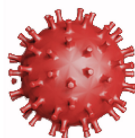
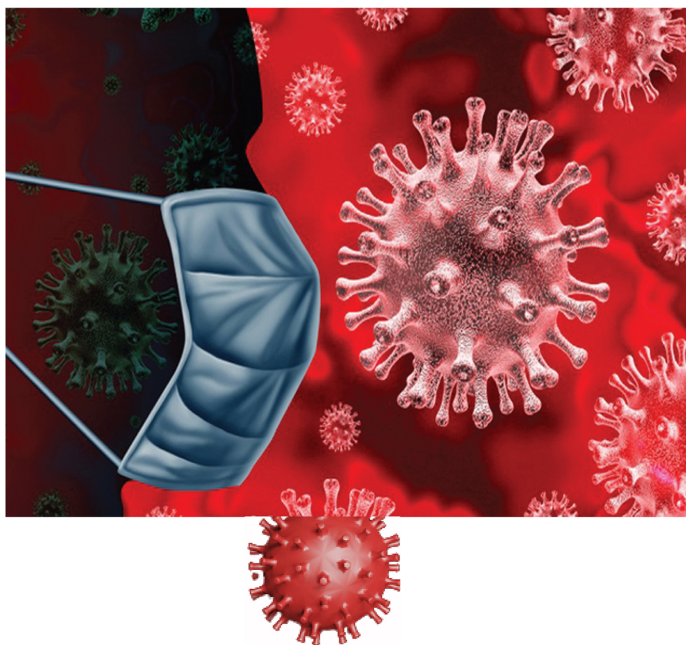


**IULIAN CHIFU
DUMITRU ȘARANUȚA**



CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC AND THE CHANGES OF THE WORLD



**EDITURA INSTITUTULUI DE ȘTIINȚE POLITICE
ȘI RELAȚII INTERNAȚIONALE „ION I. C. BRĂȚIANU”**

PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT **FOR AN AGENDA**

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE HUMAN BEING, SOCIETY, POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Iulian Chifu

Abstract:

The coronavirus pandemic has already brought major changes to human behavior, society, politics, leadership, democracy, and the perspective of international relations.

At the level of man, individual, and human society, the changes are relevant to the psycho-sociological dimension, the state of emergency and isolation at home creating various behaviors and ways of reaction. The repetition of this state brings permanent changes in society, in multiplied individual preferences and behaviors, calibrated on the themes and directions of adaptation to the pandemic. In addition, free time and the proximity of the computer and the Internet allowed the development of Infodemia, information warfare and propaganda, the uncontrolled spread of conspiracy theories, based on lack of facts and lack of societal cohesion, the absence of direct dialogue between members of society. Also, the inconsistency of the authorities, who were forced to communicate in times of crisis without exact data and clear information on Covid-19, amplified the conditions in which this infodemia managed to spread.

At the level of society and politics, the coronavirus pandemic has revealed the strengths of democratic governments in the face of technological and social media developments, developments that have had an unexpected impact in promoting populism and extremist approaches, popularity, and overconfident and shocking claims, extraordinary speculation, even if unproven, against expertise, or a balanced approach. Against this background, the current pandemic has highlighted the need for serious and professional people to return to the forefront and the need for political elites – limited, blasphemed, and largely unacceptable in Western states – to reconnect with the natural and professional elites in society. The recourse to expertise and the need for professionalism blew up, at the political level, populism and extremism of all kinds, in favor of established classical ideological approaches and rationality versus excessive emotionality, provoked and amplified through social media.

Although we do not know how long these changes will last and how permanent they will become¹, at the level of international relations there are great changes that show a shift in trade, economic and power relations with China, respectively its decoupling from global trade, with or without President Trump's re-election. In this context of overlapping crises, caused by the coronavirus crisis, authoritarian states and mainly those with populist leaders seem to be the big losers in times of crisis where the actions are the only thing that matters, and chasing approval and benefits is punished by the public. China is the main target, through the guilt attributed to it and Donald Trump's new campaign strategy. And Russia, although it now has the opportunity to realign, is being pushed off the map to marginal areas of low crisis management, collateral error and the impact of the crisis, while President Putin's uncertain future makes it less present on the negotiation table of relevant aspects of the world of tomorrow.

¹ Iulian Chifu, *Sfârșitul coșmarului: scenariile prospective pentru criza de coronavirus – pauza de 3 luni, îngheț un an sau amenințare eternă a omenirii*, Adevărul, May 4, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/sfarsitul-cosmarului-scenariile-prospective-criza-coronavirus-pauza-3-luni-inghet-an-amenintare-eterna-omenirii-1_5e86bdb55163ec427167438b/index.html

Keywords: pandemic, coronavirus, crises, authoritarianism, democracy, populism, the war of the end of oil.

Disclaimer: This assessment is made in the middle of the first wave of the crisis, when in Russia, Great Britain, Turkey, Iran, or the USA number of cases was still increasing very fast. At this time, the prospects of the second wave, in autumn-winter, the coronavirus mutations, the prospects of safe treatment, or finding an effective vaccine are unknown. The prospect of perpetuating social/physical distancing measures may radically change the current assessment, so we reserve the right to return with revisions as knowledge of Covid-19 advances.

1. The prospect of the pandemic threatens humanity: the Covid-19 psychosis in various forms²

The major impacts of the coronavirus pandemic have been studied more or less and there are multiple theories. The evolution of the pandemic crisis has affected the individual, society, politics and international relations alike. Fundamental emotions have been identified and exploited by the infodemia, information warfare, and the speculation of the opportunity generated by the pandemic and how to limit the effects by isolation at home, social distancing, wearing a mask – thus a greater inclination to spend time in the virtual space, on the Internet. But the coronavirus itself and the isolation methods adopted to limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus have generated significant changes in human behavior that, if such measures return, are likely to perpetuate, giving rise to other individuals and a new society in which we will live after the end of the pandemic. Without being a psycho-sociologist and without professional claims in this field, I revealed below what a research agenda would look like and what would be the directions in which the effects of the pandemic on the individual and human society should be investigated.

² Iulian Chifu, *Spectrul pandemiei amenință umanitatea: psihoza Covid-19 în variate forme*, in Adevărul, August 3, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/news/societate/spectrul-pandemiei-ameninta-umanitatea-psihoza-covid-19-variate-forme-1_5f26f51d5163ec42719a587d/index.html

Isolation and loneliness. The impact on the family

The main method of preventing the spread of the virus was isolation. Isolation as an individual from a family, in a broad sense, sometimes from a small family – when the person in question was caught up in developments away from home, at school, or at work, from where he could not return. Then the isolation from friends, colleagues, society, and the comfort zone. The dramatic reduction of physical and direct social interactions – replaced by electronically mediated ones – is not necessarily a phenomenon that maintains the same social comfort in a relevant proportion. For the most isolated and austere, introverted and antisocial, it can be a normal thing. For the sociable, which draw their sustenance from social interactions, this change was major and impactful.

The main impact was on the lonely ones. Alone in the house, in everyday life, but not alone in the world. The loneliness that came from isolation and the lack of banal contacts, of ordinary communication with those known and close, but with whom they did not live together, led to the first category of psycho-sociological effects. The accentuation or revealing, for some, of loneliness, of a life in which, in the end, they are alone, had important psychological effects. A discovery for some about their own lives.

Just as we saw dramas with formal families who found themselves locked together to reveal and discover the essence of their relationship. A moment of truth, which had been hidden by everyone's activities, by the relatively short time of real coexistence. Alienated or inappropriate spouses, forgotten, unwanted, tolerated partners found themselves under the same roof for days, weeks, months, without any insufficient time gap in another space and company or the possibility to export problems or get stuck in work and living in distinct social forms and groups that allow them to forget less appropriate relationships at home. Hence many family dramas.

We also had positive effects resulting from the isolation and fear in the pandemic. Whole families managed to rediscover themselves, to relive, to avoid the endless running and stress that had naturally separated them to find themselves only in the few holidays

and late nights. Some have rediscovered their spouse, relived, or re-launched even deeper relationships. Others had time to get to know their children even better, to rediscover them with all their anxieties, originality, intelligence and happiness, with passions and needs. Conversely, the children benefited from the presence of their missing parents, reconnected deeply, and re-established family connections that exceeded cohabitation and family or economic symbiosis. Many enjoyed the quality time spent with the family. And this has had positive effects on limiting the effects of fear, panic, unrealistic expectations, or isolation stress.

Because perhaps the most important achievement of the pandemic is a significant decrease in stress pressure, slowing down the continuous and endless daily running to work, and in everyday existential concerns. A complete relaxation imposed, an unexpected time for reflection and time for you, for each of us. The introspection was extremely helpful and helped everyone.

The impact is difficult to predict, but there are known premises and elements. First, it's hard to tell if it was an episode, if the impact is partial, temporary, with possible effects over time, if it was a unique two-month experience, or if the experience will return. If repeated and periodic, unexpected isolation will lead to permanent changes. In any case, it has introduced flexible working hours, paved the way for free and adjustable forms of work programs for families, children, domestic or administrative activities that could be the premise for future employment contracts.

Crisis, stress and behavioral changes during the pandemic

Of course, the impact is not uniform, not even simple to generalize in its main lines, which ensure social trends. The impact depends on the personality of the individual going through such an experience, on life habits, on their different emotions and feelings, also individual in their form of manifestation and perception, on the behavior of each in a situation of prolonged crisis or prolonged isolation, of the unique identity of the individual, of each of us, with a distinct character and different behavior in

front of a unique, unpredictable, crisis. Everything relates to distinct typologies of people, and these characteristics affect us, they are not permanent components, because the human always learns and adapts – easily or harder – and everyone's personality adjusts to the events of life they are facing.

The crisis accentuates and accelerates pre-existing behaviors, reveals hidden or indistinguishable elements in particular individuals. Diseases, disorders, inclinations that are revealed and accentuated by the pandemic crisis are more visible and easier to diagnose. Coronavirus has brought manifestations of more obvious behavior that can no longer be hidden, made up, or controlled in its sensitive and inappropriate areas, and constantly erupt.

Of course, beyond calming a type of work stress, agitation, continuous movement, speed and pressure of daily life, through isolation, other effects of the crisis itself come into play. People experience different reactions, and distinct behaviors, and a capacity and resilience during a crisis that is different from person to person. Besides, the crisis forces and exposes the capacity to manage individual and collective crises by individuals, societies, and decision-makers, while exposing the capacity and fairness of political choices that democratic societies make under normal conditions for the representatives that lead them.

The psychological effects in interpersonal relationships in the days of Covid-19

The pandemic has generated several actions and social measures beyond isolation at home, where it exists. The isolation generated various effects related to the quality and size of the buildings, the number of family members forced to live there for two months almost non-stop. It's about wearing a mask and social distancing – in fact physical. In this category, we have several psychological effects of wearing a mask, which we find claimed as motivation in certain marches and demonstrations challenging measures to combat the spread of coronavirus.

We are talking primarily about classical elements and completely related to the individuality of the human being and his

recognition in society, fundamental needs that we find and that were already a major concern – as shown in the book on Identity of Fukuyama from 2019. Identity, dignity and recognition become fundamental needs of the human being that are required to be transposed into rights quantified in the laws and norms of behavior inside the society.

Wearing a mask creates problems with identity, recognition, and personal image. The presence of characteristic facial features in communication and reading the reactions on the face with which you communicate are important for knowledge, for non-verbal communication, and especially for relating to the other in a society. Wearing the mask uniformed and blurred the individual characteristics, image, and direct physical recognition. It is also true that a real mask industry has emerged in which creativity has tried to make up for the need for identity, originality, and differences, but it does not fully cover the need for identity that has disappeared through the wearing of masks in closed public spaces. In the short term, the problems are minor, but if it ends up not being temporary, it will lead to profound and permanent changes.

We also have a number of effects that come from social distancing. The elements of closeness, touch, caress are missing, an increasing number of senses and elements of non-verbal communication disappear from the space of knowledge or recognition, of individual identity. Handshake, hugging, touch communication of any kind disappears, even if it is purely human and deeply characteristic of sociable human typologies and capable of major empathy, which is an essential component as a binder of society, for emotional and identity coagulation and societal cohesion.

If at a general social level the impact is easy to detect, blocking travel of any kind also gives rise to deep traumas, behavioral changes, and accelerations or accentuations of character traits that were not revealed. It creates divisions and alienations even within states, certainly national consolidations and international isolations. But this aspect is also relevant at a commercial and

economic level – the isolation of partners, friends who can provide support, customers, and suppliers at a distance. Hence the need to recalibrate and identify alternatives to contacts – via the Internet, not directly – with the costs and losses of this lottery of credentials and symbolism of face-to-face discussion at the partner's headquarters, direct knowledge, and guarantees of commitment given by handshakes in businesses.

The superficiality of social media relationships and false identities during the pandemic

The pandemic and the solutions identified to reduce the impact of the virus's multiplication have led to a profound undermining of social relations. And the transfer of meetings and contacts from the physical space to the virtual one comes with countless shortcomings and negative side effects. First, the superficiality of relationships in the virtual space, the ease of their elimination or termination – unfriend, block on social media, for example – or especially the playful elements in the virtual space that multiply and justify their presence very easily becomes problematic.

Social relationships are about the social and emotional investment of the actors/individuals that generate and maintain such a relationship. But they are also about real and apparent identities, exhibited, and about false identities. They are also about playing with the other, fooling him but also about more serious things, about altering reality through the prism of the desired image and also about fraud and crime related to identity theft or false identity, anonymization in case of social or economic and commercial relations, as well as about deception or other even more complicated effects that undermine the transactional trust of the actors at the economic level.

Superficial social media, the penchant for play and playfulness, taking life and relationships lightly can have major effects on relevant categories of the population. Moreover, studies related to the impact of technology, specifically social media and access to virtual space and the doubling of personality, on the individual and social relationships exist and are well-founded. From here it

is only a step towards the relevance of such an impact when entire categories of social relations move into social media and presume pre-existing social partners, who were previously given a degree of trust, but without physical knowledge – due to a lack of real encounter and knowledge.

Withdrawal from the physical social space gives rise to accentuations of the inclination towards the introverted character, towards reflection for all people. But this perspective creates a special kind of stress for extroverts, for sociable people, tricksters and artists. In addition, isolation comes with the feeling of seclusion. The feeling of imprisonment is also extremely deeply, carefully and widely studied. It has a major impact. The isolation and limitation of freedoms give rise, for more sensitive individuals with past traumas or complicated histories, to the feeling of imprisonment, relevant beyond the dramatizations of conspiracy theories that are sustained on social media. The question remains how permanent is the change given by the limitations of movement and how concerned we should be about repeating these episodes at certain intervals.

We cannot ignore here the secondary crises of the coronavirus pandemic, which induce other major concerns than the medical crisis generated by the coronavirus. It is another type of stress, it is no longer that of haste, agitation and constant rush to do work and ensure modern existence, but of other life perspectives – health in the broadest sense, not necessarily those related to coronavirus, the concern is related to the economic and family fate, job security and future income, the recalibrated way of life and the fundamental values affected.

Best case scenario: The Michelangelo effect

The “Michelangelo effect” translates into individual development in the direction of building the type of person we would like to be. This type of effect or syndrome manifested in isolation is possible if we are with the partner with whom we have a close romantic relationship during the pandemic. Natural and accepted changes from the desire to please or meet the partner’s expectations

or even from the desire to be better, closer to an ideal presented to the other, is a mechanism of growth, individual development, and positive self-improvement.

This is the best-case scenario of the effects and impact of solutions found internationally to limit the spread of coronavirus. Staying with the desired and loved one for a long time gives rise to such a phenomenon that is difficult to achieve in other conditions. It compensates for many of the shortcomings of isolation. But not every individual necessarily reaches the position of being with the loved one, which impels a certain desired or hoped-for transformation.

On the other hand, quarantine and pandemic isolation lead to routines destroyed in individual and social life. For the individual, the routines created about daily life support relational clarity and one's position in society, in the social hierarchy and aspirations towards the peak elite – where appropriate – the order of life, the known rhythm. This formula is deeply troubled by crisis and isolation. Instead, there are positive elements of individual clarifications of the meaning of life, of what we want or want to do with our lives, there are elements of clarification of future plans, options, and perspective strategies at the individual, family, at the level of professional options.

On the other hand, a period of isolation from this type and for so long, possibly repeated, leads to individual, couple, or family debates about the meaning of life, happiness, feelings relevant to each. And the return to the current activity also brings new relevant changes and new options are beginning to emerge. Especially the long periods of isolation with the loved one or in the family accentuate the inclination to make time to live, the rediscovery of the fact that there are things beyond work, occupation and everyday madness. And this affects the efficiency and amount of work done for corporations or the extreme wear and tear and urges choices that recalibrate life to more flexible areas and that allow the rebalancing of the professional area with the family and the individual. And not infrequently the resting time is usually sacrificed on the altar of occupation and current problems.

Impact and exposure of individuals and society to the negative effects of the pandemic

We will not discuss here the psychological effects and stress of one's fear of catching the disease or that of a loved one catching it or, God forbid, the loss of a loved one. There is a rich literature in this area and solutions ranging from religion to psychology and social reintegration starting from the family and support groups.

Job loss, declining incomes, and economic degradation that are the result of the pandemic and secondary economic crisis introduce a new type of stress and create complicated, large-scale personality problems. Especially to the ones affected first, at the very beginning of the crisis, who lived the stress without the possibility to intervene during the whole period of isolation, and to those over 50, with lower chances of being re-employed. Less for those with weight and relevance. The severity of the impact increases at the middle and lower levels of society.

However, tolerating pressure and limiting the impact of this type of stress looks better in the EU than in the US and the UK, where support formulas (including health) exclude the social model and the welfare state, i.e. broad societal aid versus liberalism and stricter conditioning in terms of resources. At the EU level, support schemes follow the European social model far beyond the harsh and pure liberalism of competition that leaves losers behind. In the US, the number of evicted and homeless people, who end up on the streets, is increasing.

I was saying that there is also the new stress of returning to the lifestyle before the pandemic. After two months of slowing down, limiting stress and the need for quick action, living with family and loved ones for much longer, the move to normal pre-crisis activity creates the need to manage change, fosters the inertia of a slower rhythm and staying closer to loved ones. Thus it creates a new category of stress that is worth investigating. Humans are very adaptable, but there are categories and percentages of the population that have a lower propensity for adaptation and

feel the impact and stress of returning to work and in previous responsibilities. Sometimes there are individuals and cases that can never recover.

Some resist better, others have a harder time during a crisis, due to the stress, pressure, panic, and the fear of its impact on oneself or close people or, conversely, the silence, isolation, introspection that occurs in the case of isolation. Not all people are well and easily accept the reality of their own life and individuality, they accept themselves and can reflect without fear on themselves and their own lives. Some have a major problem accepting themselves, preferring stress and distraction with a lot of work and sleep without dreams and with minimal periods of reflection on the meaning of their own life. Adaptation is a characteristic of the human being and is extremely good if a new period of isolation does not return too quickly, or lasts too long, or if it's repeated too often. Because the cyclical and long-term resumption of such isolation can lead to the perpetuation of the changes we identified during the pandemic.

2. The time of earnest people: the return of professional elites to the rule of the democratic state³

The coronavirus crisis, like any crisis, reveals highly hidden or less visible aspects of society and accelerates trends that pre-existed but developed in a time that made them imperceptible, under the radar of public interest and attention. That is why we discover today that, among the multiple concurrent and successive crises of the medical urgency caused by the pandemic, there are, in addition to those of the health system, information war, society,

³ See also Iulian Chifu, *Conducerea lumii de după COVID-19: schimbări și reasezări, bătălii și lovituri pe sub masă*, April 10, 2020, at <https://deschide.md/ro/stiri/editorial/64298/Iulian-Chifu-Conducerea-lumii-de-dupa-COVID-19-schimb%C4%83ri-%C8%99i-rea%C8%99ez%C4%83ri-b%C4%83t%C4%83lii-%C8%99i-lovituri-pe-sub-mas%C4%83.htm>; Iulian Chifu: *Bătălia publică, subterană și ocultă pentru conducerea lumii de după Covid-19*, at <https://www.caleaeuropeana.ro/iulian-chifu-batalia-publica-subterana-si-oculta-pentru-conducerea-lumii-de-dupa-covid-19/>; Iulian Chifu, *Renașterea dreptei. Reconectarea la elite*, July 3, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/news/politica/renasterea-dreptei-reconectarea-elite-1_5eff2ddb5163ec427198fe41/index.html.

human behavior and economic crisis, and some that directly address the essence of democratic societies: the crisis of liberal democracies, the crisis of leadership, the crisis of the political class.

All these processes were pre-existing. Not infrequently, the debate of recent years has lamented the recent developments generated mainly by new technologies that have brought to the fore populist personalities and extremist discourses of any kind because they are adored, enticed and promoted by social media, even the classic media, as they draw audiences. The words, the illusion of strength were more popular than the cold calculation, the pragmatic analysis, and the less spectacular professionalism.

The crisis of liberal democracy is represented – at European and also transatlantic level – by the success, through democratic rules in conditions of the preeminence of social media and the post-truth world, and the promotion of this type of leaders, charismatic, special, who attract audiences, but who do not solve concrete problems. They bring votes – which is no small thing – but in times of crisis, they are part of the problem rather than part of the solution. Even during the current pandemic, we felt the need to return to meritocracy and professionals.

The crisis of democracy overlaps with the crisis of political parties, of politics in general, which involved to a lesser extent the battle for professionals, for prominent minds, and more for people loyal to the party, compliance, “mouthpieces” or people pushed forward by party financiers. The result was, not infrequently, the process of isolating parties from reality, moving away from the classic partnerships with society – the left with trade unions, liberals with businessmen and civil society, Christian Democracy with religious groups – from which they recruited professionals, resources, and non-political support.

On the contrary, we have witnessed a growth in many states of a partitocracy, in which the 3-5-7-9% of the citizens of a country, the party members, become the only ones eligible to lead the executive structures of the state. When professionals, the professional and the natural elite run away from party membership

and are excluded from the leadership of public affairs and democratic states through such a mechanism, parties end up full of people without a profession, without experience, with no past qualifications other than being a party member, regardless of whether they are graduates of higher education earlier or later in life.

Obviously, this situation could only lead to removal from the leadership of the democratic states of most of the professional elite and the natural elite in each state. And, furthermore, to a leadership crisis: how many times have I not heard about repeated complaints that we no longer have leaders from other times or where is a Margaret Thatcher, a Francois Mitterrand, a Churchill (although for Romania his personality carries negative elements and memory, from the famous Yalta napkin). Even a Helmuth Kohl or Jacques Chirac, Jacques Delors, or Jose Maria Aznar (let's put aside the blunder with the attack at Atocha station) are no longer found today as part of the leadership.

The crisis has revealed the need to return to the forefront of serious people, with specializations, with professional careers, i.e. of meritocracy. The return to management positions of those who know the fields in which they serve and do not learn while in office, or adapt along the way. And among the professionals, the parties do not have a good hand at picking the best: it is usually said that when you do not have a career and you do not find your professional place, you enter politics to get ahead. The observation is not generally valid, there are also professionals in the political life, but few and far from the decision-making area in the foreground.

Relevant, massive changes are also seen at the level of national institutions and their roles. But the debate between legitimacy, credibility and professionalism is seen more and more often in times of crisis when the pressure of the public is towards clarifications, guarantees and figures that inspire trust. By no means in political figures. The ability of political parties and governments to bring to the forefront, directly or in partnership, credible professionals and established elites of society, to assume and fulfill the roles of decision-makers in times of peace, not

only of war and crisis, will become a point of reference and attractiveness or rejection for the future choices of the democratic public.

I intentionally left at the end the visible failures of populism in the current crisis, regardless of where it comes from, be it liberal democracies, or autocracies, illiberalism, and isolationist nationalism. The closed borders did not protect anyone, it was not the foreigners who invaded the country but rather their conationals. The solution of getting someone to choose whether to stay or come to their country, in times of crisis is related to civic spirit and conviction, reason and responsibility – and also objective possibilities to live in the host country – and less enforcement, blockages, constraints on their citizens.

But perhaps the biggest problem remained the invalidation of triumphalist, snoring, bombastic and absolute approaches, and extremist in form and empty in substance. From President Trump's first approach – “there are about 15 cases and they disappear” – to those of Vladimir Putin – “we have solved the crisis,” a statement made before the actual outbreak of the pandemic – to Lukashenko's vodka bucket and sauna and healing plants of Berdymhamedov (who banned the word coronavirus in Turkmenistan), to Kim Jong Un's North Korea, which closed its borders and declares no infection cases – all proved to be failures due to lack of solutions. The virus knows no nations or borders, only people, of all categories and colors, which it infects. And dealing with that requires thinking, skill, experience, expertise, knowledge, and science, not empty statements!

All this emphasizes that the time has come for principled people. Decent, without PR ambitions, with a clear profession as a base, recognized in their fields, who have done something for their nations and for the fields in which they work, who have already proven their skills. They must return to the forefront, it is necessary to return to the established professional elites – retired in ivory towers, driven away by the reprehensible reputation of the political life, or, directly, by the lobby of campaign contributors and loyal mouthpieces who populate parties and public institutions.

The political class and the professional elites must meet somewhere in the middle. Elites, professionals, principled people must support the political structure of democratic states, accepting decision-making, leadership, and important roles, just as the political class that ensures legitimacy and gathers votes must open its doors to them, bring in professionals. In the era, social media this meritocracy will balance the slide of democracy towards populism and extremes, partitocrats, and especially exceptionalist or unipersonal approaches of the *sic volo* type – because that's what I want!

3. The world after Covid-19. The impact of the pandemic on International Relations and Global Security

The changing world. Trends at the beginning of the crisis

The crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic is already having major effects. And we will leave aside, for the moment, the effects for poor or excessively oil-dependent countries, with Venezuela's case being the most eloquent on the major impact of the pandemic on global consumption, energy products, and oil-dependent or other commodity-dependent states. We will focus instead on the power shifts in the world, on the areas where the major global actors, or actors with relevant potential and specific strategic weight, matter⁴.

The coronavirus crisis has several special features. The main problem is that it tests the leadership and system of a state, not just the health system, in many ways. Especially since the coronavirus pandemic comes with multiple overlapping crises, being, in fact, a crisis of multiple crises, in addition to the current medical predicament:

- the first is about the information warfare, propaganda, and exploitation of the crisis in the battles for prestige and image;

⁴ James Roger, *Audit of Geopolitical Capability. An assessment of 20 major powers*, Henry Jackson Society, January 2019, ISBN: 978-1-909035-50-8, 64 p., at <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HJS-2019-Audit-of-Geopolitical-Capability-Report-web.pdf>.

- the second is the crisis of confidence of the society, in itself, its leaders, decision-makers, and, at the same time, about panic, credibility and the crisis decision-making;
- the third is about leadership and the quality of the political class;
- the fourth is about the quality of liberal democracy in the social media era and populism, and extreme ideologies being promoted versus professionalism, meritocracy and the return to the leadership of qualified elites in a society;
- let's not forget about the crisis and the resettlement of the medical/health system, with all its current strengths and imbalances, with the difficult examination it is failing today;
- last but not least, it's the global economic crisis caused by the coronavirus, including supply chains, and the trade crisis, as well as the foreseeable decoupling of China.

The economic crisis seems the most important because it determines the readjustment of the world of tomorrow. With its existential threats, but also with opportunities to take control of global governance and the management of tomorrow's globalization⁵.

This is not a first, the world already had to deal with these impending crises, with or without the Wuhan coronavirus explosion and its spread around the world. It's just that COVID-19 accelerated their evolution and brought them to the forefront. Technological developments had long since moved things to a distinct spectrum but no one has dealt with the trending effects of these changes on man, society, politics, and international relations.

The solutions are few, the same, and we do not have to reinvent the wheel, especially since neither world has changed so

⁵ Iulian Chifu, *Testul suprem pentru Regimul Dodon: pregătirea de criza Covid-19 și credibilitatea conducerii de la Chișinău*, Adevărul, April 1, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/moldova/politica/testul-suprem-regimul-dodon-pregatirea-criza-covid-19-credibilitatea-conducerii-chisinau-1_5e8363bc5163ec42715755a1/index.html; deschide.md, March 31, 2020, at <https://deschide.md/ro/stiri/editorial/63637/ICHifu-Testul-suprem-pentru-Regimul-Dodon-preg%C4%83tirea-de-criza-Covid-19-%C8%99i-credibilitatea-conducerii-de-la-Chi%C8%99in%C4%83u.htm>

dramatically overnight nor has our minds, and that of the advisers sitting next to decision-makers, evolved and will evolve so fantastically in 2-3-5 months:

- The G0 world – of no one, No One’s World – the anarchic world without leadership, after Trump’s USA withdrawal from the world scene. If not in splendid isolation, in a more self-preoccupied posture; – “America first, Great again!” – rather than ensuring global leadership.

- Returning to the world with US leadership – even if more nuanced, changed, and with more limited tasks, with or without the current president, with or without the current US leadership.

- The G2 world, the globalized world along the main lines of the big players, the USA and China. If they get along. If rivalries and the prospect of confrontation fade. If they collaborate. If China accepts the rules and follows them. If they don’t end up fighting. Or at least I don’t break the global trade, polarizing it into two sides, as they started to do. Slim chance! It would take at least half a miracle for this, or major global pressure.

- The US-China-EU tripod – which is rather a European ambition, a visionary assumption of Emmanuel Macron on the global role of the EU between the two seas, balancing them, but without the resources and agreement of European economic engines. Again, it is difficult to predict the likelihood of this scenario in the short and medium-term.

- P5 – the group of permanent members of the Security Council, as leaders in the debate on the future of the world and the management of globalization. Again, with very big differences in quality, lift, manners, fundamental values, and specific weight between the actors and with major differences between them. But with an initiative already on the table – Macron-Trump-Putin. We will see the leaders of the action, and its directions, if this initiative will actually work.

- G7 (G8) – is a natural framework for discussing the major issues of the world, the G8 variant being the desire and aspiration of Russia, which is not in the category of the most industrialized states in the world, but yearns its global role.

- G20 – a broader framework, which blurs the ambitions and trends of the Great Power policy that all the other projects so far reveal. It was proposed as a sketch in a letter published as an editorial in The Washington Times by Mevlut Cavusoglu, Turkey's foreign minister. This is also a *pro domo* plea, but it has its substance and relevance⁶.

Our analysis has led to several scenarios, none of which are likely to be good and salutary in the current context. All of them bring to the fore rather the continuation/acceleration of globalization as an objective process, and the effects of the coronavirus crisis on the populist, nationalist, and isolationist options, which we will analyze below.

- *Worst case scenario* remains the politics of power – i.e. the inclination to use force, war, aggressive influence to achieve political goals, respectively the policy of Great Power – i.e. the temptation of a Great Deal between the great powers, inclined to share world domination, which also means multipolarism, spheres of influence and privileged interests. The world will be divided and deals will be made between great powers, behind closed doors, regarding the future of these spheres of influence. Unfortunately, this is a scenario likely to materialize.

- *Best case scenario* remains the arrangement of the world based on multilateralism, the rule of law, a world based on rules, consensualism in decisions (technically EU values extrapolated globally). While it is promising, the probability of heading in this direction is very low given today's world and the political leaders we inherited, which must guide the current world through the coronavirus crisis.

- The most likely scenario oscillates between two variants, and these on the good-bad scale: The G0 world, anarchic,

⁶ Iulian Chifu, *Criza de coronavirus, Globalizare, politică de Mare Putere și Concertul Mondial* in April 5-6, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/criza-coronavirus-globalizare-politica-mare-putere-concertul-mondial-5-1_5e89eab25163ec427175a514/index.html; Iulian Chifu, *Bătălia publică, subterană și ocultă pentru conducerea lumii de după COVID-19*, Adevărul, April 9, 2020, at <https://www.calea-europeana.ro/iulian-chifu-batalia-publica-subterana-si-oculta-pentru-conducerea-lumii-de-dupa-covid-19/>

without leadership, with rivalries between great powers and, why not, possible wars, with inadequate ambitions and leaders in the forefront, and with the abandonment/marginalization of professionalism and meritocracy, but leaning towards partitocracy and the closure of democratic systems; or Transatlantic Leadership – if it manages to overcome the poor management of the crisis, populism, the temptation to change unfavorable narratives, with a possible change of leadership or options for the main actors, and the need to coordinate global efforts in line with civilized, Western, democratic states.

