological-report-2015>.

⁴ <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications/SR-2024-12>.