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Why blockchain is the best solution for Covid vaccines and tests certification

by Georgios Kyrtsos MEP and Maria da Graça Carvalho MEP   —   9 April 2021   in Opinion

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Blockchain technology can tackle the problems accostated with vaccine programmes and test certification, argue Georgios Kyrtsos and Maria da Graça Carvalho.

Brussels (Brussels Morning) The ongoing debate around the pros and cons of COVID-19 vaccines and tests certification, that increased in fervour after the European Commission's announcement last month that it will commit to the launch of a Digital Green Certificate, has been centred on two major concerns. The first is the possible discrimination against travellers. The second regards issues of authenticity and confidentiality around personal data.

On considering the first issue, it' s worth reflecting on what "discrimination" means — an unjustified distinction between human beings, based on a specific category, or set of categories, they are perceived to belong.

One can argue that very point should travellers be denied the right to mobility on the grounds of an act (being vaccinated or tested) that is itself is voluntary. Even with the reassurances given by the Commission, the possibility of a degree of abuse is very real.

Fair solution

However, we also need to consider the alternative: closed borders, complete travel bans to and from specific destinations and many other restraints, most of them unilaterally decided by individual member states, which is the current status quo in the EU. Discrimination is already happening, and on a large scale. Therefore, what we should be asking ourselves is "Is it fair or logical to refuse a solution that will benefit many while this pandemic lasts because of fears that it might be imperfect?"

Once the EU comes to terms with an answer to this question, it can move on to addressing the concerns about personal data confidentiality and reliability. This is where, in our view,

of the European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (ECDC), which has promised to consider it.

The authenticity of certificates for COVID-19 tests and vaccination is a matter of serious concern in all EU Member States, and it is our firm belief that blockchain technology is the best option to create a reliable validity mechanism that will contribute significantly to restoring confidence between member states at cross-border level, thus leading to normalisation of movements. Blockchain allows the COVID-19 tests and vaccination certificates to be verified in real time in relation to their origin (laboratories), subject (citizens, travellers, etc.) and results.

Decentralised

With respect to confidentiality, we believe that the exponential increase in the use of this technology in particularly sensible sectors, such as finance, speaks for itself.

We envision a decentralised, completely safe, knowledge database updated in real time with data from all official laboratories responsible for controlling COVID-19. The system will start with national coordination of agencies recording COVID-19 data and then extended to third countries. With this network, national agencies will be able to create a blockchain to exchange information based on agreed protection protocols and fully compliant with personal information protection as determined by the General Regulation on Data protection.

In fact, our confidence in this technology extends to many other fields, and we have just co-authored a proposal for a pilot-project, entitled EdUBlock, aimed at the authentication and circulation of education certificates in the Union through blockchain.

Certain technologies are simply too good to waste, especially when they are needed the most.

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