If the transatlantic rift that many are forcing ends up closing, the United States will no longer be the leader we know, it will need the general support and legitimacy of the contribution of all democratic states in the transatlantic community. It is a simple, well-known, beaten and functional road, it has its own common values at its base, it is easy to rebuild, maybe with other leaders, and the will and support of the population can be catalyzed because the need is obvious⁷.

Unfortunately, the possible catalyst for such a scenario, both likely and close to a best-case, includes the use of the common enemy trope to catalyze all the support, namely the designation of China as a common enemy! American documents and many documents from European and EU Member States are beginning to contain converging elements in such a direction.

Authoritarianism versus democracy during the crisis. Winners and losers⁸

On the other hand, we cannot deny two immediate processes that were determined by the appearance of the plague and the low supply of PPE and medical ventilators, and also by propaganda and information warfare triggered by the temptation of profit

⁷ Iulian Chifu, *Criza de coronavirus, Globalizare, politică...*

⁸ Iulian Chifu, *Bătălia lumilor în vreme de coronavirus: meciul China – SUA autoritarism – democrație pierdut de populism*, Adevărul, April 30, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/batalia-lumilor-vreme-decoronavirus-meciul-china-sua-autoritarism-democrație-pierdut-populism-1_5eaa66865163ec427146286e/index.html

from the crisis: First, an immediate collapse of solidarity and the emergence of excesses of individualism, exceptionalism and crisis selfishness. It is not only about the national tendencies, but also about the local ones, exaggerated formulas of localisms, manifested by keeping room in the hospitals and the materials necessary for the treatments for “my people” – those from the locality, relatives, acquaintances – that should be treated preferentially, before others – newcomers, foreigners, others. A deeply human behavior, to save peers first – reprehensible, unethical, immoral but deeply human⁹.

The second process is that of rivalries and the tendency to use the crisis for image gains, political and geopolitical purposes (I put aside the war enriched and the electoral trampolines of the future, which we have already talked about), through propaganda and information warfare, to show that one system is better than another, that authoritarianism and nationalism solve the problem and liberal democracy and open society amplify it, that the strong hand leader is the solution, not the democratically taken decision, through debate or consensus¹⁰. With the export of soft power through unnecessary or defective pseudo-aid, but with ambitions and desires to achieve political goals – see Italy’s break with Europe, the pseudo-aid from China and Russia when “the EU does nothing”, respectively the tearful anti-European campaign of Salvini and Lega’s with the famous clip of Macron and Merkel’s abandonment of Italy. With the tendency of absolute nationalism in politics, with the preeminence of the providential national leader who is right no matter what he does, and with the closing of borders as the preferred solution.

As absurd as it may be, these declarative, snoring and aggressive approaches are effective. In the early stages of the crisis, especially

⁹ Iulian Chifu, *Infodemie trilaterală în pandemia de coronavirus: China, Rusia, Iran împotriva Lumii Libere*, Adevărul, April 28, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/infodemie-trilateral-pandemia-coronavirus-china-rusia-iran-lumii-libere-1_5ea70e405163ec42712fa672/index.html

¹⁰ Iulian Chifu, *Infodemie trilaterală în pandemia de coronavirus: China, Rusia, Iran împotriva Lumii Libere*, Adevărul, April 28, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/infodemie-trilateral-pandemia-coronavirus-china-rusia-iran-lumii-libere-1_5ea70e405163ec42712fa672/index.html

through the effect of multiplying propaganda during a crisis and by capitalizing on people's emotions and needs, but also their amplified time on social media due to isolation and appetite for the exceptional and morbid. But also for providential saviors – whether they are self-declared nationalist patriots, or authoritarian regimes with ambitions of global hegemony. Still, the solutions come from professional, trained people, from constant investments in research, medicine, and from the effort to find a treatment and a vaccine¹¹.

Hence responsible, secure, and lasting solutions – unburdensome and without political conditioning – are also found in modern, rational, and civilized liberal-democratic states, not in the flurry of meaningless words and the bragging of populist leaders or the providential solutions of the authoritarian leaders of the world.

The media tend to see – perhaps too often – options, rifts, wars, and dichotomous choices between good and evil. It's about ease of thinking and communication. And the crisis generated by the coronavirus brought the same vision to the forefront when the “match,” the war or the battle takes place between authoritarianism and democracy. No matter, this real battle of the worlds was also fueled by the virulent and aggressive campaign, in the space of the information warfare of Russia and China, with predilection, to emphasize how effective the autocracies are. The result is not, however, at all to the liking of those who used propaganda excessively and humanitarian aid for political gains¹².

The battle in public space should be one between authoritarianism and democracy. Especially when the theme was who is better? Who claimed victory? Who is more efficient in the design of the

¹¹ Iulian Chifu, *Pescuitori în ape tulburi și îmbogățiti de război: Cazul coronavirusului*, March 16, 2020, Adevărul, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/pescuitori-ape-tulburi-imbogatiti-razboi-cazul-coronavirusului-1_5e6f1d1c5163ec4271f6dba5/index.html

¹² Iulian Chifu, *Forcingul pescuitorilor globali în ape tulburi - Rusia, China și efectul pervers al propagandei pro domo*, Adevărul, March 23, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/forcingul-pescuitorilor-globali-ape-tulburi-rusia-china-efectul-pervers-propagandei-pro-domo-1_5e78b0ec5163ec4271206388/index.html

political model. Because here the result was not at all advantageous to all the parties that fueled the dispute, no matter how attractive it seemed. The themes were publicly packaged and sold in the simplest, most raw and direct way possible. Has authoritarianism won? Is it more efficient, has it managed the crisis better? Who? Can China, Russia, or Iran claim victory? And are Italy and the US defeated? What about Turkey and Great Britain, on which side do they stand, winners or losers?

If we look at the result, through effects and consequences, China and Russia, as well as the USA and Italy lost equally. And victory, efficiency, the best crisis management capacity goes to Taiwan, New Zealand, Australia, South Korea, Germany, even Singapore, Japan and Hong Kong, they are at the top as well. All the winners are all democracies! What then separates these states from those “defeated” in the fight against the coronavirus crisis? What separates at the European level the Nordic states from Italy, Spain, and France?

Many elements come into play. First the peoples, their customs and characteristic behavior and especially the conformity to rules, laws, and obedience to the authority during a crisis; then the efficiency of the government, the capacity of the political establishment when dealing with both the actions of crisis management, a crisis with multiple human victims, and the support, credibility, trust it can attract. Especially the ability to associate with credible professionals in the field of infectious diseases and crisis management¹³.

On the contrary, populism, the division of society, action rather in words and image gain, political and ideological, not in concrete facts, visible, perceptible by the population, to solve the crisis or diminish the effects, economic problems existing

¹³ Iulian Chifu, *Efectele Covid: Naționalizarea globalizării versus accelerarea integrării globale. Locul UE*, Adevărul, March 30, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/efectele-covid-19nationalizarea-globalizarii-versus-accelerarea-integrarii-globale-locul-ue-1_5e80ba1d5163ec42714a4204/index.html

outside/before the crisis and pre-existing ruptures in society are the ingredients that rather define the failure of coronavirus crisis management.

That is why China, and Russia, and the USA, and Italy – the Cinque Stele/Lega side is more in the area of those defeated during the crisis. Not coincidentally, the hardest-hit area in Italy is the rich basin of the Northern League, Lombardy, Padania, while Donald Trump's public statements, who recommending testing disinfectant injection as a treatment and fought with states for necessary medical ventilators, or encouraged anti-social distancing demonstrations, were quickly capitalized on by anti-democratic propaganda¹⁴.

The pursuit of PR was the most condemned globally. Not only by its population, especially in democracies, but by the whole world. Things like excessive, ostentatious use of propaganda during the crisis, the temptation to gain political advantages in the midst of crisis, not to mention the ones who exploited the crisis for financial gains at the expense of citizens who face major losses, their fears and emotions, now that they lose loved ones, jobs, sources of income and have to deal with the insecurity and unpredictability of the crisis.

Hence the failure that destroyed populists all over the world, both authoritarian and democratic alike. Too much pursuit of political gains, too many snoring statements, not covered by facts. The lessons learned from this: it doesn't matter so much how you gained power – although issues of legitimacy and credibility during a crisis are crucial; it does not matter how balanced and controlled, the executive power is, – here too democracy gives some guarantees to the population and avoids abuses, hence the clear separation between authoritarians and democrats, the latter being accountable, and acting accordingly.

¹⁴ Iulian Chifu, *Conflictul de valori: viața oamenilor versus economia națională*, Adevărul, March 26, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/conflictul-valori-viata-oamenilor-versus-economia-nationala-1_5e7d0da95163ec4271374a5b/index.html

What matters most in the relationship between victory and defeat in a crisis is what you do with the power, how you use it, and who benefits from your actions. How do you make your actions benefit the general population, which is facing the crisis, how does it feel you are helping, how do you increase confidence and how do you listen, referring to recognized and credible professionals. How do you manage to open the public scene, to allow the entry of credible figures during the crisis, who join as Government and power to manage the crisis? How governments work in times of crisis. And how the politician knows to take a step back, leaving room for professionals during the crisis, but without running away, ensuring access to authority and resources to solve the crisis.

This is what distinguishes the general victory of professional democracies, inclined towards solutions, from empty autocracies; this is what distinguishes the uneducated populists from the statesmen of established democracies.

Crisis as a threat and an opportunity: China as an enemy and the engagement of Putin's Russian¹⁵

On the other hand, the idealistic perspective of global management by consensus among all actors, in consensual multilateralist formulas, hits at the limits of acceptability, existing policies, and the growing need to penalize China, to push China's to admit its responsibility in the coronavirus crisis. In this context, the refusal of an international commission to investigate the source and evolution of coronavirus in Wuhan is not auspicious and creates increasingly strong grounds for turning China into an enemy.

Just as, on the other hand, the model of globalization will be fundamentally changed, also to the detriment of China, the current quasi-monopolist. What follows, therefore, is the decoupling and

¹⁵ Iulian Chifu, *Bătălia lumilor în vreme de coronavirus: meciul China – SUA autoritarism – democrație pierdut de populism*, Adevărul, April 30, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/batalia-lumilor-vreme-decoronavirus-meciul-china-sua-autoritarism-democratie-pierdut-populism-1_5eaa66865163ec427146286e/index.html

exclusion of China from major global trade chains, the relocation of Chinese industries, and the takeover of the production chains by democratic states. It is underlined by the US National Security Strategy and the US position, it is increasingly mentioned in the European Union on both tones, from both Paris and Berlin, it is also confirmed by Romania, through the latest statements of the President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis.

The Chinese model of authoritarian communism and ostentatious and venal information warfare, propaganda and populism unrelated to reality, covering the responsibilities of leaders and authoritarian states during a crisis, as well as the model of concentrating cheap global manufacturing output is no longer acceptable. And all, due to China's mistakes by politicizing aid and conditioning the deliveries of health supplies that everyone wanted, as well as due to the quality of cheap Chinese goods that entered the global market once stocks and special sources for export were exhausted.

Obviously, the episode of the coronavirus crisis also revealed the Chinese lackeys in the West, states, leaders and political parties. It also revealed the motivation of leaders or parties behind the support, embrace, or use the Chinese model, beyond propaganda, bringing back the Chinese money, corruption and conditioning that came on authoritarian folds for private enrichment. At the same time, it led, as we have seen, to the public exposure of hollow populism and undeniably marked the failure of baseless discourse, of chasing a good image the unsupported by facts.

Vladimir Putin's situation is not to be envied today¹⁶. After successive mistakes in anticipating the impact of the crisis caused by the coronavirus, which "did not hit Russia"¹⁷ – as he declared a month ago – the explosion of the number of cases and the impact caused a crazy outburst among the population. The

¹⁶ Andrew Higgins, *Putin, Russia's Man of Action, Is Passive, Even Bored, in the Coronavirus Era*, April 30, 2020, New York Times, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/30/world/europe/russia-putin-coronavirus.html>.

¹⁷ Henry Foy and Max Seddon, *Economic Woes Undermine Putin's Pledge Pandemic Is 'Under Control,'* in Financial Times, April 23, 2020, at <https://www.ft.com/content/63ea4134-ce5c-48dc-a0e0-0fde43948d86>

disappearance of the president in the public view and the passing of responsibility to mayors and governors of regions, but without federal funds, was frowned upon by the population. His support is drastically declining¹⁸. Additionally, the oil war, for the market and prices, with Saudi Arabia ended very badly for Russia, being brought to its knees by the agreement with OPEC and the prospect of cutting 10 million barrels of oil production per day, respectively 18% of Russia's production. And that is not all, the estimates are that the stabilization of prices requires cuts 3 times bigger¹⁹.

In this context, Donald Trump's "China's main enemy" policy may bring opportunities, but it forces, as in the case of the European Union, the realignment with the US policy of decoupling China from the global economy. With a clear condition, it must choose between the USA or China! *Tertium non datur!*

Russia and Putin's overlapping crises. Alternative approaches²⁰

Vladimir Putin announced confidently, about a month ago, that Russia has no problems with the coronavirus and that the pandemic and the explosion of the number of cases in China, its neighbor, did not affect it, because it closed the state border²¹. In fact, the Kremlin relied on the fact that the number of flights

¹⁸ Iulian Chifu, *Criza de coronavirus, încrederea și susținerea liderilor: Putin și prăbușirea susținerii publice*, in *Adevărul*, April 4, 2020.

¹⁹ Iulian Chifu, *Încăpătânarea Rusiei: prăbușirea prețului barilului de petrol și explozia crizei globale*, March 10, 2020, *Adevărul*, at https://adevarul.ro/international/rusia/Incapatanarea-rusiei-prabusirea-pretului-barilului-petrol-explozia-crisiei-globale-1_5e669b3f5163ec4271d3d727/index.html; Iulian Chifu, *Războiul Rusiei lui Putin cu lumea: spirala prăbușirii prețului petrolului*, in *Adevărul*, March 17, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/rusia/razboiul-rusiei-putin-lumea-spirala-prabusirii-pretului-petrolului-1_5e70701f5163ec4271fc8753/index.html

²⁰ Iulian Chifu, *Criza de coronavirus, încrederea și susținerea liderilor: Putin și prăbușirea susținerii publice*, in *Adevărul*, April 4, 2020.

²¹ Henry Foy and Max Seddon, *Economic Woes Undermine Putin's Pledge Pandemic Is 'Under Control'*, in *Financial Times*, April 23, 2020, at <https://www.ft.com/content/63ea4134-ce5c-48dc-a0e0-0fde43948d86>; Steven Pifer, *Putin's Not-So-Excellent Spring*, Brookings Institution/ Stanford CISAC, April 23, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/04/23/putins-not-so-excellent-spring/>

between Chinese cities and Moscow is not so relevant and the presence of patients scattered through Siberia – the contact area with China and the Chinese business area, is irrelevant because there the density of the Russian population is so low that a real epidemic cannot “explode” there. And the lack of interest in human rights, the right to life and fair medical treatment, could be added, we should say, to the reason for the misjudgment by the Kremlin, which exposed Putin to a different reality²².

However, the pandemic overwhelmed major population centers in Russia, mainly Moscow and St. Petersburg, the capital of Russia and Putin’s hometown, a relevant blow to his image. Russia had, on its latest report on Tuesday, April 21, 2020, 5 642 new cases – a steady increase – and 51 new deaths, marking the fact that it is today, along with Britain, on the path of exponential growth and is still far from the peak number of cases²³.

If we add the fact that the Russian president suddenly disappeared from the public view – it was even heard that he was in self-isolation, after having contact with a doctor who tested positive for coronavirus later – Vladimir Putin yielded all responsibility and left the battle with coronavirus to mayors and heads of regions²⁴. But what the federal government has forgotten is to offer the basic resources needed to fight the coronavirus, namely funds for the purchase of protective gear, support for first-line doctors and medicine. The 15-hour queues of ambulances at the entrance to the hospitals showed the size of the impact of the pandemic in Moscow²⁵.

²² Iulian Chifu, *Operațiunile psihologice ruse și bumerangul coronavirusului pentru regimul autoritar al lui Putin*, *Adevărul*, April 15, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/rusia/operatiunile-psihologice-ruse-esecul-regimului-autoritar-lui-putin-fata-coronavirusul-1_5e95f0e65163ec4271b9c487/index.html

²³ Worldometers, at <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

²⁴ Henry Foy and Max Seddon, *Economic Woes Undermine Putin’s Pledge Pandemic Is ‘Under Control,’* in *Financial Times*, April 23, 2020, at <https://www.ft.com/content/63ea4134-ce5c-48dc-a0e0-0fde43948d86>; Leon Aron, *The Coronavirus Could Imperil Putin’s Presidency*, in *Wall Street Journal*, April 24, 2020, at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-coronavirus-could-imperil-putins-presidency-11587682524>

²⁵ Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, *Russia Analytical Report*, April 20-27, 2020 at <https://www.russiamatters.org/news/russia-analytical-report/russia-analytical-report-april-20-27-2020>

Vladimir Putin later returned to the forefront, after facing public pressure and at the advice of image consultants, acknowledged the following critical period and the fact that even more people will lose their life – even with the risk of contradicting himself and of associating his image with the bad news. The absence and reluctance of the president in terms of responsibility – still left to mayors and heads of regions – did not help at the level of public opinion²⁶, as growing economic difficulties exacerbate internal problems and threaten to cause the regime to collapse by implosion²⁷.

Issues in the management of the current coronavirus crisis have overlapped in Russia with domestic policy issues and Putin's interests, respectively his forceful attempt to amend the Constitution in a referendum and approve Vladimir Putin's rule for life. The referendum, which was due to take place on April 22, was postponed due to the outbreak, but even without the mistakes made during the crisis management, support for Putin to stay in power after 2024, according to official data, was below 50%, with a low probability for the referendum to meet the required majority²⁸. Today the probability is even lower.

Indeed, it proves once again that populist leaders have problems on all fronts with this crisis: it is not enough to give speeches, wind up conspiracy theories, and score image points, possibly

²⁶ Leon Aron, *The Coronavirus Could Imperil Putin's Presidency*, in Wall Street Journal, April 24, 2020, at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-coronavirus-could-imperil-putins-presidency-11587682524>; Editorial Board, *Russia's Economic Woes Will Clip Vladimir Putin's Wings*, in Financial Times, April 27, 2020, at <https://www.ft.com/content/d000617c-8620-11ea-b872-8db45d5f6714>

²⁷ Iulian Chifu, *Jilțul lui Putin zgâlțâit serios: Tarul rus împins afară pe scări de la Kremlin chiar înainte de încheierea mandatului*, Adevarul, April 22, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/rusia/jiltul-putin-zgaltait-serios-Tarul-rus-impins-afarscari-kremlin-incheierea-mandatului-1_5e9fca645163ec4271ffec95/index.html

²⁸ Tom Balmforth, *Poll finds Russians split over allowing Putin to extend rule*, REUTERS, March 26, 2020, at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-poll/poll-finds-russians-split-over-allowing-putin-to-extend-rule-idUSKBN21E1T2>; Henry Foy and Max Seddon, *Economic Woes Undermine Putin's Pledge Pandemic Is 'Under Control'*, in Financial Times, April 23, 2020, at <https://www.ft.com/content/63ea4134-ce5c-48dc-a0e0-0fde43948d86>

capitalizing on the charisma and public support for the image of a strong and macho man. First of all, Vladimir Putin is already 67 years old and does not arouse the same emotion as before. Then, in real crises, we need serious and professional people, who commit themselves to guide the country through the crisis, who give up on or have never had political ambitions, never fought battles of this type, or had electoral interests or ego as a driving factor. Here what matters are the facts and the concrete, effective way of managing the crisis.

Usually, the crisis brings with it the principle of rallying around the flag and supporting the leader who is currently in charge of the state. This marks a significant support increase in polls for leaders, both in democratic and authoritarian states²⁹. It is not a serious and long-term growth: immediately after the end of the crisis, leaders, decision-makers during the crisis become fully liable and support decreases dramatically. Especially when we talk about crises with multiple deaths and victims, facing the prospects of both illness and losing their jobs, or collapsing under the effects of the ensuing economic crisis.

This time, Vladimir Putin proved uncompetitive and dropped in the polls. In all polls, conducted by all polling firms³⁰. This must be a result of a substantial rejection at the grassroots level,

²⁹ Vladimir Ruvinsky and Pavel Aptekar, *The Coronavirus Gave Europe's Leaders a Popularity Boost. Putin Hasn't Fared As Well*, May 1, 2020, The Moscow Times, at <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/04/30/the-coronavirus-gave-euro-pes-leaders-a-popularity-boost-putin-hasnt-fared-as-well-a70157>

³⁰ The Moscow Times, *Russians' Trust in Putin Hits 14-Year Low – State Poll*, Updated: April 28, 2020, at <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/04/28/russians-trust-in-putin-hits-14-year-low-state-poll-a70128>; Доверие политикам, at https://wciom.ru/news/ratings/doverie_politikam/; Vedomosti, *Levarda Opinion Poll: Trust level and rating of Vladimir Putin*, at <https://www.vedomosti.ru/society/articles/2020/03/26/826370-konstitutsionnaya-popravka>; Andrei Zlobin, *Уровень доверия к Путину упал до минимума за 14 лет*, Forbes Russia, April 27, 2020, at <https://www.forbes.ru/newsroom/obshchestvo/399199-uroven-doveriya-k-putinu-upal-dominimuma-za-14-let>; RFE/RL, *Poll Finds Russians' Trust In Putin Dips To Lowest Point In 14 Years*, April 28, 2020, at <https://www.rferl.org/a/poll-finds-russians-trust-in-putin-dips-to-lowest-point-in-14-years/30581727.html>

a major accumulated emotion, and a punishment for poor crisis management. There are no happy managers during a crisis and in the case of crises with multiple victims, with loss of life, things are even worse³¹. That is, they usually lose the next election, whether they lose or win the war, whether they manage the crisis well or badly – see Churchill after World War II or the Liberals after the Falklands War³².

The only counterexamples are the American singularity – the starting of a new war, which brings victory to the incumbent president. Today things are much more sophisticated, there is a lot of information, which is why Donald Trump did not benefit – amid the late and poor management of the crisis, the unfortunate statements about injecting disinfectants to fight the virus, and support for conspiracy theories – from this rally under the flag.

On the other hand, in the case of long wars, the gain goes to those who plead for their end and bringing the military home – the Vietnam War, or even Trump in 2016 – and losses go to those who continue these long conflicts. But even during crises with multiple victims, with major impact, there are special crisis managers, good professionals accompanied by leading professionals in the field, excellent communicators, who gain trust: the mayor of New York – not directly involved in the fight against terrorism that led to 9/11, but an excellent manager of the crisis that followed, capturing the public eye – he ran for president and received the title of mayor of the United States, while Andrew Cuomo, governor of New York, the state most affected by the coronavirus in the US, gained the most support and highest marks during the crisis, despite the occasional war with President Donald Trump, and also by avoiding unnecessary confrontations with him.

³¹ Iulian Chifu, *Coronavirusul. Lecții pentru decidenți în vremuri de criză*, March 13, 2020, Adevărul, at https://adevarul.ro/news/eveniment/coronavirusul-lectii-pentru-decidenti-in-vremuri-criza-1_5e6b5fd25163ec4271e89459/index.html

³² Iulian Chifu, *Criza de coronavirus, încrederea și susținerea liderilor: Putin și prăbușirea susținerii publice*, in Adevărul, April 4, 2020.

Vladimir Putin has today the lowest rating in the last 14 years³³. An official assessment by the state institute, made on April 13-19, 2020 shows that only 28.3% of Russians spontaneously call Putin a politician they trust, in an open-ended question, the lowest point since January 2006. There is also a steady decline in support regarding confidence in Putin when he is on a list and named, reaching 69.8%³⁴.

The Levarda Center too, the most prestigious institution doing public opinion polling, has similar data, when the leader of Russia, in power for 21 years, is mentioned in a direct question, with a list being presented, recorded results are 63%, the lowest point since November 2013, six a half years ago³⁵. If we add the issue of support regarding the extension of the term of the President after 2024, by amending the Constitution, only 48% of the public supports the idea versus the 47% opposition to these changes. This was the case in March 2020, and the decrease is probably even more drastic³⁶ today. Compared to the minimum of 60% support, expected to be the public confidence needed to start a new two-term rule, the current poll data already shows the degree

³³ The Moscow Times, *Russians' Trust in Putin Hits 14-Year Low – State Poll*, Updated: April 28, 2020, at <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/04/28/russians-trust-in-putin-hits-14-year-low-state-poll-a70128>; RFE/RL, *Poll Finds Russians' Trust In Putin Dips To Lowest Point In 14 Years*, April 28, 2020, at <https://www.rferl.org/a/poll-finds-russians-trust-in-putin-dips-to-lowest-point-in-14-years/30581727.html>; Andrei Zlobin, *Уровень доверия к Путину упал до минимума за 14 лет*, Forbes Russia, April 27, 2020, at <https://www.forbes.ru/newsroom/obshchestvo/399199-uroven-doveriya-k-putinu-upal-do-minimuma-za-14-let>

³⁴ *Доверие политикам*, at https://wciom.ru/news/ratings/doverie_politikam/; Andrei Zlobin, *Уровень доверия к Путину упал до минимума за 14 лет*, Forbes Russia, April 27, 2020, at <https://www.forbes.ru/newsroom/obshchestvo/399199-uroven-doveriya-k-putinu-upal-do-minimuma-za-14-let>; RFE/RL, *Poll Finds Russians' Trust In Putin Dips To Lowest Point In 14 Years*, April 28, 2020, at <https://www.rferl.org/a/poll-finds-russians-trust-in-putin-dips-to-lowest-point-in-14-years/30581727.html>

³⁵ Vedomosti, *Levarda Opinion Poll: Trust level and rating of Vladimir Putin*, at <https://www.vedomosti.ru/society/articles/2020/03/26/826370-konstitutsionnaya-popravka>

³⁶ Tom Balmforth, *Poll finds Russians split over allowing Putin to extend rule*, REUTERS, March 26, 2020, at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-poll/poll-finds-russians-split-over-allowing-putin-to-extend-rule-idUSKBN21E1T2>

of erosion of the Russian president³⁷, hence the start of a public disinformation and propaganda campaign with the narrative “if Putin leaves it will get worse! Someone less democratic will take his place,” that is meant to save Putin and his regime, which is shaking today³⁸.

Bibliography:

- Andrei Zlobin, *Уровень доверия к Путину упал до минимума за 14 лет*, Forbes Russia, April 27, 2020, at <https://www.forbes.ru/newsroom/obshchestvo/399199-uroven-doveriya-k-putinu-upal-do-minimuma-za-14-let>
- Andrew Higgins, Putin, *Russia's Man of Action, Is Passive, Even Bored*, in the Coronavirus Era, April 30, 2020, New York Times, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/30/world/europe/russia-putin-coronavirus.html>.
- Editorial Board, *Russia's Economic Woes Will Clip Vladimir Putin's Wings*, in Financial Times, April 27, 2020, at <https://www.ft.com/content/d000617c-8620-11ea-b872-8db45d5f6714>
- Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, *Russia Analytical Report*, April 20-27, 2020, at <https://www.russiamatters.org/news/russia-analytical-report/russia-analytical-report-april-20-27-2020>
- Andrew Foxall, *Covid-19 is testing Putin's regime*, The Spectator, April 29, 2020, at <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/covid-19-is-testing-putin-s-regime>
- Henry Foy and Max Seddon, *Economic Woes Undermine Putin's Pledge Pandemic Is 'Under Control'*, in Financial Times, April 23, 2020, at <https://www.ft.com/content/63ea4134-ce5c-48dc-a0e0-0fde43948d86>
- Iulian Chifu, *Bătălia lumilor în vreme de coronavirus: meciul China – SUA autoritarism – democrație pierdut de populism*, Adevărul, April 30, 2020, at <https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/batalia-lumilor-vreme-decoron>

³⁷ Steven Pifer, *Putin's Not-So-Excellent Spring*, Brookings Institution/ Stanford CISAC, April 23, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/04/23/putins-not-so-excellent-spring/>; Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, *Russia Analytical Report*, April 20-27, 2020, at <https://www.russiamatters.org/news/russia-analytical-report/russia-analytical-report-april-20-27-2020>; Andrew Foxall, *Covid-19 is testing Putin's regime*, The Spectator, April 29, 2020, at <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/covid-19-is-testing-putin-s-regime>

³⁸ Iulian Chifu, *Operațiunea "Salvați-l pe Putin!"*: Stalinismul represiv tardiv de după coronavirus, Adevărul, April 27, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/operatiunea-salvati-l-putin-stalinismul-represiv-tardiv-coronavirus-1_5ea5dd485163ec427128470f/index.html

- avirus-meciul-china-sua-autoritarism-democratie-pierdut-populism-1_5eaa66865163ec427146286e/index.html
- Iulian Chifu, *Bătălia publică, subterană și ocultă pentru conducerea lumii de după COVID-19*, *Adevărul*, April 9, 2020, at <https://www.caleaeuropeana.ro/iulian-chifu-batalia-publica-subterana-si-oculta-pentru-conducerea-lumii-de-dupa-covid-19/>
- Iulian Chifu, *Conflictul de valori: viața oamenilor versus economia națională*, *Adevărul*, March 26, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/conflictul-valori-viata-oamenilor-versus-economia-nationala-1_5e7d0da95163ec4271374a5b/index.html
- Iulian Chifu, *Coronavirusul. Lecții pentru decidenți în vremuri de criză*, March 13, 2020, *Adevărul*, at https://adevarul.ro/news/eveniment/coronavirusul-lectii-pentru-decidenti-in-vremuri-criza-1_5e6b5fd25163ec4271e89459/index.html
- Iulian Chifu, *Criza de coronavirus, Globalizare, politică de Mare Putere și Concertul Mondial în 5*, April 6, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/criza-coronavirus-globalizare-politica-mare-putere-concertul-mondial-5-1_5e89eab25163ec427175a514/index.html
- Iulian Chifu, *Criza de coronavirus, încrederea și susținerea liderilor: Putin și prăbușirea susținerii publice*, in *Adevărul*, April 4, 2020.
- Iulian Chifu, *Efectele Covid: Naționalizarea globalizării versus accelerarea integrării globale. Locul UE*, *Adevărul*, March 30, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/efectele-covid-19-nationalizarea-globalizarii-versus-accelerarea-integrarii-globale-locul-ue-1_5e80ba1d5163ec42714a4204/index.html
- Iulian Chifu, *Forcingul pescuitorilor globali în ape tulburi – Rusia, China și efectul pervers al propagandei pro domo*, *Adevărul*, March 23, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/forcingul-pescuitorilor-globali-ape-tulburi-rusia-china-efectul-pervers-propagandei-pro-domo-1_5e78b0ec5163ec4271206388/index.html
- Iulian Chifu, *Încăpătânarea Rusiei: prăbușirea prețului barilului de petrol și explozia crizei globale*, March 10, 2020, *Adevărul*, at https://adevarul.ro/international/rusia/incapatanarea-rusiei-prabusirea-pretului-barilului-petrol-explozia-crizei-globale-1_5e669b3f5163ec4271d3d727/index.html
- Iulian Chifu, *Infodemie trilaterală în pandemia de coronavirus: China, Rusia, Iran împotriva Lumii Libere*, *Adevărul*, April 28, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/infodemie-trilateral-pandemia-coronavirus-china-rusia-iran-lumii-libere-1_5ea70e405163ec42712fa672/index.html
- Iulian Chifu, *Jilțul lui Putin zgâlțâit serios: Țarul rus împins afară pe scări de la Kremlin chiar înainte de încheierea mandatului*, *Adevărul*, April 22, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/rusia/jiltul-putin-zgaltait-serios-Tarul-rus-impins-afara-scari-kremlin-incheierea-mandatului-1_5e9fca645163ec4271ffec95/index.html

- Iulian Chifu, *Operațiunea “Salvați-l pe Putin!”: Stalinismul represiv tardiv de după coronavirus*, Adevarul, April 27, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/operatiunea-salvati-l-putin-stalinismul-represiv-tardiv-coronavirus-1_5ea5dd485163ec427128470f/index.html
- Iulian Chifu, *Operațiunile psihologice ruse și bumerangul coronavirusului pentru regimul autoritar al lui Putin*, Adevarul, April 15, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/rusia/operatiunile-psihologice-ruse-esecul-regimului-autoritar-lui-putin-fata-coronavirusul-1_5e95f0e65163ec4271b9c487/index.html
- Iulian Chifu, *Pescuitori în ape tulburi și îmbogățiti de război: Cazul coronavirusului*, March 16, 2020, Adevarul, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/pescuitori-ape-tulburi-imbogatiti-razboi-cazul-coronavirusului-1_5e6f1d1c5163ec4271f6dba5/index.html
- Iulian Chifu, *Războiul Rusiei lui Putin cu lumea: spirala prăbușirii prețului petrolului*, in Adevarul, March 17, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/rusia/razboiul-rusiei-putin-lumea-spirala-prabusirii-pretului-petrolului-1_5e70701f5163ec4271fc8753/index.html
- Iulian Chifu, *Sfârșitul coșmarului: scenariile prospective pentru criza de coronavirus – pauza de 3 luni, îngheț un an sau amenințare eternă a omenirii*, Adevarul, May 4, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/sfarsitul-cosmarului-scenariile-prospective-criza-coronavirus-pauza-3-luni-inghet-an-amenintare-eterna-omenirii-1_5e86bdb55163ec427167438b/index.html
- Iulian Chifu, *Testul suprem pentru Regimul Dodon: pregătirea de criza Covid-19 și credibilitatea conducerii de la Chișinău*, Adevarul, April 1, 2020, at https://adevarul.ro/moldova/politica/testul-suprem-regimul-dodon-pregatirea-criza-covid-19-credibilitatea-conducerii-chisinau-1_5e8363bc5163ec42715755a1/index.html; also on deschide.md, March 31, 2020, at <https://deschide.md/ro/stiri/editorial/63637/IChifu—Testul-suprem-pentru-Regimul-Dodon-preg%C4%83tirea-de-criza-Covid-19-%C8%99i-credibilitatea-conducerii-de-la-Chi%C8%99in%C4%83u.htm>
- James Roger, *Audit of Geopolitical Capability. An assessment of 20 major powers*, Henry Jackson Society, January 2019, ISBN: 978-1-909035-50-8, 64 p., at <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HJS-2019-Audit-of-Geopolitical-Capability-Report-web.pdf>.
- Leon Aron, *The Coronavirus Could Imperil Putin’s Presidency*, in Wall Street Journal, April 24, 2020, at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-coronavirus-could-imperil-putins-presidency-11587682524>
- RFE/RL, *Poll Finds Russians’ Trust In Putin Dips To Lowest Point In 14 Years*, April 28, 2020, at <https://www.rferl.org/a/poll-finds-russians-trust-in-putin-dips-to-lowest-point-in-14-years/30581727.html>

- Steven Pifer, *Putin's Not-So-Excellent Spring*, Brookings Institution/ Stanford CISAC, April 23, 2020, at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/04/23/putins-not-so-excellent-spring/>
- The Moscow Times, *Russians' Trust in Putin Hits 14-Year Low – State Poll*, Updated: April 28, 2020, at <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/04/28/russians-trust-in-putin-hits-14-year-low-state-poll-a70128>
- Tom Balmforth, *Poll finds Russians split over allowing Putin to extend rule*, REUTERS, March 26, 2020, at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-poll/poll-finds-russians-split-over-allowing-putin-to-extend-rule-idUSKBN21E1T2>
- Vedomosti, *Levarda Opinion Poll: Trust level and rating of Vladimir Putin*, at <https://www.vedomosti.ru/society/articles/2020/03/26/826370-konstitutsionnaya-popravka>
- Vladimir Ruvinsky and Pavel Aptekar, *The Coronavirus Gave Europe's Leaders a Popularity Boost. Putin Hasn't Fared As Well*, May 1, 2020, The Moscow Times, at <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/04/30/the-coronavirus-gave-europes-leaders-a-popularity-boost-putin-hasnt-fared-as-well-a70157>
- Доверие политикам, at https://wciom.ru/news/ratings/doverie_politikam/

I. THE IMPACT ON THE INDIVIDUAL AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR

1. POST-COVID-19 WORLD: PERSPECTIVES AND CHANGES

Human Behavior & Collective Consciousness in the Age of COVID-19

Esma Sirbubalo

*International Foundation for Sustainable Peace and Development (IFSPD)
August 2020*

1. Executive Summary

The World Economic Forum published an article back in April 2020, depicting the lockdown as the world's biggest psychological experiment. And how could it not be if approximately 2.6 billion people worldwide have gone through some kind of lockdown measures? (Dr. Hoof, E., April 2020). Lockdown's main priority has been taking under control the transmission of the coronavirus COVID-19. However, its consequences have had some negative impact on human behavior and people's mental state in general.

Unfortunately, we already have a good idea of its results. In late February 2020, right before European countries mandated various forms of lockdowns, The Lancet published a review of 24 studies documenting the psychological impact of quarantine (the "restriction of movement of people who have potentially been exposed to a contagious disease"). [...] People who are quarantined are very likely to develop a wide range of symptoms

of psychological stress and disorder, including low mood, insomnia, stress, anxiety, anger, irritability, emotional exhaustion, depression and post-traumatic stress symptoms. (Dr. Hoof, E., April 2020).

Even though lockdown has served negatively as a trigger for a lot of people to turn to harmful behavior, it also has had an effect on spreading people's consciousness and ability to unite. In other words, it can be stated that lockdown with all of its positive and negative sides made people slow down and reevaluate their actions and priorities in life. In that perspective, the need for large-scale cooperation and the acknowledgment of the collective consciousness is important to navigate in the complicated narrative that COVID-19 has brought into people's life and affected the course of the 21st century.

It is worth pointing out that researching the effect of the pandemic and the measures required (in this case the focus is on lockdown) is in a way ambitious and challenging task, considering that the world is still in the midst of the pandemic, already surrounded by its main negative consequences such as economic and political issues. Apart from that, human nature as much as it has been thoroughly studied remains unpredictable. However, any research done in 2020 may serve as a great base for the research that is yet to come.

2. Lockdown Consequences on Human Behavior

2.1. Lockdown as a trigger to harmful human behavior

COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus, which was first detected in Wuhan, China, in late 2019, was declared as a pandemic on 11 March 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO). Back in March, more than 100 countries were affected by the disease. In April, registered cases reached millions, and more than 202 countries were in lockdown. Now, when the lockdown is behind us, while the coronavirus is still among us, the number of confirmed cases as of 9 August 2020 is 19,462,112 with the death toll of 722,285. (WHO COVID-19 Dashboard, 2020).

When Wuhan's quarantine was partially weakening, back in late March 2020, most of the infected countries were only beginning with their lockdown measures. The idea of 'herd immunity', i.e., gaining immunity to COVID-19 by infecting the majority of the young population that would go through a lighter phase of the illness and unlikely spread the disease from person to person, was highly supported, primarily, in Sweden.

But the majority of the affected countries stick to the lockdown measures to combat the spread of the illness. India, being home to 1.3 billion people, introduced strict isolation for 21 days, and people were not able to leave their houses for any reason. It is now known as the first lockdown, considering that India is currently going through the Unlock 3.0 phase of lifting lockdown measures.

Another one of the toughest lockdowns in the world occurred in South Africa, where a ban on cigarettes and alcohol was included among everything else. (ABC News, 2020). It is worth mentioning that *after more than two months of not being able to legally purchase their preferred triple, South Africans came out en masse on the morning of the lifted ban; some lining up as early as three hours before shop officially opened.* (Young N., June 2020).

On 24 March 2020, during the briefing on COVID-19 the WHO Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adan Ghebreyesus, emphasized the need for global solidarity, and the need to take care of our daily habits during lockdown:

During this difficult time, it's important to continue looking after your physical and mental health. This will not only help you in the long-term, but it will also help you fight COVID-19 if you get it. First, eat a healthy and nutritious diet, which helps your immune system to function properly. Second, limit your alcohol consumption, and avoid sugary drinks. Third, don't smoke. Smoking can increase your risk of developing the severe form of the disease if you become infected with COVID-19. Fourth, exercise. WHO recommends 30 minutes of physical activity a day for adults, and one hour a day for children.

If your local or national guidelines allow it, go outside for a walk, run, or ride, and keep a safe distance from others. If you can't leave the house, find an exercise video online, dance to music, do some yoga, or walk up and down the stairs. (WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 – 20 March 2020.

But how much did people pay attention to such advice? To answer this question, it is crucial to not forget about individuals, who have a past of abusing alcohol intake.

The Lancet Gastroenterology & Hepatology noted the long-term implications of lockdowns on the behavior of individuals with alcohol-use disorder. It is not only due to the lockdown, but to the *complex interplay of heightened financial difficulties, social isolation, uncertainty about the future, and the redistribution of the health workforce and the disruption to clinical services that could contribute to increased alcohol intake.*

A population survey of 1555 active drinkers in the UK identified that 21% increased alcohol consumption during the lockdown, while 35% reduced their alcohol intake. But, as it is highlighted in the report, the true effect of the lockdown on alcohol intake remains unknown because of a paucity of qualitative data. (Kim, J., Majid, A., Judge R., Crook, P., Nathwani R., Selvapatt, N. et al., August 2020).

However, the same reasons for the increase of alcohol consumption played a role in the decrease of consumption, i.e. decreased financial ability and the closure of pubs, restaurants, etc. influenced the reduction of alcohol consumption. But a spike in alcohol sales was present undoubtedly, and it went up by 22% in the UK and even by 55% in the US. (Keating, S., May 2020).

WHO Europe claims that the European region in general has the highest alcohol intake and the highest prevalence of drinkers in the population, but it is also a region with the highest share of deaths caused by alcohol. Nevertheless, people turned to alcohol out of boredom as much as out of trying to use it as a coping mechanism during these unprecedented times.

Mememes and social media proved to be a fair, sometimes a bit exaggerated, but still fair representation of people's mental state, as Sarah Keating pointed out in her BBC Future article on why people might be drinking too much during lockdown:

“I’m coming out of this global pandemic either a master chef or an alcoholic,” one meme on social media quipped. Ina Garten, an American celebrity chef, posted a video online mixing up a jumbo-sized pitcher of cosmopolitan because “you never know who’s gonna stop by... wait a minute no one is stopping by”, she laughs, with a knowing twinkle in her eye, before pouring the cocktail into an oversized martini glass. And to fill the pub-sized gap in people’s social lives, many are joining online happy hours for a virtual clink of glasses, safe in the knowledge they won’t have far to fall into bed after one too many afterwork drinks. (Keating, S., May 2020).

Being fully locked in the house means being fully present in the online world. A social media feed filled with happy hour photos tends to bring validation of doing nothing wrong, which eventually leads to a loophole of untrue beliefs and excuses for sipping on an alcoholic drink in your pajama bottoms and office shirt in front of the laptop, getting ready for a Zoom meeting. Of course, if one is lucky to work online and has not lost temporarily or even permanently the job they had pre-corona.

Compulsive behavior is also one of the negative lockdown consequences, which manifests from compulsive eating to compulsive TV shows watching. It is dangerous because anyone can be at risk, but those who are unemployed and do not have a supportive circle of people, be it family or friends, have a greater risk to end up, for example, compulsively playing video games. Adolescents and people with a history of mental health disorders tend to seek comfort in harmful behaviors such as this one. (Dr. Fotros, A., 2020). Cleaning can also become a compulsive behavior for individuals suffering from OCD. Clinical psychologist Kirthi Pai from the Apollo Hospitals in Chennai shared her experience working with several OCD patients during lockdown:

“One of my clients is the wife of a police officer,” says Kirthi Pai. “She is afraid of contracting the virus as her husband keeps working through the lockdown. Cleaning everything in the house with disinfectant has become a compulsive behavior for her. [...] In Chennai, a 27-year-old journalist says he has to work through the lockdown, even though he has OCD. “I clean even my bike keys every day. I am worried the obsession might continue well after the virus is brought under control.” (*Lockdown and coronavirus make matters worse for OCD Patients*, April 2020).

Another OCD example during the lockdown depicts a 65-year old woman, cleaning the house every time she watches TV news or reads a WhatsApp forward on the virus. But the treatment is needed only when a person is no more capable to function properly, according to the psychiatrist Vivian Kapil:

“For example, some people bathe for two hours or repeatedly wash their hands. In some cases, people just can’t function because they are terrified. If their everyday functions are impaired by their distress, they should consider getting medication from a psychiatrist on an emergency basis.” (*Lockdown and coronavirus make matters worse for OCD Patients*, April 2020).

Lockdown, as something that had not been experienced before, represents a period of enormous amount of stress and changes in people’s routines. Uncertainty on how long it is going to last and what will be the final outcome has made it all worse on people’s mental state. *Decades of scientific research show that how we make meaning out of situations can leave us vulnerable to unhelpful, out-of-proportion anxiety. When our environment is inherently ambiguous – open to interpretation and unknown outcomes – our interpretations matter. Ambiguity breeds anxiety; more so when the “facts” change hourly.* (Association for Psychological Science, May/June 2020).

On top of that, human beings as inherently social creatures, who begin to feel lonely when their level of socialization is not met, and that causes even more stress. Stress on its part degrades

mental and physical health (*e.g., cardiovascular fitness, immune fitness*) through disruption of recuperative behaviors (*e.g., sleep, leisure*) and corruption of health behaviors (*e.g., substance use, diet, exercise*). (APS Member Segrin, C. May/June 2020).

This is when social distance and physical distance had to be differentiated to remind people that connectedness can be shared while the physical distance is preserved. *The term “social distancing” has an unfortunate connotation and is actually not an accurate descriptor of what public health officials are trying to achieve. Meaningful social contact can occur in the absence of close physical contact.* (APS Member Segrin, C., May/June 2020).

Having said that, a crucial fact of human behavior is that people are not just observers or victims. People have the power to acknowledge their actions and change them in accordance with a set goal, which is accepting the ongoing situation as a challenge for all, trying to manage it as much as possible. *It is how people interpret reality that governs their emotions and their actions, not the actual reality itself.* (APS Member Reyna V., May/June 2020). And the power lays in humans’ ability to change this interpretation, which will lead to more appropriate actions. Flexibility and ability to adapt are other crucial factors for any challenging life situations including the pandemic, which made humanity show its level of ability to behave adequately.

2.2. Lockdown as a trigger for a large-scale cooperation

Research from the West Africa Ebola crisis of 2014-2015 shows that *enlisting local voices to help build engagement and trust in health officials can increase the success of such public health measures.* (Van Bavel, J., Baicker, K., Willer, B., April 2020). In other words, knowing that the behavior of individuals depends on moral norms and values, which on its part is regulated by society and its acceptance or disapproval of one’s right or wrongdoings, can and is usually used as a mechanism of social enforcement that encourage people to embrace suggested guidelines.

Moral decision-making forces people to take into consideration other people's perception, i.e. judgment. Harmful actions are judged more harshly. If in the first part of the paper there was a focus on a more individualist approach in responding to the pandemic outlined by some of its measures, primarily lockdown; here the focus shifts to the need of aligning individualist response to a more collective one. Hence, large-scale cooperation is highly important in fighting a global pandemic such as this one. But there are some challenges:

The problem is that, by definition, cooperation requires people to bear an individual cost to benefit other people. In particular, there is a conflict between short-term self-interest vs. longer-term collective interest. Moreover, in this pandemic, there are several collectives (for example, family, community, national and international) that can make decisions to cooperate challenging.

From an evolutionary perspective, extending self-interest to protect and promote the welfare of family members should be a small step, as it increases genetic fitness. Indeed, laboratory research has found that people prioritize local over global (or international) interests. One major question, then, is how to promote cooperation. (Van Bavel, J., Baicker, K., Willer, B., April 2020).

The excerpt above continues with the statement that people tend to cooperate more when they believe that others cooperate. In this case, leaders and the media can promote cooperation by making it more observable. However, making someone else's participation available for observing to make people motivated to do the same surely is not enough. In order to lead someone, a leader of any field needs people's trust and compliance, be it a political leader, a leader of a particular workplace, or a community leader.

This is something that is not earned easily, hence the leadership during a crisis such as this one, when a change of people's

behavior is needed, surely is a challenge on its own. Experimental studies are highlighted in the research *using social and behavioral science to support COVID-19 pandemic response* as clarifiers of what leaders might do to promote trust and that is a creation of *a shared social identity amongst the followers*. (Van Bavel, J., Baicker, K., Willer, B., April 2020).

The idea of ‘we are all in this together’ is used and sometimes overused in all different scenarios. But with COVID-19 even the biggest skeptics were starting to feel that way. Aljazeera published a long article on 10 August 2020 listing top politicians, celebrities and sportspeople that have been infected with COVID-19.

The list goes all the way from the Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, who was tested positive on 7 July *after months of downplaying the virus’ severity*, to Tom Hanks and Novak Djokovic, making it obvious that no one can be sure that the virus will not affect them. (ALJAZEERA, August 2020). If having politicians, celebrities and community leaders as models promoting a desirable behavior has been effective in the past, during this pandemic ‘we are all in this together’ has got another meaning of ‘no one is safe’.

Nevertheless, the period that will probably be known in the history as a lockdown period, which in the most countries primarily occurred from the late March until June 2020, shows that leaders accepted the fact that their country was at risk and the citizens, on the other hand, had to accept it one way or another. Why one way or another? Because there is no gentle way of asking people to lock themselves in their houses.

Leaders who threaten people with sanctions as a way to deter undesired behavior may make people feel distrusted and paradoxically reduce their willingness to do as they are told. Leaders and authorities who treat people with respect, and who communicate that they trust people to do as they are told, tend to be more successful in eliciting cooperation. (Van Bavel, J., Baicker, K., Willer, B., April 2020).

If the political situation in one country has space and an opportunity for its leader to ask of the nation to stick to lockdown measures and have trust in their willingness to completely listen and follow the friendly advice, then it is a successful country indeed. However, in a crisis such as a pandemic, it is a high risk to rely on trust only, knowing that people will eventually have a lot of things to say or even do. Hence, anywhere people started to be uncooperative and went out during the curfew or did not wear a mask when having an opportunity to exit their house had to bear the consequences, i.e. fines for lockdown breaches.

Over 100 years ago, *Science* magazine published a paper on lessons from the Spanish Flu pandemic. The paper argued that three main factors stand in the way of prevention: (i) people do not appreciate the risks they run, (ii) it goes against human nature for people to shut themselves up in rigid isolation as a means of protecting others, and (iii) people often unconsciously act as a continuing danger to themselves and others. (Van Bavel, J., Baicker, K., Willer, B., April 2020).

Even now when people are again starting to be able to cross the borders, and wear masks on the plane, it will take a highly anonymous but explicit survey to find out if people are following the measures because they are afraid to get sick or because they know it is something that has to be obeyed to get to the desired destination.

3. Collective Consciousness

Émile Durkheim developed the concept of collective consciousness in 1893 when he introduced it in his book “The Division of Labor in Society.” It is a fundamental sociological concept *that refers to the set of shared beliefs, ideas, attitudes, and knowledge that are common to a social group or society:*

Social institutions produce collective consciousness. These other institutions include the state (which fosters patriotism and nationalism), news and popular media (which spreads all kinds of ideas and practices, from how to dress, to who to vote

for, to how to date and be married), education (which molds us into compliant citizens and workers), and the police and judiciary (which shape our notions of right and wrong, and direct our behavior through threat of or actual physical force), among others. Rituals that serve to reaffirm the collective conscious range from parades and holiday celebrations to sporting events, weddings, grooming ourselves according to gender norms, and even shopping (think Black Friday). (Cole N., 2019).

When talking about collective consciousness from the perception of our current modern time, one has to keep in mind a theory, which says that *human modern culture has not evolved quickly enough to match the rapid advances of its transportation and telecommunications technologies*, which are crucial factors nowadays for producing the collective consciousness of the modern society. (Galvani, A., Lew, A., Perez, M. May 2020).

However, the abovementioned institutions, and the transportation and telecommunications technologies are not the only means for expanding humankind's global consciousness. As a matter of fact, *these conscious ways of knowing our world, however, are limited because they only give us fragments of the full complexity of the planet*. (Galvani, A., Lew, A., Perez, M. May 2020).

According to Jung (1976, p. 157), expanding one's true awareness beyond these limitations requires a reawakening of the "unconscious within the mind and the integration of the ego with the unconscious, to forge the self." [...] Alternative experiential and embodied ways of world knowing also abound, including spirituality and psychic abilities (Dhiman & Marques, 2016), various forms of meditation (Heaton, 2016), recreational and religious uses of psychoactive substances (Tuper, 2006), and the direct experience of other people and places through travel and tourism (Lew, 2018; Sheldon, 2020). Like these, the experience of a pandemic can also be put into this category of being an altered, subconscious experience of the world. (Galvani, A., Lew, A., Perez, M. May 2020).

Since the majority of the worldwide population has experienced lockdown to the varying degrees, the inability to live in accordance to the previously established beliefs and preferences, amplified by the death toll of infected ones; has made people think and acknowledge the importance of home, safety, family relations as well as relationships in general, their jobs and a possibility to lose their ability to enjoy the things they once could. In other words, the pandemic did not only expand the collective consciousness on what matters but brought a new type of enlightenment by pointing out how much humankind tends to take everything in life for granted, including the ability to freely blow candles on a birthday cake and eat it in a company of friends and family.

4. Conclusion

“I heard that we are in the same boat.

But it’s not that.

We are in the same storm, but not in the same boat.

Your ship can be shipwrecked and mine might not be.

Or vice versa.

For some, quarantine in optimal: a moment of reflection, or reconnection.

Easy, in flip flops, with a whiskey or tea.

For others, this is a desperate crisis.

[...]

For some, peace, rest time, vacation.

Yet for others, Torture: How am I going to pay my bills?

[...]

Some were in their “home office”.

Others are looking through trash to survive.

Some want to go back to work because they are running out of money.

Others want to kill those who break the quarantine.

Some need to break the quarantine to stand in line at the banks.

[...]

Some have experienced the near-death of the virus, some have already lost someone from it, and some believe they are infallible and will be blown away if or when this hits someone they know.

Some have faith in God and expect miracles during 2020. Others say the worse is yet to come. So, friends, we are not in the same boat.

We are going through a time when our perceptions and needs are completely different. And each one will emerge, in his own way, from that storm.

[...]

Let us not judge the one who lacks, as well as the one who exceeds him. We are on different ships looking to survive.

Let everyone navigate their route with respect, empathy and responsibility.”

A COVID-19 poem by an unknown author “We are not in the same boat...” became viral in a lockdown period of April 2020 as a reaction to a popular phrase, especially during the pandemic, ‘we are all in the same boat’. Viral posts cannot be always used as a reliable argument. However, given the circumstances and the message that the poem carries, it is evident that the pandemic brought a specific shift in people’s consciousness.

One could list numerous examples of how people spent their lockdown time and under what conditions, but to include all in the scope of this specific research is unreal. Most importantly, even if one focuses on a specific country only, an accidental abandonment of someone’s experience still can occur.

This is why generalization of experiences is present, making it complicated to synthesize people’s responses that eventually are transformed or even integrated into large-scope cooperation based on the emergence of a shift in people’s awareness. COVID-19, like any other crisis, brought the good, the bad and the ugly that is naturally present in humanity. But it is still quite early to make any conclusions on how it will affect human behavior and humanity’s consciousness when the pandemic is gone for good.

It will be humanity’s choice whether the post corona society has decided to learn and grow from everything that had happened or start taking things for granted again. And if from the outside people have not experienced this storm in the same manner, the

deep inside of the storm reminds that humanity's essence is not supposed to follow the steps of inequality, anger and hatred but rather resist it and fight it with dignity.

The degree of shift in mind and consciousness today is nothing less than an evolutionary expansion in awareness that promotes our maturation as a human species, or as Fox and Alldred (2020) suggest, the evolution towards being a “post-human” who finally understands one's self to be only a small part of the universe, not more important than other parts, living or not living, but embedded between nature and culture. We all are part of an evolutionary process (Brouder, 2017; Buttimer, 1990; Li, 2000; Lowenthal, 1961; Tuan, 1993). (Galvani, A., Lew, A., Perez, M. May 2020).

Bibliography:

- Bavel, J., Baicker, K., Boggio, P., Capraro, V., Cichocka, A., Cikara, M., Willer, R. (2020, April 30). Using social and behavioural science to support COVID-19 pandemic response. Retrieved July 31, 2020, from <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-020-0884-z>
- Behaviour fuels, and fights, pandemics. (2020, May 19). Retrieved July 31, 2020, from <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-020-0892-z>
- Bollyky, T. (2020, April 06). Plagues Tell Us Who We Are. Retrieved July 8, 2020, from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2020-03-28/plagues-tell-us-who-we-are>
- Clay, J. M., & Parker, M. O. (2020, April 8). Alcohol use and misuse during the COVID-19 pandemic: A potential public health crisis? Retrieved July 31, 2020, from [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(20\)30088-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(20)30088-8/fulltext)
- Cole, P. L. (2019, January 16). Understanding Emile Durkheim's “Collective Consciousness”. Retrieved August 15, 2020, from <https://www.thoughtco.com/collective-consciousness-definition-3026118>
- Dr. Maria Loades Clinical psychologist, Loades, D., & Psychologist, C. (2020, June 03). Lockdown loneliness is going to have a worse long-term impact on teenagers' mental health – View. Retrieved August 3, 2020, from <https://www.euronews.com/2020/06/03/lockdown-loneliness-is-going-to-have-a-worse-long-term-impact-on-teenagers-mental-health-v>
- Evans, A. (2020, March 17). The collective psychology of coronavirus. Retrieved August 9, 2020, from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/collective-psychology-coronavirus/>

- Evans, P. (2020, June 08). Remembering Life in Lockdown. Retrieved August 9, 2020, from <http://www.silvercentury.org/2020/06/remembering-life-in-lockdown/>
- Fotros, MD, A. (2020). Compulsive Behaviors during COVID-19 Lockdown. Retrieved August 9, 2020, from <https://www.lifespan.org/lifespan-living/compulsive-behaviors-during-covid-19-lockdown>
- Hoof, D. V. (2020, April 9). Lockdown is the world's biggest psychological experiment – and we will pay the price. Retrieved August 3, 2020, from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/this-is-the-psychological-side-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-that-were-ignoring/>
- Human Behavior in the Time of COVID-19: Learning from Psychological Science. (2020, April 29). Retrieved August 1, 2020, from <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/human-behavior-in-the-time-of-covid-19>
- John Allen, N. (2020, March 20). How the World Will Look After the Coronavirus Pandemic. Retrieved July 10, 2020, from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/20/world-order-after-coronavirus-pandemic/>
- Keating, S. (2020, May 11). Why you might be drinking too much during lockdown. Retrieved August 9, 2020, from <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200507-why-you-might-be-drinking-too-much-during-lockdown>
- Kruglanski, A. (2020, March 22). 3 ways the coronavirus pandemic is changing society and human interaction as we know it, according to a psychologist. Retrieved July 30, 2020, from <https://www.businessinsider.com/3-ways-the-coronavirus-pandemic-is-changing-society-2020-3>
- Magazine, P. (2020, April 15). Coronavirus Will Change the World Permanently. Here's How. Retrieved August 1, 2020, from <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/03/19/coronavirus-effect-economy-life-society-analysis-covid-135579>
- Michael Brant-Zawadzki, M. (2020, April 10). The collective consciousness of COVID-19. Retrieved August 2, 2020, from <https://www.kevinmd.com/blog/2020/04/the-collective-consciousness-of-covid-19.html>
- News, B. (2020, April 07). Coronavirus: The world in lockdown in maps and charts. Retrieved July 31, 2020, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-52103747>
- R, C. (2020, April 26). Lockdown and coronavirus make matters worse for OCD patients. Retrieved August 9, 2020, from <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2020/apr/26/lockdown-and-coronavirus-make-matters-worse-for-ocd-patients-2135435.html>
- Ramsden Lecturer in Psychology, P. (2020, July 01). How the pandemic changed social media and George Floyd's death created a collective conscience. Retrieved August 3, 2020, from <https://theconversation.com/how-the-pandemic-changed-social-media-and-george-floyds-death-created-a-collective-conscience-140104>

- Talking to community: Behavioural change in the age of COVID-19. (2020, July 02). Retrieved August 1, 2020, from <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/behavioural-change-age-covid-19>
- Unknown Author. (2020). We are not in the same boat. Retrieved August 10, 2020, from https://institute.mercy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/We-are-not-in-the-same-boat_-A-poem-about-COVID-19.pdf
- WHO. (2020, March 20). WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 – 20 March 2020. Retrieved March 22, 2020, from <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19—20-march-2020>
- Young, N. (2020, June 02). South Africa's long-standing alcohol abuse problem reemerged a day after lifting a lockdown ban. Retrieved August 9, 2020, from <https://qz.com/africa/1863922/south-africa-alcohol-abuse-up-after-lockdown-sales-ban/>

2. COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND ITS DECISIVE IMPACT ON THE HUMAN PSYCHE

**How the pandemic situation and bleak
prospects for the future influence
the level of anxiety and depression**

Antonia Motoc

Abstract

People's mental health depends, to a large extent, on how they react to external factors, on how they manage a stressful situation, relating to their ability to cope with the challenges of everyday life. Unexpected situations that people cannot control are a factor of stress, nervousness, anxiety; one of these situations is the coronavirus pandemic that currently affects almost every state in the world.

The imbalance created in the life of every person, caused by an external factor, has psychic effects on members of societies and can cause deep states of anxiety and depression. The main objective of this chapter is to highlight how the situation created by the emergence of the COVID-19 virus is a stress factor that has increased anxiety among people – due to changes in daily life, the link between stress and anxiety, how anxiety and depression are correlated, but especially how human needs are, or not, satisfied in this pandemic context.

Coronavirus and pandemics as black swans

The end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 brought to the fore, on the international stage, a pandemic situation considered a *black swan*, because the outbreak of the SARV-Cov-2 virus was not a predictable event or one for which global actors were prepared.¹ The spread of the virus from Wuhan, China at a global level, in a short time, created hysteria in both state governments and populations and put enormous pressure on national medical systems.²

While hysteria in the state leadership has been caused by the rapid spread of the virus and the attempt to reduce or even stop the spread by seeking and implementing the best and most effective methods; the population level is due to the ability to manage a crisis, the ability to differentiate fake news from real and genuine ones, as well as the way a person chooses to relate to the massive changes in society.³

Thereby, although most effects are felt at the economic level or in the medical system, the psychological field, which is one of the most complex, is considerably affected, especially since each person is unique and reacts differently to the same situation. The ability to understand, to accept, to obey, to differentiate between good and bad, but also to adapt is distinct in each individual, just as misinformation and the media influence differently.⁴

¹ Sherman A. Lee; *Coronavirus Anxiety Scale: A brief mental health screener for COVID-19 related anxiety*, Death Studies 2020, vol. 44, no. 7, pp. 393-401, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07481187.2020.1748481> - accessed on 13.08.2020.

² Goldman Sachs, *2020's Black Swan: Coronavirus*, Global Macro-Research, ISSUE 86, February 28, 2020, <https://ro.scribd.com/document/451219283/Goldman-report-Corona-impact-pdf-pdf> - accessed on 13.08.2020

³ Sherman A. Lee; *Coronavirus Anxiety Scale: A brief mental health screener for COVID-19 related anxiety*, Death Studies 2020, vol. 44, no. 7, pp. 393-401, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07481187.2020.1748481> - accessed on 13.08.2020

⁴ John R. Peteet, *Covid-19 Anxiety*, Journal of Religion and Health, 15.05.2020, <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s10943-020-01041-4.pdf> - accessed on 13.08.2020.

Psychological problems started as a negative effect of the media, due to the lack of clear information about the virus, as well as due to the huge accumulation of comments, opinions and information that make it impossible to identify the true and real information.⁵

COVID-19 impact on mental health explained through Maslow's theory

In order to be able to explain how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced and affected the human psyche, we need to analyze people's personal needs, and how they have been satisfied or not in the past months. A relevant theory for this paper is the *human needs theory*, which is based on the concept of needs, best developed by Abraham Maslow, who made a classification and ranking of needs, the result being the well-known Pyramid of Human Needs.⁶

Analyzing this pyramid we can see that the needs vary, the most basic being the physiological needs related to the optimal functioning of the human body (food, water, air) while the top ones are focused on ego, and the need for recognition from society.⁷

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is divided into five specific types of needs, the first being the one of primary physiological needs (food, water, air), followed by the personal safety and security one, seen as both physical and financial security, but also health – both physical and mental. Level three of the pyramid is dedicated to social needs, of belonging, those in which man feels the need to interact with other people, to fit into large social groups; as a

⁵ Jeffrey Kluger, *Coronavirus Pandemic may be causing an anxiety pandemic*, March 26, 2020, <https://time.com/5808278/coronavirus-anxiety/> - accessed on 13.08.2020.

⁶ J.A.H. Maslow, *A theory of human motivation*, *Psychological Review*, vol. 50, 1943, pp. 370-396.

⁷ A. Azam; S. Rehman, *Assessing Human Needs Theory: An Approach to Conflict Resolution*, *The Nucleus* 55, no. 3, 2018, p. 128.

restricted form, the social groups that satisfy the need for belonging are family, close colleagues, close friends.⁸

The fourth level, of social recognition, self-confidence and self-respect, is based on the desire not to have feelings of inferiority or social alienation. The last level, that of self-realization, is at the top of the pyramid of needs and is quite difficult to achieve.⁹

The World Health Organization has issued a series of recommendations regarding the prevention of the spread of the virus, among which the most common are respect for social distance, wearing a mask in crowded spaces, avoiding direct contact with other people; however, the measures that have increased the level of anxiety and created the feeling of lack of control over personal life, are those of states with a high number of cases, in which the state of emergency has been established for different periods of time.¹⁰ In Romania, the state of emergency was established on March 16, for 30 days, after the World Health Organization declared, on March 11, the SARS-CoV-2 virus as a pandemic.¹¹

Among the rights that were affected by decree no. 195 of 16.03.2020 issued by the President of Romania are free movement, the right to education, freedom of assembly. The 30-day period in which Romania was in a state of emergency created, among the population, the feeling that for the common good, rights and

⁸ E.O. Aruma; Melvins Enwuesi Hanachor, *Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of need and assessment of need in community development*, International Journal of Development and Economic Sustainability, Vol. 5, No. 7, pp. 15-27 <http://www.eajournals.org/wp-content/uploads/Abraham-Maslow%E2%80%99s-Hierarchy-of-Needs-and-Assessment-of-Needs-in-Community-Development.pdf> - accessed on 13.08.2020.

⁹ Saul McLeod, *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*, Simply Psychology, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html> - accessed on 13.08.2020.

¹⁰ World Health Organization, *Rolling updated on coronavirus disease (Covid-19)*, Updated 31 July 2020, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen> - accessed on 13.08.2020.

¹¹ World Health Organization, *WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 – 11 March 2020*, <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19—11-march-2020> - accessed on 13.08.2020.

freedoms will be suspended, but everything will return to normal after the 30 days.

Psychologically, people react much better to a restriction of rights and freedoms as long as there is a well-established end. The state of emergency involved limiting contact with other people, leaving home in absolutely necessary situations, closing shopping malls, closing parks and playgrounds, as well as restaurants and terraces. In addition, the government recommended changes at the level of institutions and companies, establishing the telework regime and decided to close schools and continue the school year online.¹²

Due to the significant number of cases in the country, the end of the state of emergency brought the implementation of the state of alert, which was last extended on August 16, for another 30 days. Thus, even if the restrictions have not been completely lifted, at this time the measures to prevent the spread of the virus are much more relaxed.¹³

Romania is in the situation of most countries around the world, which have applied a series of drastic measures and began to relax them constantly, usually after a decrease in the number of cases.

It can be stated that, looking at Maslow's needs pyramid and analyzing each level of it, the coronavirus pandemic has a significant impact in this hierarchy. The basic need, the physiological one, was threatened during the state of emergency when panic

¹² President of Romania, *Decree signed by the President of Romania, Mr. Klaus Iohannis, regarding the establishment of the state of emergency on the Romanian territory*, March 16, 2020, <https://www.presidency.ro/ro/media/comunicate-de-presa/decret-semnat-de-presedintele-romaniei-domnul-klaus-iohannis-privind-instituirea-starii-de-urgenta-pe-teritoriul-romaniei> - accessed on 13.08.2020.

¹³ Legislative Portal, *Decision no. 668 of 14 August 2020 on the extension of the alert status on the Romanian territory starting with August 16, 2020, as well as the establishment of the measures applied during it to prevent and combat the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic*, <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/229151> - accessed on 15.08.2020.

set in the society and the survival instinct was activated, there being unlikely scenarios in people's minds and the fear of not running out of food.¹⁴

The pandemic situation has raised concerns among the population regarding basic needs, people feeling that these needs are being addressed by the measures taken by the authorities, to prevent the spread of the virus.¹⁵ The inability to control change in life, as well as the need to comply with social distance rules and government and medical recommendations to prevent coronavirus infection, have led people to believe that their fundamental freedoms are being restricted in bad faith, which has increased anxiety.¹⁶

According to an article by Leo Sher entitled „*Covid-19 anxiety, sleep disturbances and suicide*„, which looked at several studies related to coronavirus, shows that Chinese researchers found that in the early stages of the COVID-19 epidemic, 58% of survey respondents rated the impact of the virus as moderate or severe, 16.5% reported symptoms of moderate or severe depression, while 28.8% reported moderate or severe anxiety symptoms.

At the same time, another nationwide survey of more than 50,000 people showed that approximately 35% of respondents had psychological pandemic suffering.¹⁷ A study of online posts by about 18,000 Chinese social media users shows that negative

¹⁴ Debanjan Banerjee, *The other side of COVID-19: Impact on obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and Hoarding*, US National Library of Medicine; National Institutes of Health, April 11, 2020, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7151248/> - accessed on 15.08.2020.

¹⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Coping with Stress*, July 1, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html> - accessed on 15.08.2020.

¹⁶ Henry A. Nasrallah, *During a viral pandemic, anxiety is endemic: The psychiatric aspects of COVID-19*, Mdedge Psychiatry, Current Psychiatry, April 19, 2020, <https://www.mdedge.com/psychiatry/article/219212/coronavirus-updates/during-viral-pandemic-anxiety-endemic-psychiatric> - accessed on 15.08.2020.

¹⁷ Leo Sher, *Covid-19, anxiety, sleep disturbances and suicide*, US National Library of Medicine; National Institutes of Health, April 25, 2020 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7195057/> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

emotions, such as anxiety, depression, and anger increased, while positive emotions and life satisfaction decreased considerably.¹⁸

COVID-19 and the basic needs of people

At the base of Maslow's pyramid of needs, which refers to physiological needs, is the need for water, food, air, sleep; needs that were not fully met during 2020.¹⁹ Also in China, in the context of self-isolation, a study shows that anxiety is associated with stress and poor sleep quality, with the authors noting that anxiety and stress in isolated individuals have was at high levels, while sleep quality was low. At the same time, the same study confirms that sleep disorders are associated with anxiety, depression, and suicidal behavior.²⁰

It can be said that the coronavirus pandemic has changed many aspects of people's personal lives, including the quality of sleep. Concerns felt by the population during 2020, which include isolation, job loss, financial worries, the possibility of illness, switching to teleworking, school closure, increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, affecting significantly sleep, causing insomnia and other sleep disorders, which can seriously affect physical and mental health.²¹

At the same time, lack of sleep affects energy, ability to concentrate and exacerbates the symptoms of anxiety and depression, reaching the point of lowering the immune system.²²

¹⁸ Yeen Huang, Ning Zhao, *Generalized anxiety disorder, depressive symptoms and sleep quality during COVID-19 outbreak in China: a web-based cross-sectional survey*, ELSEVIER, Psychiatry Research, April 12, 2020, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0165178120306077> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

¹⁹ Leo Sher, *Covid-19, anxiety, sleep disturbances and suicide*, US National Library of Medicine; National Institutes of Health, April 25, 2020 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7195057/> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

²⁰ IPSOS, *Coronavirus pandemic: What are the psychological effects of self-isolation?*, April 3, 2020, <https://www.ipsos.com/en/coronavirus-pandemic-what-are-psychological-effects-self-isolation> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

²¹ Help Guide, *Sleep problems during Coronavirus*, June 2020, <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/sleep/sleep-problems-during-coronavirus.htm> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

²² Sherman A. Lee; *Coronavirus Anxiety Scale: A brief mental health screener for COVID-19 related anxiety*, Death Studies 2020, vol. 44, no. 7, pp. 393-401, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07481187.2020.1748481> - accessed on 13.08.2020.

The closure of shopping malls and stores considered non-essential, raised the possibility of closing food stores among the company, so, due to the survival instinct, people crowded into stores to shop excessively to have products for a long time.²³ Another reason for people's decision to shop excessively at the beginning of the pandemic period was the desire to avoid going to the shops and to get in touch with other people, due to the fear of illness.²⁴

Coronavirus and its impact on people's sense of security

The personal security needs related to level two have also been affected since the beginning of this year. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the state's economy, with companies having to reduce staff in order to remain in business. Financial security is combined with that of employment and affects a large part of the population. People who have lost their jobs, or who have felt salary cuts during this period are prone to much higher anxiety states, compared to those who have not had problems in this aspect of life.²⁵

A study conducted in the People's Republic of China by Yeen Huang and Ning Zhao, entitled „*Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Depressive Symptoms and Sleep Quality during the COVID-19 Outbreak in China: A Cross-sectional Study Based on Online Questionnaires*“ identified that COVID-19 is a burden on the mental health of the Chinese population, especially young people, who face job insecurity, the possibility of illness, the need for financial security, compared to the elderly, who are already realized.²⁶

²³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Coping with Stress*, July 1, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

²⁴ Stacy Lu, *An Epidemic of fear*, American Psychological Association, Vol. 46, No. 3, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2015/03/fear> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

²⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Coping with Stress for Workers*, May 5, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/mental-health-non-healthcare.html> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

²⁶ Yeen Huang Ning Zhao; *Generalized anxiety disorder, depressive symptoms and sleep quality during COVID-19 outbreak in China: a web-based cross-sectional*

People's inability to make plans was felt on the psyche, especially due to the fact that people were forced out of their comfort zone, which led to instinctive reactions due to lack of certainty and security about the future. The pandemic situation is one that few people know how to manage, most feeling that they have lost control of their lives.²⁷ This aspect falls into the second level of Maslow's pyramid, that of personal safety and security.²⁸

In this context, the one in which the need for personal safety and security is restricted/attacked appears anxiety, due to the lack of control over one's own life and the uncertainty over the future.²⁹

In addition to the above, the second level of Maslow's pyramid also includes health security, both physical and mental. Concerning physical health, which refers to the possibility of becoming ill with the new coronavirus, its security is achieved by observing measures against the spread of the virus, especially by vulnerable people, who are elderly (and a weakened organism that will hard fight) or those suffering from chronic diseases and for whom COVID-19 infection can be fatal.

The risks of disease are also high for healthy and young people, who follow the minimum rules to prevent the spread.³⁰ However,

survey, Shenzhen University Health Science Center, <https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0165178120306077?token=D2B305E8FE8ACE85BFEAF344A52C6002E7DB8405A5A466FA7A59434C31714131F9C7DE5C7C620AC70E34721FC53F9D7B> – accessed on 25.08.2020.

²⁷ Nidal Moukaddam, *Psychiatrists Beware! The Impact of COVID-19 and Pandemics on Mental Health*, Psychiatric Times, March 15, 2020, <https://www.psychiatristimes.com/view/psychiatrists-beware-impact-coronavirus-pandemics-mental-health> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

²⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Coping with Stress*, July 1, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

²⁹ Betty Pfefferbaum, *Mental Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic*, The New England Journal of Medicine, August 6, 2020, <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2008017> - accessed on 16.08.2020

³⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Coping with Stress*, 1 July 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

stress due to the desire to increase physical health security has negative effects on mental health.³¹

The negative effects felt at the mental level are divided according to age categories, so that the stress caused by the possibility of illness is high among vulnerable or elderly people, but the same type of stress affects children or adolescents, especially due to measures taken by states to respond to the SARS-CoV 2 threat to public health, such as school closures.

A study by Ezra Foldberstein, Hefei Wen and Benjamin F. Miller, published in the JAMA Network, entitled “Coronavirus disease 2019 and Mental Health for Children and Adolescents” states that the COVID-19 pandemic can aggravate existing mental health problems and can lead to more cases among children and adolescents due to the unique combination of a public health crisis, social isolation and economic recession. Economic recessions are associated with increased mental health problems for young people, which can be affected by how economic recessions affect adult unemployment, adult mental health, and child abuse.³²

Even though children and adolescents are generally healthy and do not require special health care, in addition to the usual checks and immunizations, mental health care is very important for children and adolescents. Most mental health disorders begin in childhood, making it essential for mental health needs to be identified early and treated during this sensitive time in the child's development.³³

³¹ Kim Usher, Joanne Durkin, Navjot Bhullar, *The Covid-19 pandemic and mental health impacts*, Wiley Online Library, April 10, 2020, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/inm.12726> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

³² Ezra Golberstein, Benjamin F. Miller, *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and Mental Health for Children and Adolescents*, JAMA Network, April 14, 2020, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2764730> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

³³ Ezra Golberstein, Benjamin F. Miller, *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and Mental Health for Children and Adolescents*, JAMA Network, April 14, 2020, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2764730> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

The feeling of being part of something during the pandemic

In addition to the uncertainty of the future and the anxiety caused by it, people also face depression. The depression caused by the pandemic situation occurs when the need to belong (level three of Maslow's Pyramid) is no longer satisfied. Social isolation prevents the need for belonging to be met, especially since people felt understood and validated by other people.

At the same time, the lack of socialization, the lack of being part of something, the lack of stimuli (such as feedback from colleagues) and the isolation of other people in an environment where they end up reliving personal problems unresolved over time, have felt significant effects on their psyche.

Even if the recommendations of the World Health Organization provide as a rule to prevent the spread of the virus the telework regime, to avoid contact with other people, but also to keep low the risk of mass infection, the human psyche suffers due to this change. The habit with which individuals have learned over some time, whether short or long, is part of the so-called comfort zone, while providing a clear distinction between professional and private life.³⁴

The moment when the workspace was homogenized with the one to relax at home, even if for a short period of time it produced positive emotions, of joy, the individuals became anxious. In addition to the feeling of insecurity about the work I do, as well as the lack of feedback provided face to face and understood with the help of non-verbal language, the lack of socializing with office colleagues feels different for each of us.³⁵

³⁴ Center for Workplace Mental Health, *Working Remotely during COVID-19; Your mental health and well-being*, <http://workplacementalhealth.org/Employer-Resources/Working-Remotely-During-COVID-19> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

³⁵ Center for Workplace Mental Health, *Working Remotely during COVID-19; Your mental health and well-being*, <http://workplacementalhealth.org/Employer-Resources/Working-Remotely-During-COVID-19> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

The threshold of depression born from the idea of loneliness combined with lack of control over a situation and a high level of stress and anxiety is in no way beneficial to the human psyche, people being forced to limit themselves to online communication with other people, it cannot be compared to face-to-face, where non-verbal communication is extremely important; these actions affecting level 4, the one that refers to the need for social recognition.³⁶

It can be said that people need to feel part of something, so in the period of self-isolation, they went to the online space, seeking to replace direct socialization with the most reliable alternative. The advantage of the online environment is that, during the period of isolation, specialized staff became involved and jumped to the aid of vulnerable people and those seeking advice on how to deal with the pandemic; and people have found a way to stop feeling lonely.

The major disadvantage of the online environment, as well as of the media, is misinformation. The phenomenon of misinformation for various reasons had significant negative effects on the mental state of society. Even if society is aware of the way events are presented among television programs, the state of anxiety, nervousness, stress, amplifies with the news about how dramatic the situation of the states, about the number of dead people, about how the situation it is managed by the competent bodies.³⁷

³⁶ Help Guide, *Coronavirus Anxiety: Coping with Stress, Fear and Worry*, Help Guide <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/coronavirus-anxiety.htm>, - accessed on 16.08.2020.

³⁷ Sandro Galea, *Mental Health in a time of Pandemic. The psychological effects of an outbreak*, Psychology Today, March 14, 2020, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/talking-about-health/202003/mental-health-in-time-pandemic> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

The negative impact on people's self-esteem and public image

Level four of Maslow's pyramid refers to the need for esteem, understood as the need for recognition from others, prestige, status, self-esteem. This need is more or less dependent on each individual on appreciation and recognition in the workplace. The pandemic situation makes it difficult to meet this level, but individuals focus on the first three much more than on the last two.

Frustration occurs when the appreciation at work is no longer felt, overtime hours no longer make a difference, adaptability within a team is no longer so relevant, because work tasks are no longer divided into teams, but focuses on a certain circuit; but the impact that these grievances have on the psyche does not rise to the level of those caused by the dissatisfaction of physiological, safety or social needs.

Between rest and self-improvement during isolation - a tough choice

The last level, that of the need for self-realization or personal fulfillment is known as difficult to achieve in any context, but in the quarantine and isolation period, people tend to focus on personal development, although not in terms of challenging projects, but in those of learning, personal development, self-knowledge.³⁸ The time that people used to spend outside the house, turned into a time for me dedicated to self-knowledge and development activities. Attempting people to focus more on themselves and their desire to evolve can be considered one of the few positive effects of the pandemic, on a mental level.³⁹

³⁸ Sherman A. Lee, *Coronavirus Anxiety Scale: A brief mental health screener for COVID-19 related anxiety*, Death Studies, April 16, 2020, pp. 393-401, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07481187.2020.1748481> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

³⁹ Archana Raghavan, *Deconstructing the pandemic with Psychology: Meaning-making, positive introspection can help us make sense of unpredictable times*, First Post, June 25, 2020, <https://www.firstpost.com/living/deconstructing-the-pandemic-with-psychology-meaning-making-positive-introspection-can-help-us-make-sense-of-unpredictable-times-8469061.html> - accessed on 16.08.2020.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the pandemic situation has negative effects on the human psyche, affecting each person differently. Stress, anxiety, depression and lack of sleep are factors that are in an interdependent relationship with the international pandemic context we face. Maslow's pyramid of needs explains the fundamental needs of individuals in relation to everyday life, to normalcy. The moment when basic needs cease to be met or are not met to the same extent is the moment when the human psyche reacts and feels the changes.

The fundamental need for survival, along with those of security and affiliation are those that in recent months have been most severely affected, basically the most important ones. The way each person related to the events of the last months is different, but each person felt during this period the common states of anxiety, depression, faced with sleep disorders, lack of socialization, and the uncertainty of the future.

Bibliography:

- Aruma E.O.; Hanachor Melvins Enwuvesi, *Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of need and assessment of need in community development*, International Journal of Development and Economic Sustainability, Vol. 5, No. 7, pp. 15-27 <http://www.eajournals.org/wp-content/uploads/Abraham-Maslow%E2%80%99s-Hierarchy-of-Needs-and-Assessment-of-Needs-in-Community-Development.pdf>.
- Azam A.; Rehman S., *Assessing Human Needs Theory: An Approach to Conflict Resolution*, The Nucleus 55, no. 3, 2018, p.128.
- Banerjee Debanjan, *The other side of COVID-19: Impact on obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and Hoarding*, US National Library of Medicine; National Institutes of Health, April 11, 2020, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7151248/>.
- Center for Workplace Mental Health, *Working Remotely during COVID-19: Your mental health and well-being*, <http://workplacementalhealth.org/Employer-Resources/Working-Remotely-During-COVID-19> – accessed on 16.08.2020

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Coping with Stress for Workers*, May 5, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/mental-health-non-healthcare.html>.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Coping with Stress*, July 1, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>.
- Galea Sandro, *Mental Health in a time of Pandemic. The psychological effects of an outbreak*, Psychology Today, March 14, 2020, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/talking-about-health/202003/mental-health-in-time-pandemic>.
- Golberstein Ezra, Miller Benjamin F., *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and Mental Health for Children and Adolescents*, Jamma Network, April 14, 2020, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2764730>.
- Goldman Sachs, *2020's Black Swan: Coronavirus*, Global Macro-Research, ISSUE 86, February 28, 2020, <https://ro.scribd.com/document/451219283/Goldman-report-Corona-impact-pdf-pdf> – accessed on 13.08.2020.
- Help Guide, *Coronavirus Anxiety: Coping with Stress, Fear and Worry*, Help Guide <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/coronavirus-anxiety.htm>.
- Help Guide, *Sleep problems during Coronavirus*, June 2020, <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/sleep/sleep-problems-during-coronavirus.htm>.
- Huang Yeen, Zhao Ning; *Generalized anxiety disorder, depressive symptoms and sleep quality during COVID-19 outbreak in China: a web-based cross-sectional survey*, Shenzhen University Health Science Center <https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0165178120306077?token=D2B305E8FE8ACE85BFEEAF344A52C6002E7DB8405A5A466FA7A59434C31714131F9C7DE5C7C620AC70E34721FC53F9D7B>.
- IPSOS, *Coronavirus pandemic: What are the psychological effects of self-isolation?*, April 3, 2020, <https://www.ipsos.com/en/coronavirus-pandemic-what-are-psychological-effects-self-isolation> – accessed on 16.08.2020
- Kluger Jeffrey, *Coronavirus Pandemic may be causing an anxiety pandemic*, March 26, 2020, <https://time.com/5808278/coronavirus-anxiety/>.
- Legislative Portal, *Decision no. 668 of 14 August 2020 on the extension of the alert status on the Romanian territory starting with August 16, 2020, as well as the establishment of the measures applied during it to prevent and combat the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic*, <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/229151> -
- Lu Stacy, *An Epidemic of Fear*, American Psychological Association, Vol. 46, No. 3, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2015/03/fear>
- Maslow J.A.H., *A theory of human motivation*, Psychological Review, vol. 50, 1943, pp. 370-396.
- McLeod Saul, *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*, Simply Psychology, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>.

- Moukaddam Nidal, *Psychiatrists Beware! The Impact of COVID-19 and Pandemics on Mental Health*, Psychiatric Times, March 15, 2020, <https://www.psychiatristimes.com/view/psychiatrists-beware-impact-coronaviruses-pandemics-mental-health>.
- Nasrallah Henry A., *During a viral pandemic, anxiety is endemic: The psychiatric aspects of COVID-19*, Mdedge Psychiatry, Current Psychiatry, April 19, 2020, <https://www.mdedge.com/psychiatry/article/219212/coronavirus-updates/during-viral-pandemic-anxiety-endemic-psychiatric>.
- Peteet John R., *Covid-19 Anxiety*, Journal of Religion and Health, 15.05.2020 <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s10943-020-01041-4.pdf>.
- Pfefferbaum Betty, *Mental Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic*, The New England Journal of Medicine, August 6, 2020, <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2008017>.
- President of Romania, *Decree signed by the President of Romania, Mr. Klaus Iohannis, regarding the establishment of the state of emergency on the Romanian territory*, March 16, 2020, <https://www.presidency.ro/ro/media/comunicate-de-presa/decret-semnat-de-presedintele-romaniei-domnului-klaus-iohannis-privind-instituirea-starii-de-urgenta-pe-teritoriul-romaniei> - accessed on 13.08.2020
- Raghavan Archana, *Deconstructing the pandemic with Psychology: Meaning-making, positive introspection can help us make sense of unpredictable times*, First Post, June 25, 2020, <https://www.firstpost.com/living/deconstructing-the-pandemic-with-psychology-meaning-making-positive-introspection-can-help-us-make-sense-of-unpredictable-times-8469061.html>.
- Sher Leo, *Covid-19, anxiety, sleep disturbances and suicide*, US National Library of Medicine; National Institutes of Health, April 25, 2020, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7195057/>.
- Sherman A. Lee, *Coronavirus Anxiety Scale: A brief mental health screener for COVID-19 related anxiety*, Death Studies, April 16, 2020, pp. 393-401, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07481187.2020.1748481>.
- Usher Kim, Durkin Joanne, Bhullar Navjot, *The Covid-19 pandemic and mental health impacts*, Wiley Online Library, April 10, 2020, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/inm.12726>.
- World Health Organization, *Rolling updated on coronavirus disease (Covid-19)*, Updated July 31, 2020, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>.
- World Health Organization, *WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 – March 11, 2020*, <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19—11-march-2020>.

3. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF COVID-19

Greta Roth

Epidemics and pandemics are major crises with a significant impact on the human psyche and social behavior. Because the entire focus of 2020 has been on the spread of the Covid-19 virus, a focus on psychosociological effects is also needed. Based on research to date, which also includes data from past epidemics (SARS and MERS), patients infected with Covid-19, or those suspected of being affected, may have intense emotional and behavioral reactions, such as fear, boredom, loneliness, anxiety, insomnia or anger as reported in similar situations in the past. These conditions can progress to disorders, which can be depressive states, anxiety, including panic attacks or post-traumatic stress, paranoia, or even suicide. Sometimes, uncertainty about infection or death, or about infecting family and friends can potentiate the present negative states.¹

In this context, epidemic psychology intervenes, which is based on primitive, irrational emotions, which are buried in every human being. The fundamental model of human beings and human society is essentially Manichean, humanity having a dual nature. In normal times, most beings manage to remain rational, but in the context of a crisis, such as epidemics, unpleasant emotions are the ones that dominate.²

¹ Felipe Ornell, Jaqueline B. Schuch and Anne O. Sordi, „Pandemic fear” and COVID-19: mental health burden and strategies”, in *Braz J Psychiatry*, 2020, pp. 233-234.

² Philip Strong, „Epidemic psychology: a model”, in *Sociology of Health & Illness* Vol. 12 No. 3, 1990, p. 255.

The psychological and sociological reactions of people were diverse. All over the world, it has been observed that the new pandemic has led from isolation, with the fear of contacting the COVID-19 virus, to street protests which have shown disobedience. However, people sought to adapt to the new reality as best they could, either by working from home, or by keeping in touch with loved ones, or by finding various coping mechanisms to help them get through this difficult time.

From the governments of the world to some of us, we reacted as we thought possible because we had a collective memory behind us. This pandemic was not necessarily new, and people knew how to react based on past experiences with SARS and MERS, trying to contain the disease as much as possible because they understood the danger.

Human behavior involves multiple processes, where emotions, although they seem individual, are found in each of us to a greater or lesser extent. The pandemic followed by the obligation to quarantine brought a mix of emotions that were reflected in the actions. All over the world, it has been observed that people have a selfish tendency to stock up on food or consumables without thinking about the broad outlook of the community. On the other hand, there were many people driven by altruism and empathy, who tried in various ways to help those in need.

Fear and socio-psychological aspects

Fear is one of the most easily recognized emotions. It is an adaptive defense mechanism, fundamental to survival that involves many biological processes of preparation to respond to potentially threatening events. On the other hand, when fear becomes chronic or disproportionate, it is harmful and becomes a key component in the development of various psychiatric conditions. In the case of pandemics, the level of anxiety and stress increases for healthy people and the symptoms of those with pre-existing mental disorders intensify.³

³ Felipe Ornell, Jaqueline B. Schuch and Anne O. Sordi, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

Fear is an important aspect of our collective and individual responses. Globally, it has been observed that people do not differ so much in behavior when it comes to an invisible danger. The behavior was similar in almost every state, it could be seen that people began to avoid anything that endangered their health and life, even before the indications from governments. Thus, once the number of Covid-19 cases began to spread around the world, people reacted out of fear, stocking up, avoiding social or work-related encounters.

An interesting aspect that is also related to fear was the incipient general denial. In the first phase, the world's population failed or chose not to see the significant danger that the spread of Covid-19 infection had. Then, as the number of cases began to increase, and the possibility of death became a major aspect of the disease, withdrawal and submission became the most important actions.

Initially, the world's governments focused on flattening the infection curve, becoming an appropriate policy, adapted to the threat. Over time and with the growing number of infected or dead, the only solution is to manufacture a vaccine and distribute it globally. However, the guarantee does not exist, and the fear of infection, anxiety and stress remains high.⁴

The fear, which gives rise to acute mental states, brought along with the pandemic the suicides because some people thought they were infected with Covid-19.⁵ Just like the epidemic that manifests itself at the medical level, in the case of the fear epidemic, it is similar because has the potential capacity to spread to the entire population. Just as almost the entire population is exposed to the possibility of becoming infected with a contagious virus, so can the entire population be frightened by these diseases.⁶

⁴ Celeste M. Condit, *Phronesis and the Scientific, Ideological, Fearful Appeal of Lockdown Policy*, in *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, Vol. 53, No. 3, 2020, p. 258.

⁵ Amir H. Pakpour, *The fear of COVID-19 and its role in preventive behaviors*, Qazvin University of Medical Sciences, *Journal of Concurrent Disorders*, 2020, p. 2.

⁶ Philip Strong, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

In the case of a fear epidemic, suspicion often arises. In other words, there is a fear that a person may receive the disease, already has it, or is prone to transmit it. In the case of the spread of the disease, it is often separated from the fear and suspicion of the reality of the spread. There is a possibility that large waves of panic and fear will spread among the population, even if the actual intake of the infection is lower.

In this context, a good example is the spread of HIV, which has managed to spread long before anyone is aware of its presence. A common phenomenon in the case of epidemics, which is complemented by the epidemic of fear is the stigma directed at those who have the disease, as well as on the carrier groups. Often, the behavior is reflected in avoidance, segregation, or even abuse. At the collective level, personal fear can be collectively translated into witch-hunting.⁷

So far, television and online media have done their job, but they have also produced effects by presenting the information. Although a very large area of the outbreak was covered, which presented numbers and graphs to support the public information campaign, some of them also came to highlight the key messages about Covid-19 symptoms and the steps needed for hand hygiene and social distancing; at the psychological level, this information has fueled fears and anxieties about the growing number of cases of infection or the spread of the globe.⁸

In a study started after the SARS epidemic, people in quarantine reported different mental states. 20% of them reported fear, 18% nervousness and sadness, and 10% reported guilt. However, there were also positive states, 5% being happy, while 4% reported feelings of relief. Psychological responses to quarantine included

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 253.

⁸ Heather Loveday and Jennie Wilson, COVID-19: fear, explanation, action, unity and ingenuity and World Hand Hygiene Day, *Journal of Infection Prevention*, Vol. 21(3), 2020, p. 81.

conditions such as confusion, fear, anger, numbness, and insomnia induced by anxiety.⁹

All over the world, what people did was take shelter, retire. Aggregate observations of fear responses brought a whole series of complex but relative actions. In the nature of denial, flight, or submission, there are culturally distinctive elements that take a different form in each individual.¹⁰

In the absence of information, either because it is not known to officials or because there is inefficient communication, ambiguity leads to increased appreciation of the threat. Studies have shown that when a crisis occurs and updates from officials are not provided, the rumors are the ones that persist, along with some psychological stress. When ambiguity is combined with an invisible threat, such as the Covid-19 virus, fear and anxiety can be exacerbated and contribute greatly to the spread of misinformation.¹¹

Prospective history

Because the Covid-19 epidemic is not a unique event, with humanity facing two more major epidemics in the last two decades, we can understand the psychological mechanisms for dealing with the crisis. In the case of the SARS epidemic, the main purpose of quarantine was to prevent the transmission of the infectious agent from possibly infected people.

The quarantine requirements have been created to minimize transmission to the community and to protect family members from possible or confirmed infection. Because not all information was

⁹ Samantha K Brooks, Rebecca K Webster and Louise E Smith, The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence, Department of Psychological Medicine, King's College London, 2020, p. 913.

¹⁰ Celeste M. Condit, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-259.

¹¹ Dana Rose Garfin, Roxane Cohen Silver, and E. Alison Holman, The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-2019) Outbreak: Amplification of Public Health Consequences by Media Exposure, in Health Psychology, University of California, American Psychological Association, Vol. 39, No. 5, 2020, p. 365.

known about the spread of the virus, quarantine became the best way to minimize transmission while waiting for a complete characterization of the disease.¹²

Studies have shown that 44% of participants who were quarantined believed that this action was due to protection against the virus. However, compliance increased once respondents correctly identified the reason behind the quarantine. Moreover, compliance can be improved by improving knowledge about relevant diseases and ensuring a better understanding of rational quarantine measures. However, quarantine information may not protect those in quarantine from getting in contact with the virus and thus adversely affect compliance¹³.

In another example, in the case of the Ebola outbreak, fear-related behaviors had a psychological impact both individually and collectively in all phases of the event, while the rate of suffering and psychiatric symptoms of the population increased, which contributed to the increase of indirect mortality from causes other than Ebola¹⁴.

Quarantine is not a pleasant experience. Separation from loved ones, loss of freedom, uncertainty about illness and boredom end up creating dramatic effects. In previous epidemiological outbreaks, cases of suicide and substantial anger have been reported. The potential benefits of mass quarantine must be carefully weighed against possible psychological costs, especially since the successful use of quarantine as a public health measure requires a reduction, as far as possible, of the negative effects associated with it¹⁵.

The information given to the public at the beginning of SARS was limited and contradictory, given the novelty of the virus. In the second stage of SARS, the information that was published

¹² D. L. Reynolds, J. R. Garay, S. L. Deamond, „Understanding, Compliance and Psychological Impact of the SARS Quarantine Experience”, in *Epidemiology and Infection*, Vol. 136, No. 7, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 1003.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 1004.

¹⁴ Felipe Ornell, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

¹⁵ Samantha K Brooks, Rebecca K Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 912.

was much more important and had a serious component, presenting data such as infection rates, arguments about the need for quarantine, and websites and specialized literature had put more emphasis on the new event, which pushed people to comply.¹⁶

After the quarantine of SARS was lifted, people continued to engage in avoidance behaviors. In this study, people reported avoiding contact with people who coughed or sneezed, avoided crowded places, or even public spaces in the weeks following quarantine. Many of the participants described that the behavioral changes continued for a long time after the quarantine period, and between these behaviors, washing hands rigorously or avoiding crowded places was the most deeply rooted, and return to normalcy was delayed by months. Loss of normal routine and reduced physical and social contact with others have led to boredom, frustration and feelings of isolation from the rest of the world.¹⁷

Use of rationality

Once the pandemic was announced by the WHO, panic did not take long to appear, and with it, people's actions and behavior changed. Globally, empty store shelves have provided evidence that people are stocking up. At the same time, people stopped hugging or shaking hands when they met and replaced this behavior with touching elbows. Physical encounters were replaced by virtual conferences, while people stored toilet paper and canned food; however, responsiveness is uneven along predictable error lines of class, race, and gender¹⁸.

Hand washing has become one of the main behaviors we have adapted along with social distancing to prevent the virus from spreading. This concern comes from preventive thinking that

¹⁶ D. L. Reynolds, J. R. Garay, S. L. Deamond, *op. cit.*, p. 1004.

¹⁷ Samantha K Brooks, Rebecca K Webster, *op. cit.*, pp. 914-916.

¹⁸ Lenore Manderson and Susan Levine, „COVID-19, Risk, Fear, and Fall-out”, in *Medical Anthropology*, 2020, p. 2.

makes people feel anxious and foreboding that something bad will happen. Excessive worry often leads to catastrophic thoughts or scenarios that people think they cannot cope with¹⁹.

In the early days of the pandemic, people had a very volatile intellectual state, this being caused by the oscillation of uncertainty, where it was not clear whether the new disease is a common outbreak or something that deserves to be taken into account.

Given that the appearance of Covid-19 was unexpected, and the disease was new in some parameters, other than SARS, at first there were no routine collective ways to control it, which is why, on each side of society, from each state, people came up with their own action plans and strategy to stop the spread of the disease. At the psychosocial level, an interpretation was produced, because the epidemic was new, hundreds of different theories about its origin and potential effects were produced.

A recurring detail was the moral nature of the explanations, where metaphysical questions took their place, trying to see what a divine punishment is, or who is to blame for it. Suggestions for action to contain the disease have sparked controversy and moral and intellectual outrage, threatening and reducing our conventional codes and practices. Simple examples such as trade or travel have been disrupted, while in some cases personal freedom has been greatly invaded.²⁰

Cognitive dissonance has been a common process in many people in this new pandemic context. It describes itself as a discomfort caused by having conflicting elements of knowledge and is summed up in the tendency of people to effectively create their realities when faced with something that contradicts their own beliefs. The current global pandemic has brought unique challenges to humanity. Local or national measures have been put

¹⁹ Dr Matthew Whalley and Dr Hardeep Kaur, *Living with worry and anxiety amidst global uncertainty*, Psychology Tools, 2020, p. 2

²⁰ Philip Strong, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

in place to manage crises, while cooperation has been seen at the individual level and joint efforts have been made to deal with the new situation.²¹

The best-seen cognitive dissonance created by the virus was between personal risk, which was very low, and high community risk. At the psychological level, when faced with this type of dissonance, we most often choose to ignore or marginalize the community's risk.²²

The explanation was a very common need among the population. As a society, people do not do very well with uncertainty, or with the messages of experts on the best measures by which we can manage the Covid-19 crisis. Because experts also differ in their views, suggestions for action methods that other countries have addressed differ from case to case due to several complicated cultural and scientific reasons.²³

Action, or the requirement and impetus of action, is an effect of the pandemic. People were justified in asking governments or leaders to act, and they complied; they imposed total or partial quarantine conditions and looked for ways to financially help those most affected. The call to action was most seen in the issues of procuring, distributing and making available antibody testing, personal protective equipment and ventilators.²⁴

Another source of frustration stemmed from the fact that some people did not have the necessary basic supplies (water, food) during quarantine, and in the past, this feeling was associated with anxiety and anger months after the quarantine state rose. This level also includes the inability to receive necessary medical care or medication.²⁵

²¹ Alexander Klimburg, Louk Faesen, Paul Verhagen and Philipp Mirtl, *Pandemic Mitigation in the Digital Age, Digital Epidemiological Measures to Combat the Coronavirus Pandemic*, Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2020, p. 5.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 6.

²³ Heather Loveday and Jennie Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 81.

²⁵ Samantha K Brooks, Rebecca K Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 916.

The financial loss of people who can no longer work or are forced to interrupt their professional activities without advanced planning is another major problem during quarantine. Given previous studies, it has been observed that financial losses have created severe socio-economic suffering and have been a major risk factor for symptoms of psychological disorders of anger and anxiety months after quarantine.

Even though studies have shown that the psychological impact of quarantine is broad, substantial and can last longer than quarantine itself, this does not mean that it should not be used, because in reverse, the psychological effects of not using quarantine and allow the spread of the disease can be much more serious.²⁶

As seen in the Covid-19 pandemic, boredom and isolation contributed to the increase in suffering. However, avoiding boredom was done through various activities that people found in their own homes while keeping in touch with those close to them through social media networks. The ability to communicate with family or friends is essential, and social media has played a very important role in allowing quarantined people to inform their loved ones about their situation and to ensure that they are well.²⁷

An important aspect of the Covid-19 pandemic was found in notable examples of solidarity and cooperation between people, which led to a decrease in political polarization in the face of the „common enemy“. The high level of consent and acceptance of the blocking measures showed that people are willing to put the welfare of society before their interests.

Gestures of solidarity and collective action have been effective ways to fill gaps in state capacity. In the short term, the crisis has led to examples of solidarity and cooperation among citizens, but it has also led to outbursts of selfishness and agitation, as has

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 917.

²⁷ The Psychological Impact of COVID-19, Shauna H Springer, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/free-range-psychology/202003/the-psychological-impact-covid-19>, accessed on 19.07.2020.

been seen around the world where people are stocking up on necessary food, but some exaggerated baskets full of food cans up to toilet paper.²⁸

To protect themselves, people become susceptible to negative emotions. Compared to the potential threat of the disease, people tend to develop avoidant behaviors, where they refuse contact with people who show symptoms of a disease and tend to respect social norms, confirming the authoritarian directives. Such negative emotions end up keeping people away from potential pathogens but, in the long run, they can reduce immune function and affect normal physiological mechanisms.²⁹

When conspiracy theories take place

With the great epidemics, there are pieces of evidence that are related to the social order, and that have waves of fear, panic, stigmatization, moralization, and call to action. In addition to the disease itself, clinically researched, in parallel, psychology receives its own complex nature of epidemics, being separated from the disease.

The psychological epidemic is divided into three categories. The first is characterized by the epidemic of fear, the second by the epidemic of explanation and moralization; and the third, the epidemic of action. In the context of epidemics, society experiences waves of individual or collective panic, outbursts of interpretation of the cause of the disease and eruptions of moral control, and current control strategies that have an interest in containing disease or controlling additional fear and social dissolution³⁰.

²⁸ Marie Chêne, Jorum Duri, and Adriana Fraiha Granjo, Social Cohesion and interpersonal trust, exploring post-covid-19 trends and their impact on anti-corruption, governance and development, in Transparency International, 2018, pp. 29-30.

²⁹ Sijia Li, YilinWang, Jia Xue, Nan Zhao and Tingshao Zhu, The Impact of COVID-19 Epidemic Declaration on Psychological Consequences: A Study on Active Weibo Users, in International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 2020, pp. 2-3.

³⁰ Philip Strong, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

With news of cases of Covid-19 infection and the global situation; conspiracy theories have managed to make room. People are attracted to these theories because they satisfy important social and psychological reasons that can be characterized as epistemic, such as the desire for understanding, accuracy, or subjective certainty; or existential ones such as the desire for control and security; and social ones such as the desire to maintain a positive image of oneself or the group. Thus, conspiracy theories tend to provide broad and consistent explanations that allow people to keep their beliefs out of uncertainty and contradiction³¹.

Against this background, the billionaire philanthropist, Bill Gates, became the subject of a wide universe of conspiracy theories. A recent study found that 44% of Republicans and 14% of US Democrats believe that Bill Gates is linked to a plot to use vaccines as a pretext to implant microchips in people. Moreover, 13% of Australians believe that Bill Gates played a role in the creation and spread of coronavirus³².

The best platform for spreading conspiracy theories has become social media platforms. Thus, online conspiracies are often divided into real information, such as reporting on media news or official documents, presented in a misleading or conspiratorial setting. Here an important effect occurs, namely, it contributes to the creation of an illusion of legitimacy, while the efforts of social platforms are hampered in moderating the conspiratorial content³³.

The causal explanations, among which are often the conspiratorial ones, are based on various social motivations, where the desire to belong to a group and to maintain a positive

³¹ Karen M. Douglas, Robbie M. Sutton, and Aleksandra Cichocka, *The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories*, in *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 2017, School of Psychology, University of Kent, Vol. 26(6), p. 539.

³² Elise Thomas and Albert Zhang, ID2020, *Bill Gates and the Mark of the Beast: how Covid-19 catalyses existing online conspiracy movements*, in Australian Strategic Policy Institute 2020, p. 2.

³³ *Ibidem*, pp. 3-4.

image of oneself and the group. Researchers have shown that conspiracy theories value the self and the group, which allows them to be blamed for negative results.

Thus, the image of the self and the group is seen as competent and moral, while others, strong and unscrupulous, come and sabotage it. In this regard, we can expect conspiracy theories to be particularly appealing to people who believe that a positive self-image or group is threatened.³⁴

The Covid-19 pandemic crisis had a whole range of features of an event that is made to develop conspiracy theories. It was frightening, difficult to understand, had complex causes, and led to the reduction of individual freedoms. Thus, the lack of identification with official sources of information made their message more difficult to process and believe.³⁵

Conclusions

Although quarantine is seen as a necessary preventive measure, psychologists and sociologists who have reviewed this phenomenon have pointed out that it has negative psychological effects. Even if this is not surprising, the psychological effect of quarantine can be detected months or years later, suggesting the need for effective mitigation measures as part of the planning process.³⁶

In the absence of an internalization of the rules, the old habits are expected to reappear. For example, while customers can be helped by markings to keep a distance of 1.5 meters from each other, or are urged to disinfect their hands, once the markings or disinfectant container are removed, people will return to the old unsafe ways.³⁷

³⁴ Karen M. Douglas, Robbie M. Sutton, and Aleksandra Cichocka, *op. cit.*, p. 560.

³⁵ Jolanda Jetten, Stephen D. Reicher, S. Alexander Haslam and Tegan Cruwys, *Together Apart: The Psychology of COVID-19*, SAGE Publications, 2020, p. 44.

³⁶ Samantha K Brooks, Rebecca K Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 917.

³⁷ Jolanda Jetten, Stephen D. Reicher, S. Alexander Haslam and Tegan Cruwys, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

It has been observed that the pandemic fits the definition of a traumatic event, especially insofar as it threatens the personal lives of people or loved ones. As was the outbreak of SARS, it turned out that there were people affected with high levels of suffering and this persisted long after the end of the crisis.³⁸

Although it is unlikely that a large part of the global population will be affected by the pandemic effects at such a dramatic psychological level, it must be borne in mind that it was not only the fear of contracting the most dangerous virus. In this context, it must also be remembered that many people have lost their jobs, and the blaming of the virus, something invisible and intangible, is not at hand in search of explanations.

What could be seen very well in the wake of this pandemic crisis was how people have adapted, and this is not only due to governments but also due to the individual response, which has managed to be transferred collectively. Moreover, there has been a transfer of physical encounters to the online environment, while various coping mechanisms have not been long in coming.

The normal is now, with the vigilance of washing hands and keeping social distance, and wearing masks; although these behaviors depend greatly on the evolution of the pandemic state, and waves of disobedience will continue to occur, the world has changed.

Bibliography:

- Alexander Klimburg, Louk Faesen, Paul Verhagen and Philipp Mirtl, *Pandemic Mitigation in the Digital Age, Digital Epidemiological Measures to Combat the Coronavirus Pandemic*, Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2020.
- Amir H. Pakpour, *The fear of COVID-19 and its role in preventive behaviors*, Qazvin University of Medical Sciences, *Journal of Concurrent Disorders*, 2020.
- Celeste M. Condit, *Phronesis and the Scientific, Ideological, Fearful Appeal of Lockdown Policy*, in *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, Vol. 53, No. 3, 2020.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 70.

- D. L. Reynolds, J. R. Garay, S. L. Deamond, „Understanding, Compliance and Psychological Impact of the SARS Quarantine Experience”, in *Epidemiology and Infection*, Vol. 136, No. 7, Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Dana Rose Garfin, Roxane Cohen Silver, and E. Alison Holman, *The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-2019) Outbreak: Amplification of Public Health Consequences by Media Exposure*, in *Health Psychology*, University of California, American Psychological Association, Vol. 39, No. 5, 2020.
- Dr. Matthew Whalley and Dr. Hardeep Kaur, *Living with worry and anxiety amidst global uncertainty*, Psychology Tools, 2020.
- Elise Thomas and Albert Zhang, *ID2020, Bill Gates and the Mark of the Beast: how Covid-19 catalyses existing online conspiracy movements*, in *Australian Strategic Policy Institute* 2020.
- Felipe Ornell, Jaqueline B. Schuch and Anne O. Sordi, “Pandemic fear” and COVID-19: mental health burden and strategies”, in *Braz J Psychiatry*, 2020.
- Heather Loveday and Jennie Wilson, COVID-19: fear, explanation, action, unity and ingenuity and World Hand Hygiene Day, *Journal of Infection Prevention*, Vol. 21(3), 2020.
- Jolanda Jetten, Stephen D. Reicher, S. Alexander Haslam and Tegan Cruwys, *Together Apart: The Psychology of COVID-19*, SAGE Publications, 2020.
- Karen M. Douglas, Robbie M. Sutton, and Aleksandra Cichocka, *The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories*, in *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 2017, School of Psychology, University of Kent, Vol. 26(6).
- Lenore Manderson and Susan Levine, „COVID-19, Risk, Fear, and Fall-out”, in *Medical Anthropology*, 2020.
- Marie Chêne, Jorum Duri, and Adriana Fraiha Granjo, *Social Cohesion and interpersonal trust, exploring post-covid-19 trends and their impact on anti-corruption, governance and development*, in *Transparency International*, 2018.
- Philip Strong, „Epidemic psychology: a model”, in *Sociology of Health & Illness* Vol. 12 No. 3, 1990.
- Samantha K Brooks, Rebecca K Webster and Louise E Smith, *The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence*, Department of Psychological Medicine, King’s College London, 2020.
- Sijia Li, YilinWang, Jia Xue, Nan Zhao and Tingshao Zhu, *The Impact of COVID-19 Epidemic Declaration on Psychological Consequences: A Study on Active Weibo Users*, in *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2020.
- The Psychological Impact of COVID-19*, Shauna H Springer, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/free-range-psychology/202003/the-psychological-impact-covid-19>.

4. PERSPECTIVES ON THE PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACT OF INFORMATIONAL WARFARE AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Irina Iacovoioiu

„It is easier to deceive people than to convince them that they have been deceived”, Mark Twain

„The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting”, Sun Tzu

Introduction

The context generated by the COVID-19 pandemic (the health crisis, the institutional measures taken by the states to stop the spread of SARS-CoV-2 virus and to manage the situation – such as social isolation, social distancing, quarantine –, as well as the economic repercussions) has led to a radical change of the worldwide *status quo*. The new, sudden and disturbing reality has had a high psychosocial impact for humanity (and will continue to have on the medium and long term), which, in addition, has been accentuated by informational aggressions.

According to the *divide et impera* principle, the first step to conquering states/societies is to destabilize them. Being in pursuit of their goals, various actors of the international system have exploited the pandemic from its very beginning (especially Russia and China, as stated by various European reports) and have launched informational warfare campaigns to weaken European societies and the EU (and not only) and to increase control over them.

These informational aggressions have amplified exponentially the impact of the health crisis at the psychosocial level (as it was aimed), because, while discouraging reason and critical thinking among people, they have accessed emotions. People's ability to make the right decisions has consequently been affected, favoring the emergence of inconsistent with reality beliefs, attitudes and behaviors, which, in this context, translated also into human losses.

The short-term objective has been to weaken the collective mind, by abundantly circulating the untrue and misleading narratives, so that they would come to replace real data, and by creating an environment of chaos and panic. These evolutions have led to the next objective, the loss of citizens' trust in state institutions, in the Western organizations, the democratic values and principles, as well as replacing solidarity and cooperation with division and competition in the Western world (regarding both societies and states). Parts of these aims have been reached and, in this context of a continuous health crisis, the next steps towards gaining influence and control over the Western world can be implemented.

The analysis of the immediate effects of the informational warfare carried out amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the assessment of the consequences that may occur in our democratic societies in the medium and long term highlight the need for a vehement, extensive, coordinated and concerted response both from the European states and the EU (as well as other Western organizations). If not, the risk that developments at the European level should be controlled by actors with corrosive interests increases significantly.

In this paper, I have employed the qualitative work methodology, focusing on the analysis and interpretation of recent evolutions and scientific works. The ideas presented previously will be discussed throughout the paper, in a non-exhaustive manner, while some topics for reflection on how to address the challenge of informational warfare at the European and national level, implicitly new research directions, will be suggested.

Contextualization. The health crisis and its psychosocial effects

For the first time since World War II, the world had to adapt to a new context, generated by the epidemiological crisis and the institutional measures taken by the states to manage the critical situation. When writing this paper, around 24 million cases have been confirmed with the SARS-CoV-2 virus and 800.000 deaths from COVID-19 worldwide¹, making this cross-border health crisis unprecedented in post-war history and the worst since the „Spanish flu” of 1918.

Mankind has been faced with new social conditions, a new lifestyle and general uncertainty. Societies and people’s lives have been shaken at all levels for a significant period of time since the outbreak of the epidemic by a multitude of unknown variables.

In terms of health, a series of disturbing elements have appeared since the outbreak of the pandemic: a) the high infection rate; b) the lack of knowledge regarding symptoms, manner of contagion and effects of the disease; c) the high number of deaths at the global level; d) undiscovered remedy/treatment; e) overloaded health systems, insufficient material resources and medicines to treat the COVID-19 disease and combat the spread of the virus; f) unknown temporal delimitation of the sanitary crisis.

Radical changes have also taken place in the social sphere. Social distancing and social isolation have materialized in accentuated solitude, the separation of families, the impossibility of direct interaction with close peers (family members, friends and colleagues), as well as a general distance from people (outside the home). Also, a considerable impact at the level of the psyche has had the unknown period of social restrictions².

¹ World Health Organization, *Numbers at a glance*, link: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>, accessed on August 25, 2020.

² Emily A Holmes, Rory C O’Connor, Hugh Perry, Irene Tracey, Hugh Perry, Simon Wessely, Louise Arseneault et al, *Multidisciplinary research priorities for the COVID-19 pandemic: a call for action for mental health science*, Position Paper,

Economic problems emerged rapidly in the entire world as well. Specialists have started talking about a strong recession because many economic actors had to stop their activity during the lockdown, which translated also into increased unemployment. Others managed to move their lucrative activities in the online environment, meaning that their employees started working from home (in some cases these evolutions are prevalent until today). In addition, not only was the period required for economic rehabilitation unknown, but a new economic crisis was looming on the horizon³.

The political changes were determined by the governmental institutions' response to the crisis: declaring a nationwide state of emergency, issuing recommendations and imposing bans or closing borders⁴. In other words, the implemented political measures translated into the restriction of the exercise of certain rights or freedoms (such as freedom of movement, intimate, family and private life, inviolability of the home, education, freedom of assembly or strike), meaning great changes in our democratic societies, therefore having a high psychological impact.

All these disturbing elements and unknown variables have led to the creation of an accentuated state of uncertainty, to fear and anxiety among people. The crisis has been perceived, at the

COVID-19 pandemic: a call for action for mental health science, Position Paper, Volume 7, Issue 6, P547-560, June 01, 2020, link: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(20\)30168-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(20)30168-1/fulltext); accessed on August 25, 2020;

³ Maria Nicola, Zaid Alsafi, Catrin Sohrabi, Ahmed Kerwan, Ahmed Al-Jabir, Christos Iosifidis, Maliha Agha and Riaz Aghaf, *The socio-economic implications of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19): A review*, April 17, 2020, link: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7162753/>, accessed on August 25, 2020;

⁴ Krisztina Binder, Maria Diaz Crego, Gianna Eckert, Silvia Kotanidis, Rafal Manko and Micaela Del Monte, *States of emergency in response to the coronavirus crisis: Situation in certain Member States*, European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), June 2020, link: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/649408/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)649408_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/649408/EPRS_BRI(2020)649408_EN.pdf), accessed on August 25, 2020.

individual and collective psyche, as a moment of danger, decisive, testing at maximum our existence⁵.

On one hand, the new context has brought changes to our lifestyle and the loss of comfort and stability. On the other, the radical changes and uncertainty surrounding many key aspects of our lives have been interpreted as threats⁶. This leads to the activation of effective and beneficial short-term defense mechanisms, such as the survival instinct, which mobilizes all available resources of an individual to prepare him for an „assault” (in this case to fight against contagion, the disease, or even the possibility of death).

Its activation also influences attention, memory, the ability to quickly integrate surrounding information, including of social nature, and to adjust emotions and behavior. The problem is that the active maintenance of conservation or adaptation systems in the long term determines medical imbalances, both physical and mental⁷.

The situation of stress has been accentuated by the fact that we did not worry only for ourselves, but also for other close people (as family members, friends, colleagues) and especially for the vulnerable ones. At the same time, the vulnerable groups (front-line employees of the medical system, the elderly, the unemployed, young people, people with mental and physical problems) have been the most exposed to the psychological impact of the pandemic⁸.

⁵ Dorin Bodea, *Managementul crizei în vremea COVID-19 (I). Impactul izolării și gestionarea fricii*, April 6, 2020, <https://revistacariere.ro/leadership/contribuitori/managementul-crisiei-in-vremea-covid-19-i-impactul-izolarii-si-gestionarea-fricii/>, August 25, 2020.

⁶ *Izolarea sociala si efectele asupra sistemului nervos*, link: <https://www.neuroax.ro/izolare-sociala/>, accessed on August 25, 2020.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ Emily A Holmes, Rory C O'Connor, Hugh Perry, Irene Tracey, Hugh Perry, Simon Wessely, Louise Arseneault et al, *Multidisciplinary research priorities for the COVID-19 pandemic: a call for action for mental health science*, Position Paper, Volume 7, Issue 6, P547-560, June 01, 2020, link: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(20\)30168-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(20)30168-1/fulltext), accessed on August 25, 2020.

Therefore, the profound, sudden and imposed changes to our lifestyle, at all levels, the fact that our minds are not prepared to deal with long-term uncertainties and that the situation has exceeded the sphere of our individual control have had a particularly high psychological weight⁹. The effects have settled in an influx of negative, blunt, irrational thoughts, loaded with negative emotionality. Fear, tension, as well as sadness, have appeared, which, experienced in the long run, have turned into anxiety, panic, anger, or depression¹⁰.

Social isolation played an important role in accentuating negative thoughts and emotions. This represented both a novelty element generating stress and a potentiator of the disorders caused by the other causes. People are social beings, dependent on interpersonal relations, most individual needs being generated by them: love, esteem, belonging, security and status.

Their restriction and limitation can lead to impaired mental and physical health because people, in isolation, tend to pay more attention to situations with negative impact. The effects have also been intensified by the fact that loneliness during the health crisis generated the perception of also being alone in the fight against the pandemic¹¹.

Negative thoughts and emotions have not only affected our mental and physical health but have also generated, in some cases, maladaptive and dysfunctional social attitudes and behaviors. These manifested also in terms of non-compliance with the recommendations and restrictions of the authorities, excessive shopping¹², as well as a tendency of social animosities

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Izolarea sociala si efectele asupra sistemului nervos*, link: <https://www.neuroaxis.ro/izolare-sociala/>, accessed on August 25, 2020.

¹² The European Commission, *Tackling COVID-19 disinformation - Getting the facts right*, June 10, 2020, link: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-tackling-covid-19-disinformation-getting-facts-right_en.pdf, accessed on August 25, 2020.

(prioritizing „me” instead of „we” perceiving others as enemies) leading to the replacement of solidarity with individualism and competition¹³.

After the number of new COVID-19 cases and deaths decreased, the state of emergency and restrictions on social isolation have been lifted. People’s lives began to gradually return to the „old” normality, from a social and economic point of view, while health problems persisted (albeit on a smaller scale). However, future evolution trends are still unknown. The possibility of new waves of the pandemic remains and these can either be met with increased resilience by the population or have an even greater psychosocial impact.

Informational warfare in times of Coronavirus. Psychosocial considerations

➤ A brief conceptual perspective

Confrontation has always been one of the physical human force and technical and material means, but also of the psyche. From ancient times, the Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu stated that „*the supreme art of war is to defeat the enemy without fighting*”, by deception. Over time, informational warfare (also known as psychological warfare in the specialized language) has adapted to the changing societies, has developed and refined.

Informational warfare represents an elaborate and asymmetric form of aggression, used internationally by state and non-state actors to manipulate a target audience and influence it in the direction desired by the actor acting in pursuit of its interests¹⁴. Nowadays, the main instruments of this type of war are:

¹³ David Myers, *Real World Social Psychology Under the Coronavirus*, March 17, 2020, link: <https://community.macmillanlearning.com/t5/talk-psych-blog/real-world-social-psychology-under-the-coronavirus/ba-p/4914>, accessed on August 25, 2020.

¹⁴ Iulian Chifu, Oazu Nantoi, *Războiul informațional: tipizarea agresiunii informaționale a Federației Ruse*, ISPRI Publishing House, pp. 15-20.

■ *disinformation*: according to the EU working definition, „a set of verifiably false or misleading information, which is created, presented and disseminated to obtain an economic gain or to deliberately mislead the public”¹⁵. Other conceptual perspectives mention as specific aim the weakening of the target’s morale¹⁶.

■ *rumor*: a complex psychosocial phenomenon, which consists in circulating supposedly authentic and new narratives on one or more topics, to achieve precise goals. The messages are biased, ambiguous and difficult to verify or non-verifiable in the short-term. It appears mainly in the context of insufficient or absent official information or its lack of credibility and relevance, as well as in extremely tense and stressful situations for the population, and it exploits the emotional plan (hopes, fears, etc.)¹⁷.

■ *propaganda*: a set of organized, systematic actions meant to spread an ideology, to manipulate opinions, beliefs, attitudes, individual and collective behaviors for the benefit of the actor who carries them out¹⁸.

■ *fake news*: „fabricated, distorted or truncated information disseminated in the traditional and alternative media, as well as on social networks by a state or organization having a budget, strategy and an ideology, in order to deepen the existing social tensions and to create confusion”¹⁹.

Information warfare (whether we are referring to its extensive range of measures or a particular one) manifests itself through the premeditated presentation of alternative narratives, created in

¹⁵ The European Commission, *Întrebări și răspunsuri – UE își intensifică activitatea împotriva dezinformării*, link: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ro/MEMO_18_6648, accessed on August 26, 2020.

¹⁶ Gheorghe Arădăvoaice, Valentin Stancu, *Războaiele de azi și de mâine. Agresiuni nonconvenționale*, Editura Militară, 1999, pp. 119-121.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 105-106.

¹⁸ Gheorghe Arădăvoaice, Valentin Stancu, *Războaiele de azi și de mâine. Agresiuni nonconvenționale*, Editura Militară, 1999, pp. 67-68.

¹⁹ Marian Voicu, *Matrioșka mincișilor. Fake news, manipulare, populism*, Humanitas, 2018, p. 11.

the laboratory by altering real data and arguments, to the targeted audiences in order to inoculate them in the collective mind and to create counterfeit realities. Perverting perceptions and building predefined/false opinions and beliefs serve to manipulate and influence the targeted audiences in favor of the interests of the actors who carry out this type of aggression²⁰.

Regardless of the size of the target audience (a segment of the population of a country or an entire nation), psychosocial elements have a special significance in the manifestation of the informational warfare. That is because the first aim is to weaken them and only afterward to conquer them.

And for this purpose, aspects related to fundamental emotions (fear, humiliation, hope), context, capitalizing on the opportunities offered by the evolution of events, are taken into account in order to create the mood required to inoculate a type of reporting to the topics presented among the targeted audiences²¹.

➤ Manifestations of the phenomenon

Currently, the instrument of informational aggressions is intensively used worldwide by both state (authoritarian states like Russia, China) and non-state actors (terrorist organizations) to achieve their goals and increase their power in the international system. Widely known for its intensity, extensive instrumentation, adaptability, refinement and expansion is the Russian informational warfare. It has reached unimaginable levels in many parts of the world (such as Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans, Western Europe, the United States, and so on) with the help of the large trolls factories and government-controlled disinformation agencies in Russia²².

The crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic was capitalized by the aforementioned authoritarian states. It is worth

²⁰ Iulian Chifu, Oazu Nantoi, *Războiul informațional: tipizarea agresiunii informaționale a Federației Ruse*, ISPRI Publishing House, pp. 15-20, pp. 32-38.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² *Ibidem*, pp. 122-127.

mentioning that, in June 2020, the EU nominated for the first time China, next to Russia, as an actor deploying informational aggressions, in the context of the new coronavirus²³.

These states have carried out real informational warfare campaigns, in the form of waves of fake news, disinformation, or propaganda. The immediate objectives have been to weaken the European societies (and not only) from within, by exacerbating the health crisis, inducing panic, chaos, as well as distrust in the state authorities and the Western organizations and favoring polarization and social tensions.

Going hand in hand with the unstable situation generated by the health crisis, the misleading narratives have occupied a great space of the informational ecosystem and have been contradictory and confusing. The COVID-19 pandemic has been presented either as a farce, an easy-to-manage context, or as a situation that could generate apocalyptic scenarios for the Western world and a secret plan of „a global elite” to control the population by introducing absolute social control and compulsory vaccination.

However, the disinformation and propaganda messages promoted by Russia and China have had a few general directions: against the Western states and societies, the European and Euro-Atlantic organizations and the Western values (such as liberal democracy), while promoting a positive self-image²⁴.

Further, I will present some of these counter-made narratives, part of the informational aggressions carried against the European societies and the Western organizations, exposed by the EU through various EUvsDisinfo publications:

²³ Elena Sánchez Nicolás, *EU: China, Russia responsible for Covid-19 disinformation*, June 11, 2020, link: <https://euobserver.com/eu-china/148618>, accessed at August 26, 2020.

²⁴ *Throwing Darts To See What Sticks* (June 25, 2020), *Repeating A Lie Does Not Make It True* (April 9, 2020), *Disinformation Can Kill* (March 26, 2020), link: <https://euvsdisinfo.eu>, accessed on August 26, 2020.

- a) the Schengen system has collapsed;
- b) the EU and NATO, amid the inability to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, have collapsed;
- c) the virus was created by humans, most likely in NATO laboratories, which has spread it throughout the EU;
- d) the European organization was paralyzed and interested only in the money of the national governments;
- e) the EU failed in Greece and Spain and abandoned Italy;
- f) liberalism has facilitated the spread of the coronavirus;
- g) the epidemic was a lie, a political movement to establish American hegemony worldwide;
- h) the coronavirus was a biological weapon created by the West against its opponents – Russia, China, and Iran – and their economies;
- i) The World Health Organization is only an instrument of „the shadow government”;
- j) only authoritarian states and closed societies will be able to protect their populations from the new coronavirus and future pandemics;
- k) the situation in Russia is entirely under control;
- l) Russia invented the cure for coronavirus;
- m) Russia is unjustly accused of launching a disinformation campaign on the subject of coronavirus;
- n) the COVID-19 pandemic was planned by certain pharmaceutical corporations, government agencies or „the shadow government” to manipulate and control the people;
- o) there are natural remedies against the virus, such as vitamin C or garlic (the latter a notorious panacea against vampires)²⁵.

Once with the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the disease caused by it, COVID-19, a „pandemic” of fake news, disinformation and propaganda has been triggered globally. It has found fertile ground in the „infodemia”²⁶ generated during

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ The World Health Organization defines infodemia as „an excessive amount of information about a problem, which makes it difficult to identify a solution” and notes that during a crisis, infodemics can contribute to the spread of misinformation, disinformation and rumors. World Health Organization, *Novel Coronavirus*

the pandemic, the openness of the democratic societies (the liberal-democratic principles have been turned into weapons and directed against the democratic societies) and the tools made available by the artificial intelligence developments.

The grandeur and high-scale use of the Internet, mainly of the social networks, have turned them into vast and accessible resources for informational aggression, as the abundant content circulated reaches quickly different parts of the world and an incredibly large number of people. The situation was even more favorable as most people have turned to the media, Internet and social networks to keep themselves informed and for entertainment, leading to even greater exposure to false narratives²⁷.

The spread of misleading information and their inclusion in the collective mind was also favored by the social media *echo-chambers*²⁸. Once the untruths had been accessed and believed, people returned to these environments in search of similar information and opinions, to validate their beliefs, thus paving the way for the success of the informational warfare.

➤ Psychosocial implications of informational aggressions

Searching for reliable information that would provide quick and secure guidance, people have come across countless sources of disinformation, ranging from fragments of truth combined with false aspects to untruths and even veritable conspiracy theories. Instead of pertinently supporting the need for information

(2019-nCoV) Situation Report - 13, February 2, 2020, link: <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200202-sitrep-13-ncov-v3.pdf>, accessed on August 27, 2020.

²⁷ The European Commission, *Coronavirus: EU strengthens action to tackle disinformation*, June 10, 2020, link: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1006, accessed on August 27, 2020.

²⁸ According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary an echo-chamber is „an environment in which somebody encounters only opinions and beliefs similar to their own, and does not have to consider alternatives”. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, link: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/echo-chamber>, accessed on August 27, 2020.

of the people during the pandemic, these sources provided pseudo-answers (consisting of contradictory, inconclusive, irrational, unnecessary, alarming, inflammatory narratives). The short-term purpose was to provoke an emotional response from the public and to lead to the formation of a climate of chaos and panic.

The negative thoughts and emotions, which appeared in the epidemiological crisis context, have intensified. The anxiety, insecurity, fear, mistrust, hopelessness, stress, sadness generated by the new reality of people's lives, the new lifestyle, the extension and depth of the pandemic effects in societies and the persistent uncertainties increased due to the informational warfare campaigns²⁹.

At the same time, the recognition of false, misleading narratives or the perception of their existence has also led to feelings of fear and frustration, due to a sense of helplessness and lack of control against the attempts of manipulating the public opinion. All this negative emotional background has turned into suspicion, despair, panic, anxiety, anger and so on, the consequences being harmful from multiple perspectives, both for the mental and physical health of people and societies³⁰.

The changes in the mental-emotional state of people had repercussions in terms of their attitudes and behaviors, which have become inconsistent with reality and inappropriate to the context. Some people formed extreme, irrational, false, and contradictory beliefs (according to which the epidemiological crisis did not exist, the measures adopted by the states were excessive, the authorities did not manage efficiently the situation, the others became enemies to our well-being and so on), leading to:

²⁹ Emily A Holmes, Rory C O'Connor, Hugh Perry, Irene Tracey, Hugh Perry, Simon Wessely, Louise Arseneault et al, *Multidisciplinary research priorities for the COVID-19 pandemic: a call for action for mental health science*, Position Paper, Volume 7, Issue 6, P547-560, June 01, 2020, link: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(20\)30168-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(20)30168-1/fulltext); accessed on August 27, 2020;

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

- ignoring the measures implemented for health protection, implicitly the measures meant to reduce the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to counteract it;
- making excessive purchases of products (especially food and medical products);
- using all kinds of improvised remedies as methods to prevent and cure the disease provoked by the coronavirus;
- treating other people as enemies;
- returning to the consumption of false narratives and conspiracy theories for validation and also disseminating them through mass social platforms.

On one side, these evolutions translated into the aggravation of the health crisis and its impact at all levels and have stimulated the appearance of xenophobic feelings. On the other, they paved the way for the achievement of the goals of the informational warfare – to induce distrust towards the authorities, peers, or the gravity of the epidemiological crisis, and to sow discord at the level of societies.

Infodemia has made it difficult for people to reach official information, as reports of the epidemiological crisis and disinformation campaigns on the subject have increased exponentially. Developments have led to reactions from both European countries and the European Union, which have stepped up their communication activities, in order to present to the public the institutional measures and the official sources of information. At the same time, the European organization has taken measures to expose and dismantle the false narratives.

However, some experts have claimed that once the false news, myths and conspiracy theories are consumed, people return to them. The arguments refer to the fact that:

- 1) fictional messages are simple and repetitive,
- 2) we are exposed daily to an enormous amount of information,
- 3) people's analytical processing capacity and time resource are limited, hence the inclination to „mental shortcuts”,
- 4) the algorithmic way of functioning concerning social media;
- 5) the need to nurture a sense of control and security,
- 6) and the influence of the community on the individual and the need for belonging³¹.

The disinformation and propaganda narratives will eventually be widely discussed and dismantled, while the health crisis will diminish or pass. However, first of all, it is hard to convince people of the falsity of some narratives that have circulated. „*It is easier to deceive people than to convince them that they have been deceived*”, as Mark Twain said. Secondly, the psychosocial effects will not evaporate easily and will have, possibly, medium and long-term repercussions.

The effects of the negative thoughts and emotions experienced, the maladapted attitudes and behaviors manifested and the mistaken beliefs formed as a result to the exposure to informational aggressions or to being aware of them and feeling a sense of helplessness will have their say in the future, enhanced perhaps by other contextual elements³².

The erosion of public confidence in the authorities, the general fear, the discord within or between societies, perhaps augmented by a second wave of the pandemic or new campaigns of disinformation and propaganda (the examples are not exhaustive) can lead, among others, to:

- a) paving the way for a high degree of success for future informational warfare campaigns;

³¹ David Ludden, *Why Do People Believe in Conspiracy Theories?*, January 6, 2018, link: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/talking-apes/201801/why-do-people-believe-in-conspiracy-theories>, accessed August 28, 2020.

³² Karina Margit Erdelyi, *The Psychological Impact of Information Warfare & Fake News*, August 12, 2020, link: <https://www.psycom.net/iwar.1.html>, accessed on August 28, 2020.

The weakening of the collective mind following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the informational aggressions carried out in parallel translate into increased vulnerability to future aggressions among the population. This context is conducive to the development of new corrosive actions and can be exploited by the authoritarian states aiming at controlling the Western world.

b) maladapted reactions to potential future danger situations;

The inoculation of mentalities according to which the health crisis did not exist in reality, that it was just an instrument of the so-called „occult forces” for mass manipulation and so on, can generate collective reactions that are not in accordance with reality and non-adaptive to the possible future dangerous situations. As in the case of the health crisis caused by the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, these developments can lead to endangering the health of those concerned and others, as well as thwarting the measures taken by the authorities.

c) the persistence of social animosities and their transformation into social hostilities or tensions;

The lack of confidence, chaos and anxiety generated by the untruths’ „pandemic” determined among people the attempt of preserving their health and the perception of others as enemies. The persistence of a competitive attitude, with accents of hostility, in the medium and long term can stimulate social polarization, to determine the creation or deepening (of already existing) sociocultural fault lines. In this context, the situation may degenerate, on its own or stimulated (for example, by other disinformation and propaganda campaigns) and hostilities could turn into civil tensions or even conflicts.

d) the appearance of violent revolts against the state authorities;

The lack of trust in the authorities, based on the belief that the epidemic did not exist or on the opinion of its inefficient management, generated by the informational aggressions during

the pandemic, corroborated with a collective feeling of fear can settle in future violent riots against state authorities. These may occur also due to the expansion/escalation of the epidemiological crisis and its impact on societies (from a political, economic, social perspective), the persistence of informational aggression (which significantly complicates the situation), and other enhancing elements.

e) the potentiation of populism and authoritarianism.

This moment can be exploited for enhancing populist discourses and for gaining the trust of the masses by extremist, authoritarian politicians. They can portray themselves as strong, iron-fisted political leaders, able to handle any dangerous situation, generating the (false) feeling that choosing them means ensuring a secure future. Falling into the trap and trusting populist discourse, people can turn to candidates from the extremist political parties. In this case, the voluntary renunciation of some rights and freedoms specific to the democratic systems is not considered, because there is a strong possibility that the democratic societies will turn into authoritarian ones after elections.

Reflections on methods to counteract the informational aggressions

The ability to inculcate ideas, opinions in people's minds, to form their beliefs and make them have certain behaviors, all predefined in the laboratory, continues to be one of the basic sources of power in the current international system. Informational warfare, which brings together a wide range of refined tools adapted to our times, represents the means to achieve this goal.

The creation and implementation of informational aggression is based on the exploitation of elements/vulnerabilities from different fields in societies. In this sense, psychosocial elements are speculated (the chaos, uncertainty and mistrustful environments and the weakened collective mind – also results of disinformation and propaganda – poorly developed critical thinking), as well as

factors related to the online environment (recent developments and its poor regulation), democratic values (opening of democratic societies), or security-related issues (programmatic documents that are unadjusted to the current security challenges).

Consequently, the response to these malignant measures must be multi-faceted and involve a conjugated, concrete and continuous response from all parties affected by this phenomenon – state authorities, the private sector and civil society. At the same time, the answer must be oriented towards strengthening democratic principles and values, not sacrificing them, and increasing the resilience of the population.

First of all, the correct and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon is needed at the institutional level and in the public sphere. The gaps and inconsistencies in the institutional communication and public debate, as well as the political misuse of these terms (to disparage political opponents and to promote a positive self-image), discredit and relativize the efforts meant to combat informational aggressions.

State authorities can launch continuous strategic communication campaigns in order to indicate the official sources of information, to expose and dismantle false narratives, to explain the meaning and the tools of informational aggressions, and to let citizens know the measures that can be taken not to fall into their trap – checking the source of information to determine whether it is reliable and verify information from multiple sources to determine its veracity. Additional measures are needed for better regulation of the online space, including social media, in order to signal or remove the content that promotes false, misleading narratives.

The civil society, namely NGOs and academia, can support the efforts to expose and raise awareness of the deployment of informational aggression among the population. At the same time, it can promote measures meant to increase critical thinking, so that the population can effectively manage false information

content, designed to generate irrational, blunt and thoughts full of negative emotions.

Equally important is the adaptation of programmatic documents in the field of security, implicitly of public policies, to the current security challenges. Next to the turbulence and unpredictability of the geopolitical context and the terrorist phenomenon, a significant share of the security risks and threats is held by the informational warfare.

It should also be noted that some of these measures have been implemented at the EU and national levels. The European Union, for example, created some instruments meant to better trace and expose disinformation and propaganda and has improved its strategic communication.

In 2015, the East Stratcom Task Force was set up, at the request of the European Council, and the *EUvsDisinfo* website (where false narratives are exposed) was launched, under the auspices of the European External Action Service (EEAS). This was followed by the adoption, in 2018, of the „*Joint Communication on Combating Online Misinformation: A European Approach*”, the launch of the „Action Plan against Misinformation” and the creation of a High-Level Expert Group on False News and Online Misinformation.

Regarding Romania, multiple initiatives have been implemented in the academia and civil society to expose and dismantle misleading narratives of disinformation and propaganda. Also, the challenges posed by informational warfare have been comprehensively addressed in *Romania's National Defense Strategy for the period 2020-2024*, a significant step towards consolidating the institutional answer. Also, during the pandemic, there have been numerous communication campaigns carried out by the public authorities to present the developments of the epidemiological crisis and the official sources of information.

Final remarks

The informational aggressions carried out in the Western space before the health crisis and, at a much higher level, during the OVID - 19 pandemic, as well as their immediate and long term consequences, reveal the need to maintain the efforts to eradicate the phenomenon and to update them. The response must be vehement, extensive, coordinated and concerted, also implemented at the national and the Western organizations level by all the actors involved.

The recent evolutions have shown that these malign measures instrumented by authoritarian states have been refined and adapted to our times and have monetized the development of the online environment and social media, along with the openness of democratic societies. Also, it has become more than clear that the psychosocial dimension plays a particularly important role in the organization and deployment of disinformation and propaganda campaigns.

The destabilization of the population makes it suitable for subsequent conquest (the same is true for the European and Euro-Atlantic organizations). And, according to the *divide et impera* principle, the conquest of the minds and the destabilization of the societies represent the preliminary step to the achievement of other political, economic and military objectives.

As a result, it is extremely important to increase the resilience of the population in the process of combating informational warfare. These developments would also translate into regaining people's trust in the authorities, science, the media, their peers, and also in cultivating the feeling of solidarity.

At the same time, states must also focus on strengthening cooperation and solidarity among them, both for the general good and for fighting this scourge. On the contrary, the prosperity, stability and peace of the Western world (and beyond) risk being endangered by the corrosive interests of certain authoritarian states.

Bibliography:

- David Ludden, *Why Do People Believe in Conspiracy Theories?*, January 6, 2018, link: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/talking-apes/2018-01/why-do-people-believe-in-conspiracy-theories>;
- David Myers, *Real World Social Psychology Under the Coronavirus*, March 17, 2020, link: <https://community.macmillanlearning.com/t5/talk-psych-blog/real-world-social-psychology-under-the-coronavirus/ba-p/4914>;
- Disinformation Can Kill*, March 26, 2020, link: <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/disinformation-can-kill/>
- Dorin Bodea, *Managementul crizei în vremea COVID-19 (I). Impactul izolării și gestionarea fricii*, April 6, 2020, <https://revistacariere.ro/leadership/contribuitori/managementul-crisiei-in-vremea-covid-19-i-impactul-izolarii-si-gestionarea-fricii/>;
- Elena Sánchez Nicolás, *EU: China, Russia responsible for Covid-19 disinformation*, June 11, 2020, link: <https://euobserver.com/eu-china/148618>;
- Emily A Holmes, Rory C O'Connor, Hugh Perry, Irene Tracey, Hugh Perry, Simon Wessely, Louise Arseneault et al, *Multidisciplinary research priorities for the COVID-19 pandemic: a call for action for mental health science*, Position Paper, Volume 7, Issue 6, P547-560, June 01, 2020, link: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(20\)30168-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(20)30168-1/fulltext);
- Gheorghe Arădăvoaice, Valentin Stancu, *Războaiele de azi și de mâine. Agresiuni nonconvenționale*, Editura Militară, 1999;
- Iulian Chifu, Oazu Nantoi, *Războiul informațional: tipizarea agresiunii informaționale a Federației Ruse*, ISPRI Publishing House, 2016;
- Izolarea sociala și efectele asupra sistemului nervos*, link: <https://www.neuroaxis.ro/izolare-sociala/>;
- Karina Margit Erdelyi, *The Psychological Impact of Information Warfare & Fake News*, August 12, 2020, link: <https://www.psycom.net/iwar.1.html>;
- Krisztina Binder, Maria Diaz Crego, Gianna Eckert, Silvia Kotanidis, Rafal Manko and Micaela Del Monte, *States of emergency in response to the coronavirus crisis: Situation in certain Member States*, European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), June 2020, link: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/649408/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)649408_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/649408/EPRS_BRI(2020)649408_EN.pdf);
- Lucian Lumezeanu, *Coronavirus aduce si alte pericole: Fake news, panica, distrugerea increderii*, February 25, 2020, link: <http://www.ziare.com/stiri/coronavirus/coronavirus-aduce-si-alte-pericole-fake-news-panica-distrugerea-increderii-1598897>;

- Maria Nicola, Zaid Alsafi, Catrin Sohrabi, Ahmed Kerwan, Ahmed Al-Jabir, Christos Iosifidis, Maliha Agha and Riaz Aghaf, *The socio-economic implications of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19): A review*, April 17, 2020, link: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7162753/>;
- Marian Voicu, *Matrioșka mincinoșilor. Fake news, manipulare, populism*, Humanitas, 2018;
- Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, link: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/echo-chamber>;
- Ruxandra Hurezean, *Fenomenul infodemiei, explicat de experți. De ce cad în capcana fake news și a propagandei politice chiar și oamenii educați*, June 10, 2020, link: <https://www.revistasinteza.ro/fenomenul-infodemiei-explicat-de-experti-de-ce-cad-in-capcana-fake-news-si-a-propagandei-politice-chiar-si-oamenii-educati>;
- Scott Johnson, *Toward a Functional Model of Information Warfare, A Major Intelligence Challenge*, Central Intelligence Agency Library, link: <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/97unclass/warfare.html#top>;
- The European Commission, *Coronavirus: EU strengthens action to tackle disinformation*, June 10, 2020, link: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1006;
- The European Commission, *Întrebări și răspunsuri – UE își intensifică activitatea împotriva dezinformării*, link: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ro/MEMO_18_6648;
- The European Commission, *Tackling COVID-19 disinformation - Getting the facts right*, June 10, 2020, link: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-tackling-covid-19-disinformation-getting-facts-right_en.pdf;
- Throwing Darts To See What Sticks* (June 25, 2020), *Repeating A Lie Does Not Make It True* (April 9, 2020), *Disinformation Can Kill* (March 26, 2020), link: <https://euvsdisinfo.eu>;
- World Health Organization, *Novel Coronavirus(2019-nCoV) Situation Report - 13*, February 2, 2020, link: <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200202-sitrep-13-ncov-v3.pdf>;
- World Health Organization, *Numbers at a glance*, link: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>;
- Yuval Noah Harari, *Yuval Noah Harari: the world after coronavirus*, March 20, 2020, link: <https://www.ft.com/content/19d90308-6858-11ea-a3c9-1fe6fedcca75>.

II. THE IMPACT ON SOCIETY

1. THE SURVEILLANCE DILEMMA IN THE ERA OF COVID-19 TRACKING DEVICES

Dumitru Șaranuța

Introduction

The global pandemic of Covid-19 was a real black swan of the year 2020. It changed almost everything in our daily lives and affected almost every branch of human activity on all the possible levels, from the individual one to the international one. The SARS-Cov-2 pandemic is a truly global one as it spread on all the continents. Humanity had to make a big shift from its normal routine and try to adapt to the new conditions of the pandemic context.

On the individual level, it changed the approach and paradigm of our consciousness. Each one of us is experiencing the new disease but not necessarily from our health point of view but rather from the social and political point of view. A lot of us started to live more isolated and keeping the social distance not only because our governments told us so but also because our will to survive and try not to get infected.

Some of us deliberately wear facemasks to be protected against the deadly pathogen, some of us wear it because of more restrictive laws. In Asia, the wearing of masks became normal social practice after the SARS epidemics of 2002 but in the Western culture, we couldn't imagine that we would make such a big change in our daily "fashion".

Covid-19 changed our lifestyle. We were masks – a thing that was inconceivable one year ago for Western societies, we try to avoid mass gatherings, we are not allowed to enter closed public spaces such as pubs or restaurants, etc.

Besides that, entire industries are struggling with great financial losses. We do not fly as much as before, we are ignoring the HoReCa businesses because of the disease risk, when lockdowns we do not travel even with our cars and if there are quarantined regions, we do not visit them at all. This is a new approach to our lifestyle that became a new normal and we do not know even when we will go back to our previous normal.

As mentioned above, not only individuals experience this drama but all other actors – societies, corporations, states, the international community. Besides HoReCa and airline companies there are also companies from other branches that encountered great financial and economic challenges, and governments tried to help them and also the citizens, to stimulate the demand.

On the other hand, workers and companies are exercising a new labor approach. More and more companies, especially those from BPO and IT fields, are abandoning the building premises and switched from offices to work from home logic. We can call this a positive effect of the Covid-19 pandemic as this process fosters digital development and may help the employees to escape the stressful routine of the offices – less time spent in traffic and more time spent with beloved ones. However, some people may find work from home logic also a stressful one because of the lack of socialization and being overwhelmed by the lack of personal space from members of the family.

No doubt that the main threatened area is the healthcare systems, both national and global ones. The hospitals and healthcare specialists are overburdened fighting this disease and blocking the spreading of the new infections. The pandemic showed us that we were not ready for it. Footages from intensive care presented shocking images of the struggle of both patients and doctors in fighting the new coronavirus.

The uncertainty of Covid-19 evolutions persists and the international institutions with national governments aren't as efficient as we expected to be. For example, countries as Brazil or Belarus are managing the pandemic very badly. Also, the World Health Organization¹ was criticized for its stance against pandemic being accused of corruption. However, the pandemic is not over and there is still hope² that we will learn our lesson and will reform our healthcare system including the international institutions responsible for this field, and will manage successfully the future epidemiological issues.

Meanwhile, the states and their healthcare systems are at war with an invisible enemy. This war revealed the sad fact that the states are prone to become egoists following the logic *saue qui peut* validating the realist paradigm. This alarming behavior can affect the entire global order and change the logic of international relations. There are already solid arguments that keeping a multilateral approach and cooperation is better than hiding behind a fence of irrational nationalism and being short-sighted on a strategic level³.

Sadly, the egoist behavior was also adopted by the current Washington administration. In fact, everybody is expecting that the USA will show some leadership skills, as it is the hegemon of the liberal international order. If they will miss the chance to be once again the leader of the free world, we may witness the loss of the West against the new invisible enemy and the decline of the liberal order.

¹ "World Health Coronavirus Disinformation", Wall Street Journal, April 5, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/world-health-coronavirus-disinformation-11586122093>, accessed 15th of July 2020.

² DANIELA BRAUN, *How We Learned to Halt Pandemic*, Berlin Policy Journal, JULY 2, 2020, <https://berlinpolicyjournal.com/how-we-learned-to-halt-pandemic/>, accessed 29th of July.

³ Thomas J. Bollyky, Chad P. Bown, *The Tragedy of Vaccine Nationalism: Only Cooperation Can End the Pandemic*, Foreign Affairs, July 27, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-07-27/vaccine-nationalism-pandemic>, accessed 8th of August 2020.

“In many respects, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to be further accelerating the erosion of U.S. hegemony. China has increased its influence in the World Health Organization and other global institutions in the wake of the Trump administration’s attempts to defund and scapegoat the public health body”⁴.

On the other hand, China and Russia may not be the only existential threats to the liberal order. There are more abstract and, at the same time, real threats that can harm Western unity and cohesion. “Washington and its partners are threatened less by rival great powers than by emergent, interconnected, and cascading transnational dangers. Climate change, pandemic diseases, financial crises, failed states, nuclear proliferation – all reverberate far beyond any individual country”⁵. All these new threats, if not addressed, can make the liberal global order to fall in obsolescence.

Last but not least we should take a look at the core values of the Western world and make sure that we are still preserving and promoting them. Rule of law, human rights and democracy must be further strengthened. Thus, the confidence of the citizens in their governments will not pale.

The core values of the liberal and democratic societies are especially important during this Covid-19 pandemic. Almost all of us know that states of emergency and curfews presume more security and fewer liberties but also most of us are afraid that these limitations may last more than needed. This short paper tries to address this matter and will focus exclusively on the surveillance issue.

⁴ Alexander Cooley, Daniel H. Nexon, *How Hegemony Ends: The Unraveling of American Power*, Foreign Affairs, VOLUME 99, NUMBER 4 July/August 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-06-09/how-hegemony-ends>, accessed at 29th of July 2020.

⁵ G. John Ikenberry, *The Next Liberal Order: The Age of Contagion Demands More Internationalism, Not Less*, Foreign Affairs, VOLUME 99, NUMBER 4, July/August 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-06-09/next-liberal-order>, accessed 30th of July.

This is not a secret that pandemics, epidemics or any other scale of spread diseases means tracking the ill persons and watching them closely. This is also the case for the present pandemic of SARS-Cov-2. Besides the overloading of national health systems, the change in our lifestyle, the erosion of liberal global order, there is also another dangerous side effect – the human rights issue during the pandemic.

The biggest risk for individuals and the durability of democratic regimes is the deploying of surveillance technology to contain the spread of the virus. No doubt the surveillance is a mandatory action to end the pandemic faster and to save more lives but where is the limit? In one of his articles⁶, Yuval Noah Harari described a dark scenario of our society being under totalitarian surveillance if we will not address this issue correctly.

In order to understand this problem, we need to define the concepts of surveillance and transparency, privacy and intimacy, and the role of these concepts for medical monitoring. After underlining the connection between these concepts and human rights, we will further take a look at the surveillance technics during pandemics, the use of digital tracking devices, and their risks.

Surveillance between privacy and necessity

Before understanding the relation between Covid-19, surveillance and human rights we should first understand how the last two concepts operate in society. There is a dilemma that refers to ethics and morale. When is it acceptable for governments to monitor their citizens and when is it legitimate?

Surveillance isn't necessarily a totalitarian practice. Governments and national security institutions can monitor the individuals to prevent possible terrorist attacks, they can monitor citizens who do not abide by the law and are plotting to do crimes, etc. There are

⁶ Yuval Noah Harari, *The world after coronavirus*, Financial Times, March 20, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/19d90308-6858-11ea-a3c9-1fe6fedcca75>, accessed 14th of July.

also more neutral meanings of surveillance when it comes to doctors monitoring their patients and their health.

One of a more general definition says that “surveillance is a set of practices that gather and collect data about individuals or entities, with or without their knowledge or consent, for purposes of an analysis which sorts those individuals or entities on the basis of their behavior or characteristics”⁷. This definition can be used to describe surveillance in both ways, negative and positive.

Very often, we may associate surveillance practices with undemocratic regimes. The unethical habits of Stasi in East Germany, Securitatea in communist Romania, or KGB in the USSR made people see their monitoring as a bad thing. Even democratic governments are criticized by their citizens for abusive surveillance. For instance, some scholars are still talking about NSA mass surveillance revealed by Edward Snowden⁸.

For societies, especially democratic ones, this issue is very sensitive. Knowing that somebody might watch you without your consent makes you feel uncomfortable, even if you are not a mob or a terrorist. “Privacy evokes worlds of intimacy. Alan Westin, who had assumed a central role in asserting the significance of privacy in the second half of the 20th century, believed that privacy met a psychological need, not only for exercising autonomy but also for enjoying opportunities for emotional release and self-reflection”⁹.

As we can see privacy is a psychological need and make us feel comfortable. Moreover, we need to feel that we are autonomous

⁷ Deborah G. Johnson, Kent A. Wayland, *Surveillance and transparency as sociotechnical systems of accountability*, Chapter 1, in *Surveillance and Democracy*, ed. Kevin D. Haggerty and Minas Samatas, New York, Routledge Publisher, 2010, p. 24.

⁸ Giovanni Navarria, *Can Democracy Survive the Rise of Surveillance Technology?*, *Democratic Theory*, Volume 1, Issue 2, Berghahn Publisher, winter 2014, p. 77.

⁹ Amy L. Fairchild, Ronald Bayer, James Colgrove, *Privacy, Democracy and the Politics of Disease Surveillance*, *PUBLIC HEALTH ETHICS*, VOLUME 1, NUMBER 1, April 2008, pp. 30-31.

and that we are not controlled. This gives us an additional feeling of freedom that we enjoy. Autonomy means that there is inner life and that we are enjoying our right to subjectivity¹⁰.

However, privacy and intimacy are not absolute and we must acknowledge this. As mentioned before, there are certain situations when governments and medical institutions cannot avoid surveillance. This can be a routine practice for data analysis that aims to preserve national security or to monitor the health of the patients for example.

Thus, these state institutions are taking into account the wellbeing of the citizens and strengthen the rule of law. This system can be called a system of accountability and means that “citizens must be informed about the activities and decisions of their representatives and that they must have opportunities to provide input to these representatives”¹¹. Also, within this system of accountability, there are the so-called surveillance regime and transparency regime¹².

In this system, accounts are given and taken. Transparency regime means that citizens can hold account of the government’s actions. In other words, governments must be transparent in their actions and citizens can re-elect them or hold them accountable for their failures. In addition, the transparency regime can be applied to companies that must give account to auditors or their shareholders.

On the other side, a surveillance regime means that governments can hold account of citizen’s actions. Hence, the citizens are kept accountable for their actions through the surveillance regime.

The difference between surveillance and transparency regimes can be confusing and sometimes these terms can be interchangeable.

¹⁰ Nick Couldry, *Surveillance-Democracy*, JOURNAL OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY & POLITICS, Volume 14, Issue 2: The empiricist’s challenge: Asking meaningful questions in political science in the age of big data, Routledge Publisher, 2017, p.4

¹¹ Deborah G. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 23-24.

Generally, we can think about surveillance when governments exert their authority over the population and can think about transparency when citizens control their governments and keep them accountable for their actions. Also, surveillance can be negotiated with the governments through protests or counter-surveillance, when citizens videotape the abuses of the police officers¹³.

These regimes were in place as long as the existence of modern democratic states. But before the existence of advanced technologies, the system of accountability wasn't as efficient as today. Having the internet at his disposal, a citizen can express his dissatisfaction faster nowadays and he can call for a protest and mobilize the rest of the citizens also faster.

Nonetheless, the advanced technologies empowered the governments even more, which invest a lot in modern surveillance devices. Besides governments, another actor profits a lot from modern surveillance technologies – corporations. Both of these actors – states and corporations – benefit in their own way from surveillance technologies and have their reasons for using them. It is important to mention that both states and corporations made a deal to help healthcare specialists to fight the COVID-19 pandemic but before analyzing this issue we must understand how these actors benefit from modern technologies in the digital era.

Surveillance in the digital era

Corporations

Privacy and intimacy are values that are more and more difficult to preserve in this interconnected world. It is not only the fault of the governments who deploy more modern and sophisticated surveillance technologies. It is also our fault, the users of the internet, who share our private data without being aware of the consequences. We keep posting on social networks our photos and share our location without fully acknowledging how our data are processed and used.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

One of the main factors of this issue is the influence of corporations and their digital infrastructure that made us prisoners of the virtual world. Today we are prone to live more in a virtual world rather than in the real one. This virtual world can be called also a digital enclosure – “one in which every virtual “move” has the potential to leave a digital trace or record of itself. These digital traces are assembled into informational profiles of users, which can be used to improve the user experience, subtly shape users’ desires and behaviors, or be profitably sold to other corporations”¹⁴.

We are experiencing the effects of the digital enclosure daily. Our data is closely monitored by IT engineers from corporations and their advanced algorithmic robots. The best examples are the cookies used by sites and the search history of the browsers. Based on these parameters we can see advertising of the products searched before. This is a marketing stunt of the corporations which aims to attract more clients and to collect more profits from selling or promoting their products.

Some scholars argue that we live in new phases of capitalism. Some say that this data based capitalism promoted by corporations is called surveillance capitalism and others say it is creationist capitalism. “Surveillance capitalism involves a distinctive emphasis on data extraction rather than the production of new goods or institutions”¹⁵.

On the other hand, creationist capitalism means the exploitation of users’ labor by corporations for site contents¹⁶. In other words, users of certain social networks or even games are writing different blogs, give feedback, post photos, etc. Thus, they are enriching the content of these sites of social networks or games and are attracting more users and potential clients.

¹⁴ Jennifer R. Whitson, *Surveillance and democracy in the digital enclosure*, Chapter 12, in *Surveillance and Democracy*, ed. Kevin D. Haggerty and Minas Samantas, New York, Routledge Publisher, 2010, p. 234.

¹⁵ Nick Couldry, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹⁶ Jennifer R. Whitson, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

Users give their consent for their data being processed and agree with the privacy policy when accessing a site. There are also in place strict privacy regulation at the state level that protects personal information. However, there are still concerns regarding the transparency of corporate policies. Some find them as being opaque¹⁷.

States

The advancements of hi-tech changed the approach of the governments also. With new technologies, it is easier to monitor citizens and sometimes, this surveillance is performed without following the ethical norms at all. States are not monitoring their citizens in the same manner as corporations. Governments are not marketing companies, which want to attract more clients and they do not monetize the collected data.

State surveillance follows the logic of the surveillance regime mentioned earlier. Governments watch their population so they can keep them accountable for not following the rules and not obeying the laws. The totalitarian regimes practice surveillance not only to promote national security and public security but also to preserve the governments and to control the citizens.

China, for instance, deployed a huge digital infrastructure so it can watch its citizens¹⁸. The Chinese government acts like an Orwellian Big Brother who monitors every step of the citizen. The number of installed cameras in public spaces and facial recognition technologies make privacy and intimacy almost impossible. Not to mention that facial technologies are used for mass surveillance and the persecution of the Muslim population of China¹⁹.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 240.

¹⁸ Sam Shead, *Chinese residents worry about rise of facial recognition*, BBC, December 5, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-50674909>, accessed 15th of July 2020.

¹⁹ *Videos show how China has installed facial recognition scanners in Uighur mosques*, France 24, September 13, 2019, <https://observers.france24.com/en/20190913-videos-show-how-china-has-installed-facial-recognition-scanners-uighur-mosques>, last accessed 15th of July 2020.

The international community, especially the Western democracies, is well aware of the threats posed by new mass surveillance technology of facial recognition. There is no consensus regarding this new technology in the West. The biggest dilemma refers to the ethical concern of civil liberties and machine errors.

During Black Lives Matters protests in the USA, the government attempted to make use of facial recognition technologies. However, the biggest corporations as Amazon refused to provide their technology to the government and police, as there is not enough regulation for it²⁰. Besides that, the algorithms still fail to correctly recognize people, especially for persons of color²¹.

We should not be afraid of digitalization and advanced technologies but we still must be concerned about the risks these things pose. As we can see, both actors – states and corporations – use these technologies for mass surveillance. Not every time this surveillance respects the privacy and intimacy norms.

Nonetheless, surveillance is a reality that we must cope with. It is important to assess these threats and risks because mass surveillance and patient tracking are also used in the medical field. It is important to understand the basics of the surveillance techniques so we can fight the Covid-19 pandemic without violating human rights and civil liberties.

We are talking about Covid-19 disease and surveillance phenomena because we are trying to fight the pandemic with modern technologies but also with old techniques as manual patient tracking. As mentioned above, medical institutions are also involved in surveillance but for the patients and limiting the spread

²⁰ Karen Weise, Natasha Singer, *Amazon Pauses Police Use of Its Facial Recognition Software*, The New York Times, June 10, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/10/technology/amazon-facial-recognition-backlash.html>, accessed 27th of July 2020.

²¹ *The Best Algorithms Struggle to Recognize Black Faces Equally*, Wired, July 22, 2019, <https://www.wired.com/story/best-algorithms-struggle-recognize-black-face-s-equally/>, accessed 13th of July 2020.

of diseases. In the context of COVID-19, governments and corporations are developing new software applications and algorithms to monitor SARS-CoV-2 outbreaks and watch the infected individuals.

Medical surveillance

The ethical concerns regarding medical surveillance, also called care-based surveillance²², are sometimes even bigger than the simple corporate or state surveillance. The fear that your health issues could go public is overwhelming and stressful. Not only it can make you feel uncomfortable but can threaten your relations with the rest of the members of the society. If your medical records go public, you may risk stigmatization from other persons. Even if this will not happen, only the thought of it may be a burden for your conscience.

However, medical surveillance is a necessity. Only through research, data analysis, patient investigations and contact tracking, medical specialists can fight diseases, epidemics and their spread. “Over the course of the twentieth century, public health officials have reiterated the importance of surveillance, arguing that without the name and location of diseased individuals they worked ‘in the darkness of ignorance’ and might ‘as well hunt birds by shooting into every green bush’ ”²³.

The dilemma around privacy issues regarding medical records was debated throughout the twentieth century. Different laws and practices were either abolished or adopted to improve the safety and privacy of citizens. The USA, for instance, has a long history addressing these problems. Starting with the 60’s US Congress passed around 300 bills in order to solve these issues and health departments ended such hideous practices as sharing the personal information of the patients with the newspapers²⁴.

²² Deborah G. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

²³ Amy L. Fairchild, Ronald Bayer, James Colgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

Usually, there is in place a doctor-patient confidentiality agreement. Still, research in the medical field, as in any other field, is based on data. There cannot be any progress without studying new things and recording them.

Besides that, when there are outbreaks of infectious diseases that threaten the public health and humanity as a whole, as in the COVID-19 case, specialists from healthcare systems need to identify the source of infection and neutralize it. Thus, the public interest comes before the individual one. “The claims of the individual [have] to yield to the needs of the collective and that protecting communal health, safety and security [is] preeminent”²⁵.

This logic is also applied to the current Covid-19 pandemic. In order to be stopped, there must be a surveillance regime in place. The infected persons must be identified and the cases must be reported to health departments. World Health Organization has already published the surveillance strategies for Covid-19 cases that underlines that the aim of the surveillance “is to limit the spread of the disease”²⁶.

The medical surveillance proposed by WHO refers to patient tracking and contact tracing. Hence, this means data collection from citizens infected with SARS-Cov-2. WHO advised that only a minimum of data should be collected, such as age, sex, test result, etc.²⁷. The strategy doesn’t specify that any names or surnames should be recorded also.

However, some minimum data must be collected as fast as possible in order to prevent or stop the spread of the disease. To do so, corporations and governments started to develop different apps that track the patient’s movement. The storage of movement data on digital devices starts to raise great concerns regarding the

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

²⁶ World Health Organization, *Surveillance strategies for COVID-19 human infection, Interim guidance*, May 10, 2020, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/surveillance-strategies-for-covid-19-human-infection>, accessed 2nd of August 2020.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

personal information and data privacy of the citizens. This is where the surveillance risks crossing the red line of privacy and becoming more than a medical tool. There is also the question of when and how this tracking of patients with digital apps will stop.

The digital surveillance of the Covid-19

Shortly, after the outbreak of Covid-19 in Wuhan, China started to resemble a real cyberpunk society from sci-fi movies. Authorities deployed robots in hospitals to help treat the ill persons and, on the streets, there were robots disinfecting them²⁸.

For reasons yet unknown, the Chinese government is building a huge digital infrastructure for surveillance. Maybe there are health security reasons, maybe there are totalitarian reasons, maybe both. Anyway, Chinese authorities developed mandatory digital apps that help track citizens and monitor their movement to observe if they are infected or were in contact with those infected.

As said, these apps were mandatory. To use public services, such as public transportation, Chinese citizens must have these tracking apps installed²⁹. There are big concerns and uncertainty of how citizens' data from their smartphones are used. However, this kind of apps proved to be useful in fighting Covid-19. More and more countries started to develop such software tools in order to prevent disease outbreaks in different regions but most democratic countries didn't make them mandatory.

Generally speaking, most of these apps and digital tools follow the logic of proximity tracing. Some apps are using geolocation through satellites and some are working through Bluetooth wireless technology. In a crowded space, the phones share their

²⁸ *Robots helping patients to recover in Wuhan hospital*, BBC, March 12, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51824181>, accessed 10th of July 2020.

²⁹ Paul Mozur, Raymond Zhong and Aaron Krolik, *In Coronavirus Fight, China Gives Citizens a Color Code, With Red Flags*, The New York Times, March 1, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/01/business/china-coronavirus-surveillance.html>, accessed 15th of July 2020.

signals through Bluetooth and after that send the data to a public health department server. If an owner of the phone has Covid-19 he can mention this in the app and if he contacted a person that person would receive a notification so he can isolate himself or go to a doctor.

Medical specialists have different opinions on this matter. World Health Organization still insists that manual contact tracking is an established medical practice whilst these new digital tools known also as proximity tracing is just a new aiding technique³⁰. “Digital tools should not be considered as ‘single solutions’ for contact tracing, but rather as complementary tools”³¹.

On the other hand, recent studies insist that medical specialists should rely more on mobile phone tracking apps as the proximity records can be reported instantaneously³². In other words, some researchers advocate for digital tracing because manual contact tracing is not feasible during the COVID-19 pandemic when millions of persons are infected³³.

Even if the World Health Organization vision is a more conservative one and relies more on conventional practices, governments and corporations started to use more often digital surveillance infrastructure for Covid-19. Nonetheless, these new digital practices confirmed the fear of abusive monitoring of citizens.

In Russia for example, during the lockdown authorities monitored the movement of citizens through cell towers accessing the distance from it to phones without any court decision³⁴.

³⁰ World Health Organization, *Digital tools for COVID-19 contact tracing, Annex: Contact tracing in the context of COVID-19*, June 2, 2020, p. 1, https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/332265/WHO-2019-nCoV-Contact_Tracing-Tools_Annex-2020.1-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, accessed 2nd August 2020.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

³² Luca Ferretti *et al.*, *Quantifying SARS-CoV-2 transmission suggests epidemic control with digital contact tracing*, *Science*, Vol. 368, Issue 6491, May 8, 2020, p. 4.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

³⁴ *Отследить можно всех: как организовать пропускной режим в Петербурге (You can track everyone: how to organize access control in St.*

Big Brother surveillance practices are used officially even in democratic countries. This is the case of South Korea, a country that managed pretty successful the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the government of South Korea can legally access the personal information of the citizens and can even track their banking transactions during public health crises as the present pandemic³⁵.

This kind of surveillance is highly criticized in the European Union's countries³⁶ mainly because the private lives of citizens are not respected. This difference of approaches is not only a matter of legal discrepancies but also cultural ones. It is well known that Asians, especially those sharing Confucianism ideas, really believe that community interests come before the individual ones.

This type of approach, however, was adopted also by Western countries. The biggest IT companies in the world – Apple and Google – agreed to help developing tracking apps³⁷. The IT giants decided to help the governments in their effort to fight the pandemic. They proposed these apps as a solution to prevent Covid-19 outbreaks and to keep people safe. The key principles of these apps are data privacy and the voluntary installation of them and that governments must adhere to these standards.

Officials and public health institutions from different countries debated on how these apps should work. Donald Trump pointed out that there could be some sort of constitutional problem and

Petersburg), RBK, April 21, 2020, https://www.rbc.ru/spb_sz/21/04/2020/5e9eaf979a7947559b194666, accessed 29th of July 2020.

³⁵ Mark Zastrow, *South Korea is reporting intimate details of COVID-19 cases: has it helped?*, Nature, March 18, 2020, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00740-y>, last accessed 10th of July 2020.

³⁶ Karola Klatt, *Corona apps: South Korea and the dark side of digital tracking*, Brussels Times, April 30, 2020, <https://www.brusselstimes.com/opinion/108594/corona-apps-south-korea-and-the-dark-side-of-digital-tracking/>, accessed 25th of July.

³⁷ Mark Gurman, *Apple, Google Release Virus Contact-Tracing Tools to App Makers*, Bloomberg April 29, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-29/apple-google-release-virus-contact-tracing-tools-to-app-makers>, accessed 20th of July 2020.

that thing must be sorted out³⁸. British NHS³⁹ and French health minister⁴⁰ argued that several privacy limitations from the apps must be disabled for better control from state authorities but Apple refused to comply with this request.

An important breakthrough was achieved by the German government. In order to strengthen the data privacy and to secure the personal information, German officials decided to opt for a decentralized approach declining the proposal of Fraunhofer HHI research institute and the Robert Koch Institute of a centralized approach⁴¹. The solution of German authorities says that all the data and Bluetooth signals must be saved only on the owner's smartphone and this data shouldn't be sent anywhere else.

On the other hand, Fraunhofer HHI research institute and the Robert Koch Institute came with Pan-European Privacy-Preserving Proximity Tracing initiative, which meant to storage all the data received by the citizens' smartphones via Bluetooth on a central server. Authorities didn't like this idea and were afraid of data leaks and technical breaches.

Tracing apps are well intended and may help to fight Covid-19 but the population must trust them so these digital tools can achieve their goals. About 60%-75%⁴² of a country's population

³⁸ Charlie Wood, *Trump said Apple and Google's COVID-19 tracing tech posed 'big constitutional problems'*, Business Insider, April 14, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-apple-google-covid-19-tracing-tech-constitutional-problems-2020-4>, accessed 21st of July 2020.

³⁹ Alex Hern, *NHS in standoff with Apple and Google over coronavirus tracing*, The Guardian, April 16, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/apr/16/nhs-in-standoff-with-apple-and-google-over-coronavirus-tracing>, accessed 20th of July 2020.

⁴⁰ Idem, *France urges Apple and Google to ease privacy rules on contact tracing*, The Guardian, April 21, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/21/france-apple-google-privacy-contact-tracing-coronavirus>, accessed 20th of July 2020.

⁴¹ In U-turn, Germany backs Google and Apple on virus app, Deutsche Welle, April 26, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/in-u-turn-germany-backs-google-and-apple-on-virus-app/a-53252223>, accessed 20th of July 2020.

⁴² World Health Organization, *Ethical considerations to guide the use of digital proximity tracking technologies for COVID-19 contact tracing*, Interim guidance, May 28, 2020, p. 2, https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Ethics-Contact_tracing_apps-2020.1, accessed 2nd of August 2020

must use these apps for them to be efficient and to help the authorities to fight Covid-19 outbreaks and limit the spread of the virus.

Increasing people's trust must be one of the main goals of the governments. Nobody wants to share their location out of fear that some intelligence officers would spy on them or they will receive limitless advertising.

In addition, there is always a risk of a data breach. Normally no names are necessary to install these apps but you need an identifier to log on your app if you wish to report whether you are sick or not. People do not want their identities to be revealed by some random hackers. A data leak like this can generate a wave of stigmatizations and fears through people.

The best part of these apps in Western countries is that nobody can force to install them. This means that the care-based surveillance regime is a limited one. Besides that, WHO came with a list of principles and strongly recommended following them⁴³. The most important ones are time limit, user control and data minimization.

User restriction refers to the fact that the only purpose of the apps is proximity and contact tracing. Any other use of the data must be prohibited. In other words, data must not be sold, no advertising, no marketing. This is a digital medical tool for fighting Covid-19, not a consumer's good subject to free market logic of capitalism.

Time limitation is also very important as it means that the functionality and technical support for the apps must end together with the pandemic. Governments are not allowed to prolong the surveillance of the population with proximity tracing apps after a pandemic. WHO is concerned that these apps can be kept even after the pandemic, which will not be justified.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, pp. 3-5.

In conclusion, medical surveillance is a necessary process. Sometimes it is very important to monitor patients and, for researchers in the medical field, it is important to keep the records of the infected ones. However, this must be done lawfully and there is no place for opaque practices and lack of transparency.

Maybe, in the near future, some researchers will need to study the movement of citizens from the tracing apps so they could work out a better response and a solution for possible future pandemics. Anyway, these requests must be treated with great responsibility and the authorities must secure good practices through laws and assure its population that their data is safe.

There always will be ethical concerns and privacy risks. A surveillance regime is a normal phenomenon for the states, as somebody must be held accountable for their actions. In the event of states of emergency, crises, which can be wars or pandemics, we as citizens also, must be aware that our liberties and rights can be limited.

There are times when collective interests are a higher stake than the individual ones. Nonetheless, we must fight for our rights through democratic instruments as protests, elections. We must pressure the governments to ease the surveillance practices when they are not justified.

When it comes to our privacy there is a never-ending debate. There is a “believe that it is not possible to resolve the conflict between privacy and greater public health surveillance, nor do we think it desirable to do so. The vitality of democratic communities necessitates an ongoing effort to negotiate and renegotiate the boundaries between privacy – society’s ‘limiting principle’ – and public health – which, at its best, has sought to expand the role of government as a guardian against disease and suffering”⁴⁴.

⁴⁴ Amy L. Fairchild, Ronald Bayer, James Colgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

Bibliography:

- “World Health Coronavirus Disinformation”, Wall Street Journal, April 5, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/world-health-coronavirus-disinformation-11586122093>, accessed 15th of July 2020.
- Bollyky, Thomas J., Bown, Chad P., *The Tragedy of Vaccine Nationalism: Only Cooperation Can End the Pandemic*, Foreign Affairs, July 27, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-07-27/vaccine-nationalism-pandemic>, accessed 8th of August 2020.
- BRAUN, DANIELA, *How We Learned to Halt Pandemic*, Berlin Policy Journal, JULY 2, 2020, <https://berlinpolicyjournal.com/how-we-learned-to-halt-pandemic/>, accessed 29th of July.
- Cooley, Alexander, Nexon, Daniel H., *How Hegemony Ends: The Unraveling of American Power*, Foreign Affairs, VOLUME 99, NUMBER 4 July/August 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-06-09/how-hegemony-ends>, accessed at 29th of July 2020.
- Couldry, Nick, *Surveillance-Democracy*, JOURNAL OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY & POLITICS, Volume 14, Issue 2: The empiricist’s challenge: Asking meaningful questions in political science in the age of big data, Routledge Publisher, 2017.
- Fairchild, Amy L., Bayer, Ronald, Colgrove, James, *Privacy, Democracy and the Politics of Disease Surveillance*, PUBLIC HEALTH ETHICS, VOLUME 1, NUMBER 1, April 2008.
- Ferretti, Luca, Wymant, Chris, Kendall, Michelle, Zhao, Lele, Nurtay, Anel, Abeler-Dörner, Lucie, Parker, Michael, Bonsall, David, Frase, Christophe, *Quantifying SARS-CoV-2 transmission suggests epidemic control with digital contact tracing*, Science, Vol. 368, Issue 6491, May 8, 2020.
- Gurman, Mark, *Apple, Google Release Virus Contact-Tracing Tools to App Makers*, Bloomberg April 29, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-29/apple-google-release-virus-contact-tracing-tools-to-app-makers>, accessed 20th of July 2020.
- Harari, Yuval Noah, *The world after coronavirus*, Financial Times, March 20, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/19d90308-6858-11ea-a3c9-1fe6fedcca75>, accessed 14th of July.
- Hern, Alex, *France urges Apple and Google to ease privacy rules on contact tracing*, The Guardian, April 21, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/21/france-apple-google-privacy-contact-tracing-coronavirus>, accessed 20th of July 2020.
- Hern, Alex, *NHS in standoff with Apple and Google over coronavirus tracing*, The Guardian, April 16, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/>

- 2020/apr/16/nhs-in-standoff-with-apple-and-google-over-coronavirus-tracing, accessed 20th of July 2020.
- Ikenberry, G. John, *The Next Liberal Order: The Age of Contagion Demands More Internationalism, Not Less*, Foreign Affairs, VOLUME 99, NUMBER 4, July/August 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-06-09/next-liberal-order>, accessed 30th of July.
- In U-turn, Germany backs Google and Apple on virus app*, Deutsche Welle, April 26, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/in-u-turn-germany-backs-google-and-apple-on-virus-app/a-53252223>, accessed 20th of July 2020.
- Johnson, Deborah G., Wayland, Kent A., *Surveillance and transparency as sociotechnical systems of accountability*, Chapter 1, in *Surveillance and Democracy*, ed. Kevin D. Haggerty and Minas Samatas, New York, Routledge Publisher, 2010.
- Klatt, Karola, *Corona apps: South Korea and the dark side of digital tracking*, Brussels Times, April 30, 2020, <https://www.brusselstimes.com/opinion/108594/corona-apps-south-korea-and-the-dark-side-of-digital-tracking/>, accessed 25th of July.
- Mozur, Paul, Zhong, Raymond, Krolik, Aaron, *In Coronavirus Fight, China Gives Citizens a Color Code, With Red Flags*, The New York Times, March 1, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/01/business/china-coronavirus-surveillance.html>, accessed 15th of July 2020.
- Navarra, Giovanni, *Can Democracy Survive the Rise of Surveillance Technology?*, Democratic Theory, Volume 1, Issue 2, Berghahn, winter 2014.
- Robots helping patients to recover in Wuhan hospital*, BBC, March 12, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51824181>, accessed 10th of July 2020.
- Shed, Sam, *Chinese residents worry about rise of facial recognition*, BBC, December 5, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-50674909>, accessed 15th of July 2020.
- The Best Algorithms Struggle to Recognize Black Faces Equally*, Wired, July 22, 2019, <https://www.wired.com/story/best-algorithms-struggle-recognize-black-faces-equally/>, accessed 13th of July 2020.
- Videos show how China has installed facial recognition scanners in Uighur mosques*, France 24, September 13, 2019, <https://observers.france24.com/en/20190913-videos-show-how-china-has-installed-facial-recognition-scanners-uighur-mosques>, last accessed 15th of July 2020.
- Weise, Karen, Singer, Natasha, *Amazon Pauses Police Use of Its Facial Recognition Software*, The New York Times, June 10, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/10/technology/amazon-facial-recognition-backlash.html>, accessed 27th of July 2020.
- Whitson, Jennifer R., *Surveillance and democracy in the digital enclosure*, Chapter 12, in *Surveillance and Democracy*, ed. Kevin D. Haggerty and Minas Samatas, New York, Routledge Publisher, 2010.

- Wood, Charlie, *Trump said Apple and Google's COVID-19 tracing tech posed 'big constitutional problems'*, Business Insider, April 14, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-apple-google-covid-19-tracing-tech-constitutional-problems-2020-4>, accessed 21st of July 2020.
- World Health Organization, *Digital tools for COVID-19 contact tracing, Annex: Contact tracing in the context of COVID-19*, June 2, 2020, p. 1, https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/332265/WHO-2019-nCoV-Contact_Tracing-Tools_Annex-2020.1-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, accessed 2nd August 2020.
- World Health Organization, *Ethical considerations to guide the use of digital proximity tracking technologies for COVID-19 contact tracing, Interim guidance*, May 28, 2020, p. 2, https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Ethics_Contact_tracing_apps-2020.1, accessed 2nd of August 2020
- World Health Organization, *Surveillance strategies for COVID-19 human infection, Interim guidance*, May 10, 2020, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/surveillance-strategies-for-covid-19-human-infection>, accessed 2nd of August 2020.
- Zastrow, Mark, *South Korea is reporting intimate details of COVID-19 cases: has it helped?*, Nature, March 18, 2020, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00740-y>, last accessed 10th of July 2020.
- Отследить можно всех: как организовать пропускной режим в Петербурге (You can track everyone: how to organize access control in St. Petersburg)*, RBK, April 21, 2020, https://www.rbc.ru/spb_sz/21/04/2020/5e9eaf979a7947559b194666, accessed 29th of July 2020.

2. THE DIGITAL SCARS ON SOCIETY LEFT BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Alexandru Manoliu

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of this year, one of the most debated topics is the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced the whole society to take measures of distance or physical isolation, which has led to a rapid increase in the use of digital technologies in all areas. The rapid rise in data traffic, time spent online, and access to personal use, smart working, remote working, educational processes, business interactions, or simple social media accesses or interactions have exponentially increased exposure to cyber-attacks in turn, it exponentially multiplied the risks of increasingly new scenarios and opportunities for online crime.

The increasing use of technological tools, the growing time spent online, the growing number of users, the growing number of procedures, online operations and applications for every private or professional need have created a Babylon tower of digital interactions and risks of which the vast majority are not even aware.

The ever-expanding field of cybersecurity is a field of increasingly important risks in which everyone is involved, from state and private entities that create the rules and legal framework to the occasional user. In this field of confrontation, those who capitalize on points, entities that are not always benevolent, very often with criminal intentions and plans, and at any time on the

hunt for information, data, benefits, advantages and personal gains are emerging on the surface. In this type of ecosystem, the dangers are not always perceived to be of real importance.

Cyberspace is the most complex thing that man has ever built: on one hand, a union of thousands of networks that make it difficult even to have a snapshot of who is connected to it, on the other, stratification of software programs and protocols developed in the last 40 years. This complexity generates vulnerabilities (software errors, incorrect configurations and weaknesses in the protocols) that are exploited by cybercriminals to steal data or cause damage.

In an increasingly digitalized world, cyber-attacks raise alarm in the population, cause serious damage to the economy and endanger the same safety of citizens when they hit distribution networks of essential services such as health, energy, transport, worth to say the critical infrastructures of modern society. In Europe, entire sectors, such as mechanics, shipbuilding, tourism, agro-food and transport, could undergo heavy reductions in turnover due to attacks perpetrated in cyberspace by sovereign states or by competitors.

A successful cyber-attack could represent a moment of no return for the credibility of a company, the development of its business and the ability to sell products in a regime of healthy competition. Equally, a successful cyber-attack could destabilize the stock market by plunging entire countries into chaos, or blocking gas supplies in the winter or managing the municipal waste cycle.

Many times, the damage of cyber-attacks depends on a weak link and often this is the human factor. Man and his digital footprint is now a part of cyberspace and represents the most important and unpredictable vulnerability of this macrosystem. A wrong click can in some cases destroy any technological defense line of an institution, an organization, a country.

These are the people who get “caught” by a phishing campaign, who use the name of the cat or their spouse as a password, who

use the same smartphone to let their children play and to access the corporate network. They are the first to open doors to criminals to their organizations' sites, networks and databases, with dangerous and unpredictable effects.

A country that does not put cybersecurity at the center of its digital transformation policies is therefore a country that seriously jeopardizes its economic prosperity, security and independence.

2. A cyber-pandemic synergy

The major dangers during the pandemic in the first part of this year were intensely experienced at the individual level. Companies have raised the level of control to deal with new types of attacks, particularly automated. Attacks that are designed to penetrate security systems and cause significant damage to companies' structures identified as potential targets or victims at high risk of penetration.

Most criminal attacks have the primary purpose of access and then the destruction of antivirus and firewall systems to prepare the ground for major fraud or a bigger action. In order to deal with this type of attacks, it is necessary to identify it in time, from the first signs of the attack, and act quickly and effectively to protect the integrity of the computer and infrastructure systems.

The most effective defense tools and weapons to be implemented are those based on technologies capable of evolving through machine learning because they use the means and principles of artificial intelligence systems superior to human reaction capabilities.

Particular attention should be paid to large companies and organizations that are already in the spotlight for cybercrime which interest is strongly economic. Most of the attacks strategy used is built on continuously evolving ransomware time tools and can take advantage of organizational, computer and human vulnerabilities to penetrate societal processes and procedures with devastating effects.

Defending against ransomware attacks should become a priority but this can only be done by activating the necessary prevention systems that include continuous and proactive monitoring of attacks and events that can signal potential attacks in training or preparation. This type of attack identification cannot be done with traditional defense tools.

With the onset of the pandemic, another area of vulnerability in the fight against cybercrime has emerged, namely that of misinformation. Those who were more careful and cautious about cyber-attacks are witnessing the proliferation of fake news, increasingly widespread conspiracy theories and false truths spreading on the battlefield of misinformation and manipulation. In this vitiated environment, some fall victim to false information, in which they participate consciously or not, and those who are already victims of misinformation and who in turn propagate the false truth.

The increasing danger of these types of cybercrime specific activities has been facilitated by the rapid and continuous growth of Internet activities, increasingly widespread and use of technological platforms, increasingly sought-after search engines, and exponentially growing social media and messaging platforms. Platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Dating, and daily activities like shopping are constantly growing and data traffic includes more and more domains and types of information vectors.

The objective of these types of cybercrime is simple to perceive and is defined by the intention to manipulate the individual's perceptions to influence and direct him to choices, creating preferences and needs decided by those who manage this vast field of cybercrime.

Even if it seems that the objectives of cybercrime are predominantly political, the economic and pecuniary objectives are equally important when the targets are large companies, brands, organizations, production chains, business, trade, or numerous social groups. The danger of these attacks comes with the near

impossibility of avoiding them, doubled by the lack of adequate legislation for combating cybercrime.

In most structures under cyber-attacks, the prevailing defense reaction is mostly technological. What is missing instead is the cultural approach to correct and obtain relevant information based on collaboration with partners with the same approach and with viable and reliable principles of organizational culture.

Also, the cyber and digital security of public administrations which, although operating with a huge amount of sensitive data and personal information, are not protected to the extent of the devastating effects of targeted cyber-attacks. The university field is the most targeted by cyber-attacks, followed by Ministries, County Councils, City Halls, Hospitals and educational structures in the territory.

3. Health, one of the most affected sectors by cyberthreats during COVID-19

The World Health Organization reported in the first half of 2020¹ since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic a staggering increase in cyber-attacks compared to the same period in 2019. The attacks targeted agency staff involved in the state of emergency generated by the Covid-19. To protect computer systems, many of them have been moved to more secure operating systems. A significant increase was observed in the use of e-mail platforms endangered by phishing and scamming attacks.

WHO recommended to its staff to use official sources to obtain the correct information. Emails containing malware have been disseminated to create the conditions for fraudulent scams by stealing users' personal data generated by requesting data under the pretext of protection against the risk of a virus caused

¹ World Health Organization, URL: <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/23-04-2020-who-reports-fivefold-increase-in-cyber-attacks-urges-vigilance>, accessed at [08-08-2020].

by installing harmful files or providing bank data from personal desk computers directly to cybercriminals.

Through deceptive emails such as coming from WHO, the attackers requested the installation of a file that contained a Trickbot², malware capable of stealing documents, and access passwords from users' computers. Most of the time, the Trickbot is accompanied by a Ryuk³ ransomware that locks the computer by encrypting the files and requesting ransoms to unlock them.

Coronavirus attacks were hidden in links that pointed to files with pdf coronavirus defense instructions but were in fact harmful executable files. The same kind of attacks came through e-mail as from some banks that invited customers to check if there was any data access precisely for the dangers and computer attacks caused by the coronavirus alarm. Fear, which is normal in this case, caused users to open attached files which, once accessed, caused major damage to the computers and users.

IBM X-Force and Kaspersky reported the existence of computer viruses that exploited the fear of coronavirus infection. The Emotet⁴ virus, which targets banking data, has proven to be extremely capable of finding banking data in attacked computers, which were then used to hijack users' accounts.

The United Kingdom, the USA and Canada are coordinating against computer attacks of Russian origin that target even the computer platforms used to produce anti-COVID-19 vaccines. Attacks managed by Russian intelligence services against pharmaceutical groups engaged in vaccine production have been discovered⁵.

² Threatpost, URL: <https://threatpost.com/trickbot-attack-covid-19docusign-themed-malw/155391/>, accessed at [06-07-2020].

³ CrowdStrike, URL: <https://www.crowdstrike.com/blog/big-game-hunting-with-ryuk-another-lucrative-targeted-ransomware/>, accessed at [14-02-2020].

⁴ Security Intelligence, URL: <https://securityintelligence.com/posts/emotet-activity-rises-as-it-uses-coronavirus-scare-to-infect-targets-in-japan/>, accessed at [12-06-2020].

⁵ CNN, URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/07/16/politics/russia-cyberattack-covid-vaccine-research/index.html>, accessed at [17-07-2020].

The National Cyber Security Center (NCSC) discovered a group of hackers called APT29 and also known as Cozy Bear behind this type of attack and confirmation of the existence of these attacks came from the NSA and the Canadian intelligence authorities. However, the Russian side through the spokesman of the President of the Russian Federation stated that this information is not real and that Russia is not involved in this type of cyber-attacks.

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the cyber fragility of public structures and private companies in the healthcare field either through the negative effects suffered or through the absence of appropriate international legal norms.

Europol has reported⁶ that in the wake of the Covid-19 attacks on healthcare facilities, hospitals, national health systems and biotechnology companies by cybercriminals have increased exponentially worldwide.

The health sector remains a gold mine with sensitive data at the disposal of cyber attackers precisely because this field is not prepared to defend itself effectively against this type of targeted attacks. Only in March 2020 did the University Hospital in Brno⁷, Czech Republic and the US Health Agency⁸ fall victim to cyber-attacks and endanger the health of patients, surgeries and timely conduct of COVID-19 tests. Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks have blocked the servers of those healthcare facilities through millions of fake access attempts.

As soon as the first attacks were signaled, Interpol launched a global alarm on the blocking of cyber-attacks on hospital structures and medical staff, which led to demanded ransom payments to unblock the vital medical files or computer mechanisms attacked.

⁶ Europol, URL: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-documents/catching-virus-cybercrime-disinformation-and-covid-19-pandemic>, accessed at [10-06-2020].

⁷ ZDNET, URL: <https://www.zdnet.com/article/czech-hospital-hit-by-cyber-attack-while-in-the-midst-of-a-covid-19-outbreak/>, accessed at [14-03-2020].

⁸ Bloomberg, URL: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-16/u-s-health-agency-suffers-cyber-attack-during-covid-19-response>, accessed at [20-03-2020].

In the US in mid-March this year, there was a targeted attack on the Department of Health & Human Services⁹ aimed at undermining the state's efforts to respond as effectively as possible to the alarming increase in the number of pandemic victims. While all attention was focused on saving lives in the health system, the number of cyberattacks has increased alarmingly.

On the occasion of the current pandemic, the world experienced the largest number of mixed attacks and technologies of the most varied on a single topic, namely coronavirus, pandemic, COVID.

The size of the cyber-attacks, the multitude of technologies involved, the multitude of targeted subjects, the size of the amounts demanded as ransom and the economic damage suffered reveal a truth that is hard to accept: almost all health information systems in most of the states are extremely fragile and necessary at a time with accentuated crisis in which human lives are at stake and under the attack of an invisible but extremely dangerous enemy.

One of the main causes of the lack of adequate responses to this type of cyber-attack remains the lack of a unified international legal framework and unified procedures that can create an effective defense system.

International humanitarian law can be applied only in the case of cyber-attacks against hospital structures only in case of armed conflict. In the absence of these exceptional conditions, cyberspace transcends the national boundaries between the state of war and the state of peace on which this field of law is traditionally based. In peacetime, there are no legal rules on cyber-attacks in cyberspace.

Cyber-attacks that endanger the health sector of a state could, in theory, be interpreted as violations of the sovereignty of that

⁹ Security Today, URL: <https://securitytoday.com/articles/2020/03/18/cyber-attack-hits-department-of-health-and-human-services-amid-government-coronavirus-response.aspx>, accessed at [08-07-2020].

state. However, no clear conclusion has been reached on the obligation to respect state sovereignty in cyberspace.

Among the companies established in the field of data protection and cybersecurity is the Swiss group Acronis, which reports a steady increase in ransomware attacks in Europe targeting state and private healthcare systems and their medical staff. In an attempt to raise the level of cybersecurity and defense of its systems, they recommend digitizing the processes of data transmission and use it even if through this technological leap they become of interest to attackers.

For a better defense of companies and organizations against ransomware attacks, Acronis recommends defining and implementing anti-phishing strategies based on the training of operating personnel so that they can easily recognize potentially dangerous emails and sites. Wherever possible, two-step authentication and the use of complex passwords are required. Even turning public websites into static websites can help defend against ransomware attacks by using technologies based on artificial intelligence.

Among the groups on the front lines of defense against cyberattacks is Kaspersky, who considers health facilities to be among the most vulnerable targets in this pandemic-marked period. Switching to the home-working method did not reduce the danger created by cyber-attacks but on the contrary, the size and multiplication and diversity of forms used increased.

Attacks on health and hospital facilities in this period marked by the Covid-19 crisis should be considered terrorist attacks because attackers and victims of attacks can be assimilated into the field of terrorism. To support the fight against cyber-attacks, the Kaspersky group offered their security solutions free of charge for six months.

A particularly serious alarm signal is the fact that the police structures have discovered that on a global scale the cyber-computer attacks during the pandemic increased by 600%

compared to last year¹⁰. Cyber-attacks targeted a wide range of interests from state initiatives, industrial espionage, or political or ideological activism. Another preferred area for cyber attackers was drugstores, fundraising actions for COVID-19 victims, or interest and curiosity in providing information on pandemic spread maps.

4. Personal data theft and economic fraud

From January to April 2020, there was an increase of over 50% in the number of attacks that had as a defining element the remote work, smart working and online distance teaching and educational activities¹¹. There was also a spectacular increase in connections and their duration during the lockdown period, especially when the most requested topics and areas of interest were related to the state of emergency caused by Covid-19.

During that time, various illegal or uncertain sites exploited terms and phrases such as Corona and/or Antivirus and distributed files with malicious software on the computers of less trained users in the field of computer security.

Reasons that have allowed or even facilitated the spread of these attacks include the lack of digital culture in line with current challenges as well as the low level of protection of state and private organizations operating with sensitive data volumes. The effects of the attacks were mostly the theft of personal data from penetrated computers and the violation of privacy.

In most cases, it were e-mails with malicious attachments, misleading offers of money loans, shopping on unverified sites, or malware that has exploited the fear of coronavirus or the curiosity of users without a minimal computer culture. Spyware under a false identity and use with various names such as

¹⁰ ENISA, URL: <https://www.enisa.europa.eu/news/enisa-news/understanding-and-dealing-with-phishing-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>, accessed at [12-06-2020]

¹¹ POLITICO, URL: <https://www.politico.eu/article/coronavirus-covid19-internet-data-work-home-mobile-internet/>, accessed at [17-03-2020]

CovidLock, *CoronaAntivirus*, or *COVID-19-Antivirus* allowed attackers to enter users' computers to spy on their content, steal sensitive data, or create conditions for further attacks.

One element that contributed major to reducing the efficiency of computer security systems was the massive use of smart working and the use of personal terminals increasingly required by smart-TV, smartphones, cameras, printers connected to home networks or home automation that are were not upgraded in time, generated significant risks for employees and employers.

The year 2020 should have been a turning point and the launch of a decade of technological development but, unfortunately, it proved to be a very difficult year starting with all the corollary of inconveniences that Covid-19 has brought so far for health, work, and global economy or societal development.

An important cause of the increased exposure to cyber-attacks and the vulnerability of law enforcement systems was the increase in the share of domestic work outside the normal perimeters in which companies/organizations operated. This decrease in cyber defense capacity has resulted in an opportunity not to be overlooked by cybercrime.

Unfortunately, this whole period has brought with it an alarming increase of cyber-attacks of which, between 200 and 600% of them involved fraud and damage in all digital areas. By taking advantage of the cracks and weaknesses of computer security systems in the pandemic-marked period, cybercriminals have made increasingly sophisticated attempts to access users' sensitive data and information through social engineering, e-mail phishing, or creating fake websites.

Classic authentication systems based on passwords and PINs have demonstrated their limits in terms of the exponential increase to risks due to new technologies used by cybercriminals. Exactly at times like this when the society is going through the threat of the pandemic, it is becoming increasingly clear how hackers target

the most vulnerable victims for stealing sensitive information through e-mail, SMS or direct personal communications.

In the absence of adequate protection systems capable of detecting cyber-attacks, attackers may take possession of user accounts, private or state customer funds. Not even the OTP (One Time Password) system via SMS can protect against cyber-attacks. A skilled hacker can access enough data about a potential victim to be able to access his telephone account for intercepting SMS with OTP that are sent by banking service providers using SS7 techniques¹².

In 2019 alone, cyber-attacks cost the global economy more than \$5 billion and the average damage to victims of attacks amounted to more than \$ 2,000 per person just because of errors or stolen passwords.

An increase in the efficiency of authentication systems can be generated by the use of biometric data¹³ to enable sensitive service providers to more effectively protect against cyber-attacks and to ensure the security of their customers and employees. Also, the use of a human voice with a personal stamp or a fingerprint doubled by the use of sophisticated algorithms can ensure a high degree of protection.

A higher level of protection can be ensured by the behavioral biometrics that are based on the way the characters are typed, or by the way the keys are touched when the screen is touched can give enough identification elements of the real user. The combined use of several multifactorial authentication technologies, end-to-end encryption in public key IT infrastructures together with the use of biometric data can be a shield against cyber fraud.

¹² Secure Group, URL: <https://blog.securegroup.com/phone-hacking-through-ss7-is-frighteningly-easy-and-effective>, accessed at [12-06-2020]

¹³ Science Direct, URL: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/computer-science/biometric-authentication>, accessed at [06-08-2020]

With the emergence and global spread of the Coronavirus crisis, there has been a radical change in the interest of users, operators and cybercriminals, focusing more on information, news and statistics accessed by hundreds of millions of people in an extremely unsafe time. With the same speed, the means and vectors of misinformation, manipulation and fake news, spread.

Such an opportunity could not be missed by cybercriminals who knew how to exploit and deceive potential victims driven by curiosity, thirst for hot topics, or a desire to stand out in any way. This combination of declining cyber protection doubled by increasingly sophisticated attacks and adapted to the targets chosen by hackers has resulted in a huge volume of privacy violations, theft of personal, health, banking, or financial data, computer system blockages in almost all areas and huge sums of money stolen from the victims of the attacks.

In addition to these damages, there were restrictions on movement and social distancing, lockdown, stopping the entire economic sectors of production and services, the continuous increase in the number of infections, and the spiking levels of fear and panic among society.

In most of the cases, IT security teams have been overwhelmed by the actual spread or dislocation of employees, outside the premises, further exacerbated by the use of home computers, terminals, or private network providers surpassed by the exponentially increased volume and data traffic in the first days of the emergency state.

5. Software surveillance, balancing security and democracy during COVID-19

Around the world, several states are currently adopting software-tools that use personal data to manage the Covid-19 emergency. Some of these are statistical analysis, mainly use the aggregated and anonymized data of the telephone operators to map the concentration of people in the various areas.

In this regard, even Google, using the information collected with the history of the positions of its maps, has provided aggregate data on travel in Europe. In the United States, this type of aggregate analysis on the movements of people was also made by a startup, Unacast¹⁴, which used the location data obtained from a series of apps for shopping, gaming, etc.

Some tools used by some states are instead self-assessment and initial triage; in practice, they are apps that allow people to have a first assessment and contact on their health without clogging the emergency lines and have been adopted for example in Spain¹⁵.

Then there are those who intend to apply the rules on quarantine and lockdown, such as the Home Quarantine app of Poland¹⁶ which requires you to send regular geolocated selfies following a message at which users have only twenty minutes to respond to a photo request.

In this context, in which there is a strong temptation to resort to solutions and approaches derived from intelligence and anti-terrorism surveillance, and the criminal system, in which haste risks favoring ready-to-use solutions, it must be remembered that COVID-19 is not a technological problem and that the countries often cited as models – Singapore, South Korea, etc. also took other measures and started from a different level of preparation and intervention. Therefore, there is no ideal and identical solution for everyone.

Testing, contact tracing and quarantine are probably the best three ingredients for success in the fight against coronavirus but the contexts are different and the technological solutions adopted

¹⁴ Forbes, URL: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnscottlewinski/2020/05/07/unacast-grades-the-states-of-social-distancing-with-covid-19-report-card/>, accessed at [03-08-2020].

¹⁵ El Pais, URL: <https://english.elpais.com/society/2020-06-29/spain-launches-first-phase-of-coronavirus-tracking-app.html>, accessed at [06-08-2020].

¹⁶ CBS News, URL: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/coronavirus-update-poland-quarantine-app-asks-selfies-to-prove-isolation-social-distancing-police-patients/>.

can give different results. Thus, there is no need to rush to implement mass digital surveillance tools, and civil society can and must contribute to the debate on which alternatives to embrace. The solutions to combat the virus and protect privacy are not mutually exclusive, some projects – like the Algorithm Watch¹⁷ – go in this direction. Ultimately, every proposal adopted must be compatible with democracy.

The measures adopted – including any technologies for tracking people, their state of health, their movements and their contacts if they are infected – must be able to answer a series of questions. There is a strong risk that the result obtained can impact civil society in different ways, and act as limitations to personal freedoms and intrusions into private life.

Applying this kind of paraphernalia, technical and mental, to the health emergency also means carrying an approach (often present in the management of public law and order and intelligence) for which citizens are seen as possible suspects, rather than as responsible subjects capable of collaboration, endowed with rights and ultimately protagonists of the fight against the epidemic.

Above all, that tracking and surveillance approach drags behind a propensity for secrecy, typical of those involved in national security, as well as the idea that data and procedures must be kept hidden because the enemy could exploit that knowledge to defend himself.

However, when it comes to public health, the reasoning does not hold (admitted and not granted that it holds up in other cases). Unless the adversaries are instead those citizens who also care about civil liberties, rights, and what society will be like at the end of the pandemic, as well as the real effectiveness of the measures taken.

¹⁷ Algorithm Watch, URL: <https://algorithmwatch.org/en/our-position-on-adms-and-the-fight-against-covid19/>, accessed at [08-07-2020].

6. A need for a global cyber defense education: final thoughts

Developing new digital skills and new tools to improve the cybersecurity of a country's infrastructure system represents a challenge of the utmost importance for growth, and the well-being and safety of all. Cybersecurity in this perspective must be based on education in the careful use of the virtual space and the acquisition of knowledge.

More than anything, it is important to distinguish ourselves from the machines, learning to do things that make us human, how to expand data and information analysis skills critically, evaluating the sources and their reliability, understanding the meaning and implications of involuntary sharing or creating false information, the ability to improve the attitude to face complex problems and the knowledge of the principles that allow us to connect this knowledge and make sense of it.

Emergencies offer the opportunity to accelerate experimentation with innovative solutions and develop better strategies based on experience.

If we can take advantage of this push for innovation, once the health emergency is over, Coronavirus will not have left only damages. It is a fact that even in a situation of extreme difficulty, the need to react is opening us up to possibilities and tools that were previously little or not used at all.

Technology is helping us out and at the same time, more and more people are experiencing the importance of protecting data that travels on the network. As technology progresses, it will change the type of cyber skills required of humans. If we are ready to take this opportunity, we will see an improvement that will help ensure greater protection of citizens' privacy and at the same time of critical infrastructures.

Investing in cybersecurity training provides a unique answer to many of a country's problems and becomes indispensable in

the context of the progressive digitalization. Training the new generations will trigger a virtuous process in which the managerial class and technicians of the future will have the cultural background and operational skills necessary to confront the technological and scientific challenges that will change our lives in the coming decades, developing the initiatives necessary to face the continuous changes and the related risks that await us in the future.

Scientific research is also essential to address the challenges that cybercrime poses to the digital society. The challenges concern both scientific research and technological innovation. In many cases, in addition to obtaining theoretical results, it is necessary to create prototype systems aimed at more rapid industrialization of solutions. Given the diversity of objectives and skills needed to face these challenges, a strong synergy is needed between the world of scientific/military research and industrial/private.

In particular, private companies will play a fundamental role – within an integrated system – in the subsequent prototyping and industrialization of the needed solutions, innovative approaches defined based on scenarios and requirements identified collaboratively.

All this will allow for a timely and effective technology transfer. Finally, an important role should be assigned to the Government and the institutions in terms of defining the necessary regulatory frameworks and implementing funding programs to address the emerging digital challenges.

A global effort is needed to defend our economies from accelerating threats. Cybersecurity training and education are an important part of this effort.

Technology is helping us out and at the same time, more and more people are experiencing the importance of protecting data that travels on the network.

As technology progresses, it will change the type of cyber skills required of humans. If we are ready to take this opportunity, we will see an improvement that will help ensure greater protection of citizens' privacy and at the same time of critical infrastructures.

A global effort is needed to defend our economies from accelerating threats. Cybersecurity training and education are an important part of this effort.

Bibliography:

- Algorithm Watch, URL: <https://algorithmwatch.org/en/our-position-on-adms-and-the-fight-against-covid19/>, accessed at [08-07-2020]
- Bloomberg, URL: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-16/u-s-health-agency-suffers-cyber-attack-during-covid-19-response>, accessed at [20-03-2020]
- CBS News, URL: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/coronavirus-update-poland-quarantine-app-asks-selfies-to-prove-isolation-social-distancing-police-patients/>
- CNN, URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/07/16/politics/russia-cyberattack-covid-vaccine-research/index.html>, accessed at [17-07-2020]
- CrowdStrike, URL: <https://www.crowdstrike.com/blog/big-game-hunting-with-ryuk-another-lucrative-targeted-ransomware/>, accessed at [14-02-2020]
- El Pais, URL: <https://english.elpais.com/society/2020-06-29/spain-launches-first-phase-of-coronavirus-tracking-app.html>, accessed at [06-08-2020]
- ENISA, URL: <https://www.enisa.europa.eu/news/enisa-news/understanding-and-dealing-with-phishing-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>, accessed at [12-06-2020]
- Europol, URL: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-documents/catching-virus-cybercrime-disinformation-and-covid-19-pandemic>, accessed at [10-06-2020]
- Forbes, URL: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnscottlewinski/2020/05/07/unacast-grades-the-states-of-social-distancing-with-covid-19-report-card/>, accessed at [03-08-2020]
- POLITICO, URL: <https://www.politico.eu/article/coronavirus-covid19-internet-data-work-home-mobile-internet/>, accessed at [17-03-2020]
- Science Direct, URL: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/computer-science/biometric-authentication>, accessed at [06-08-2020]
- Secure Group, URL: <https://blog.securegroup.com/phone-hacking-through-ss7-is-frighteningly-easy-and-effective>, accessed at [12-06-2020]

- Security Intelligence, URL: <https://securityintelligence.com/posts/emotet-activity-rises-as-it-uses-coronavirus-scare-to-infect-targets-in-japan/>, accessed at [12-06-2020]
- Security Today, URL: <https://securitytoday.com/articles/2020/03/18/cyber-attack-hits-department-of-health-and-human-services-amid-government-coronavirus-response.aspx>, accessed at [08-07-2020]
- Threatpost, URL: <https://threatpost.com/trickbot-attack-covid-19docusign-themed-malw/155391/>, accessed at [06-07-2020]
- World Health Organization, URL: <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/23-04-2020-who-reports-fivefold-increase-in-cyber-attacks-urges-vigilance>, accessed at [08-08-2020]
- ZDNET, URL: <https://www.zdnet.com/article/czech-hospital-hit-by-cyber-attack-while-in-the-midst-of-a-covid-19-outbreak/>, accessed at [14-03-2020]

3. HOW COVID-19 AFFECTED “THE PEOPLE”. ITS IMPACT ON SOCIETY AND THE FUTURE OF POPULISM

Gal Dorin

The global financial crash of 2008 was the start of more than a decade of unrest and full-scale protests which eventually lead to the emergence of populism into the very real threat we see today. Battered and challenged at every step, many of the perceived norms of Europe’s political discourse are scrutinized through critical eyes as the people do not feel the same connection with their leaders anymore.

Coupled with so-called “democratic failures” like the migration crisis or the Eurozone one, society has increasingly begun to view politicians as a separate entity and one that does not understand the hardships it is going through or, at most, does not care about them enough to actually do something about it. Once this mark of shame stuck, populism reared its head as protests began spreading like wildfire from the historically-ironical rise of the far-right in Germany to an augmentation of the authoritarianism in Central Europe to the Yellow Vests in France and, of course, Brexit¹.

As a whole, the people seem to have not only lost touch with those in charge but, even more importantly, seem to have lost confidence in their ability to govern. In such scenarios, there will

¹ D. McCaffrey, *Analysis: Will COVID-19 usher in a new wave of populism in Europe?*, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/06/05/analysis-will-covid-19-usher-in-a-new-wave-of-populism-in-europe> , retrieved on 07.20.2020.

always be someone who tries to take advantage of this and turn the tides in his or her favor. Jan-Werner Müller does perhaps the best job of defining it by picturing populism as a “*morally pure and fully unified- but, I shall argue, ultimately fictional-people against elites who are deemed corrupt or in some other way morally inferior*”².

Society, therefore, finds itself on a crossroads as things are not as simple as they first appear to be. While, at a first glance, the people’s beef seems to be with said *elites*, one cannot help but wonder, what exactly is the exact notion capable of defining *the people*? Can we identify one country where the entirety of its population has precisely the same thoughts, desires, and expectations when it comes to the powers that rule it? Of course not.

Populism seeks to provide an answer here by implying that those who do not fully support populist parties might not be part of the “*proper people*” to begin with. As such, the real people have to be somehow extracted and pulled out of the entire mass of citizens³.

Taking all of these things into account, let’s now turn towards the crisis that is currently shaking the very foundations of modern society: the global pandemic caused by the emergence of the new coronavirus. From living in fear to having to impose economic and social restrictions and, at the very end, a full-scale lockdown, not only has society been forced to undergo changes but some of our core values seem to have been altered by these recent events.

From a social perspective, we are looking to present an answer to the question of “*How bad can things get in the long run?*”. Since it is almost certain that the economic shock will lead to a recession far deeper than the one we had 10 years ago and given the political difficulties that countries have had to navigate in relation to other countries and their citizens, will

² I.W. Müller, *What Is Populism?*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2016, pp. 19-20.

³ *Ibidem*.

populism thrive even more in these circumstances? Will it help push the world to the brink of a new type of social anarchy or, on the contrary, will citizens stand behind their governments in times of need and rally in order to fight off the common enemy?

Populism: Bringing “the People” together

On the plus side, this does not seem to be the case so far. Much to the surprise of some, people seem to have rallied behind their leaders and pushed aside any and all differences to deal with the more real problem. To be fair, we want to say that the process was decidedly more successful in countries where the level of development is high enough to be a factor. Curfews and confinement measures, while authoritarian in nature, have been more or less successfully adhered to as citizens try to fight back the unseen enemy.

On the other hand, the fact that the virus is said to have originated in China and transmitted to humans from live animals has so far been the source of an endless stream of conspiracy theories about sinister global forces that are out to undermine the modern way of life. While most of them are at least ubiquitous in nature, one has to take into account the fact that the average citizen may not be educated enough to be able to properly filter such information.

Be it in paper form or online, most of us still rely on the daily news, newspapers, and social media feeds in order to know what's going on in the world. When almost everything he sees, hears and reads is about global conspiracies either regarding China or the UN, the ordinary person will undoubtedly start to believe it, and this amplifies even further his tendency to gravitate toward something as charming as populism.

Thus increases the need to analyze the entire situation not just through the eyes of the populist challenge but, in order to be able to fully understand the picture, through the eyes of society as a whole. The once-in-a-century pandemic is a test and one that most populist leaders seem intent on failing.

The anti-science, scapegoating approach may work well enough when it comes to gathering votes from unhappy people but, faced with deadly consequences, society requires a pragmatic and solution-oriented approach which such leaders strongly lack. We will therefore aim to see why exactly is this *modus operandi* failing right now and, even more important, what changes has this period brought to our way of thinking and how this may influence our future going forward.

In this day and age, people are more connected than ever, especially if we think about the Spanish flu that happened a century ago and was, in many cases, strangely similar to what we have gone through so far. On one hand, even though disease outbreaks can spread much faster, transferring knowledge has also become much easier so one would think that these two effects would keep the balance between them⁴.

However, as a disease outbreak appears, we still seem to start from the very beginning and force ourselves through a process of trial and error that not only stops progress in its tracks but causes the citizens to turn their eyes towards those they feel are responsible for such events.

Interestingly enough, the age of globalization has brought a somewhat negative outlook on international organizations in the sense that regular people will tend to point the finger at such entities when something goes wrong in their society. This is also the birthplace of modern-day populism so we can clearly see how the way people reacted and continue to react to the COVID-19 pandemic can be used as a tool of projecting its progress in the future.

On the other hand, as we said, citizens seem to have aligned themselves with the state now that pretty much anyone has been forced to admit the reality of the pandemic and fighting it will

⁴ *Talking to community: Behavioural change in the age of COVID-19*, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/behavioural-change-age-covid-19>, retrieved on 07.27.2020.

continue to require things like cooperation, solidarity, and responsibility, all of which are things populist leaders firmly stand against, when it doesn't suit them, that is.

Why, though, has this belief of solidarity taken so long to take root? For this, we need only look at the way people have reacted to the rise of populism so far and then compare it to how things are going in the world today to get our answer. After doing that, the final part of the paper will involve going through some of the changes that COVID-19 has managed to instill into the very heart of our society and trying to draw some conclusions from there regarding the future and what it can bring.

For much of the past five to ten years and perhaps even more than that, the notion of an international community that should stand on the shoulders of organizations like the U.N. or the E.U. has taken quite the metaphorical (and sometimes literal) beating. The potent combination of populism, nationalism, and all-around misinformation led to a decision by a lot of actors to try and tell “The People” what they want to hear⁵.

While a volatile notion at its core, the most commonly-accepted definition of populism is that of an *“ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people. Populism, so defined, has two opposites: elitism and pluralism”*, as stated by Cas Mudde (2004, p. 543).

COVID-19 is a challenge for the entire world not only in terms of policies or economics but also when it comes to the world's ability to actually work together. As we said, populist leaders vehemently oppose anything that is not classified as

⁵ M. Limon, *Is COVID-19 proving to be the “Achilles’ heel” of the world’s populist leaders?*, <https://www.universal-rights.org/blog/is-covid-19-proving-to-be-the-achilles-heel-of-the-worlds-populist-leaders/>, retrieved on 08.04.2020

“populist” so herein lay one of the main reasons for its apparent downfall in the wake of the coronavirus’ emergence. However, this is not the only way we should look at it.

“He sees to it that nothing sticks to him” was a phrase used in a 1983 speech by American Congresswoman Pat Schroeder⁶. While she was talking about then-American president Ronald Reagan, this phrase can be used to describe current White House tenant, Donald Trump.

The reason we point this out is that this description is aptly showing another reason why the pandemic is in a direct relationship with the decline of populism and the changing of the perceptions of people: Nothing sticks to a populist leader. Neither evidence of corruption and nepotism nor a parade of international actors and organizations accusing him of trying to destabilize the world order.

Well, now, an external event has already destabilized it in a way that requires unity in order to get through it, and it’s not going well for such rulers. As presidents such as Trump or Bolsonaro implicated themselves in scandal after scandal, nothing seemed to last and their approval ratings continue to be high, despite the opinion of the international public.

That was the case until the coronavirus pandemic hit. For some reason, the brick wall that should stand between the population and its election of such leaders, unable to be erected by any means, now stands proudly tall. Not only have the countries governed in such a way fared far worse than their comparable counterparts elsewhere in terms of numbers of infections and death, but the spell that has endured for so long and entranced “the People” seems to finally be lifting⁷.

There appear to be a number of reasons as to why this is happening and we will endeavor to list and explain all of them in

⁶ P. O. Espejo, *Teflon Populism: Will it Slip or Falter?*, <https://www.21global.ucsb.edu/global-e/july-2020/teflon-populism-will-it-slip-or-falter>, retrieved on 08.05.2020.

⁷ M. Limon, *op.cit.*

relation to the current pandemic. First of all, populism is and has always been a game of words. Beautiful words, it's true, but ultimately still nothing short of subjective speech. This is all the more true because, as we pointed out, not everyone manages to make it into "*the People*" but only those citizens who agree with what populism stands for.

Perhaps there hasn't been a more adequate proof of this than Nigel Farage celebrating winning the Brexit vote by claiming it to be a "victory for real people", effectively making the 48% of the British electorate who was against their country leaving the European Union somehow less than proper members of the community⁸.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the consequences of policies endorsed by populist leaders are stark, irrefutable, and, most of all, happening right away. The spell upholding a bright future in which "the People" have obtained control of their society is gone and the result of political choices made, for instance, by the governments of Brazil, India, or Turkey recently can be precisely pondered in the numbers of infections and deaths in these countries⁹.

Another argument that is fairly easy to understand and the process is that populist leaders like those in the countries we mentioned prefer something that can be described as "gesture politics" to decision-making procedures based on evidence and facts. These are usually supported by a belief that they and their country are somehow special and out of the regular framework of international relations and, as such, completely worthy of distinctive treatment.

The COVID-19 crisis has transformed such attitudes into pure complacency and statements regarding the lower possibility of being hit by such a crisis, simply because of the "special" factor that we've mentioned above. Since early January, for instance,

⁸ I.W. Müller, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

⁹ M. Limon, *op.cit.*

President Donald Trump has repeatedly claimed the virus will go away “with the heat”¹⁰ and that the actual risk to the American people was negligible. Due to the cat and mouse relationship that populists often have with science and pretty much any testable facts, people have begun lowering their trust in moments such as these when testing and careful planning is required so that everyone can safely get through.

Linked with the above, we also have to talk about the way populist politicians seem to depend on fake news as a useful if immoral tool of boiling down complex political problems and presenting them as an understandable narrative of “*the People against the establishment*”¹¹. However, during a world health crisis, citizens have the natural desire to be guided honestly and clearly because their lives are at stake.

This psychological change in mentality stems from the ongoing threat that surpasses any type of discourse such leaders might bring. Divisive and demagogic language, used to bolster some at the expense of others, might be what brought populists to power when the world did not have a pandemic threatening its ability to function. Now, it looks like more of a liability than an asset.

Last but not least, the coronavirus has struck a hard blow against the populists’ desire for popularity. Being popular is the lifeblood of any such leader and, as a result, his or her speech will always tend to be upbeat, denying any truths that might offer a negative but more pragmatic view of things. Once again, when lives are on the line, citizens require truth, not fiction so it is a small wonder that authorities in power around the world are finding more and more common ground with the people they govern.

¹⁰ 22 times Trump said the coronavirus would go away, https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/politics/22-times-trump-said-the-coronavirus-would-go-away/2020/04/30/d2593312-9593-4ec2-aff7-72c1438fca0e_video.html, retrieved on 08.05.2020.

¹¹ M. Limon, *op.cit.*

Also, we must not forget the fact that populists do not seek to represent the population as a whole but rather the segment that stands by their ideas, so this will keep creating a breach between them and present-day society, scared by the dangers of COVID-19. Müller warns against this by arguing that “*a completely coherent, single ‘popular will’ is a fantasy*”¹².

Furthermore, the current division between populists and their would-be supporters can prove to be the signs of a much larger danger, particularly if more like-minded leaders come to power. While we argue that is highly unlikely as the world adapts and recovers from the effects of the coronavirus, this may yet prove problematic.

The reason for this is that, in Müller’s words, “*the problem is never the populist’s imperfect capacity to represent the people’s will; rather, it’s always the institutions that somehow produce the wrong outcomes*”¹³. As a result, we feel that a new populist leader freshly spurred by the people’s reactions in the wake of the coronavirus can prove even more dangerous to the traditional, democratic order of things.

All in all, it’s fair to say that populism did not emerge unscathed from the first stages of the world dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. While this set of ideas might have benefited from a lot of good outcomes during its rise to power, this is the first time that we are seeing an actual setback.

As a result, the question that stands now and probably will for some time is to see if COVID-19 has permanently damaged the brand of leaders like Trump, Bolsonaro, or Modi. If this will be the case, we will probably see the boasting of all those who have proclaimed populism as nothing more than a “fad”. If not, we are probably in for a resurgence at some point or the next. Whether this resurgence will bring populism right back up to where it was

¹² I.W. Müller, *op.cit.*, p. 31.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

or not will probably depend on the way authorities do their job until then and the psychological changes that COVID-19 manages to instill into each and every one of us.

How “the People” have changed due to COVID-19

If, until now, we’ve looked at the way people have changed their overall behavior regarding populists and those in power, now it’s time to take a deeper look and analyze some of the mental and psychological changes that may very well live on even after the end of the pandemic.

While being incredibly painful and disruptive to all layers of society, this crisis has also invariably nurtured the emergence of a great common purpose, solidarity, creativity, and improvisation. Lewis Dartnell states so in his article on the British Broadcasting Corporation’s website, *“From the extinction of the daily commute to transforming our relationship with food, COVID-19 is changing our world already – and in some ways, it looks set to get better”*¹⁴.

This is quite a positive outlook on things and it also serves as yet another explanation of the recent downfall in populists’ popularity. The virus has brought out the need and desire for people to work together in order to protect everyone and this was something sorely needed. What’s more, we live in the era of globalization and social media acted as the means to open little windows into how everyone else was responding to the same situation and the coping mechanisms that they found. This, in turn, created an even more pronounced sense of unity and closeness.

Furthermore, shortages of commonplace items or sheer difficulty in simply going out to the shop and buying them, along with the fact that many people have had a lot of free time on their

¹⁴ L. Dartnell, *The Covid-19 changes that could last long-term*, <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200629-which-lockdown-changes-are-here-to-stay> , retrieved on 08.06.2020.

hands, have unlocked a lot of inner creativity. Once again, due to social media, this could be freely shared online and contributed even more to the “*All will be well*” mantra that was starting to take roots¹⁵. The people who were or felt lonely were hit the hardest by the need for social restriction so having the means to simply go online and see how everyone else is doing created a very important factor that was not there, for instance, during the 1918 Spanish Flu.

Also, many of us are now taking more time for ourselves and this leads to a less-pronounced worry and availability in front of divisive populist speeches. From cooking to baking to growing vegetables and a myriad of other things, people are using isolation to become isolated from the usual worries of the world. Realizing how the little things can make life deeply satisfying and fulfilling has not only worked to improve the general mindset of the public but also severely impaired the impact populist speeches can have at this time.

We can also identify a new level of community dialogue, even if this has not always been for the better. What we mean by this is that while it is important to address misinformation to avoid increasing anxieties around COVID-19 even more, the ease with which people communicate today has once again managed to catch governments by surprise. Direct messages from those in power have not always been there during this crisis and they have been replaced with a plethora of Internet information, stats, and make-beliefs that have sometimes served to make things even worse.

For instance one of the more difficult challenges humanity had to face when dealing with the Ebola disease was all the misinformation surrounding it and this is definitely the case with COVID-19 today as well¹⁶. While Twitter posts seem to be more than enough in regular times, the people are expecting a lot more

¹⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹⁶ *Talking to community: Behavioural change...*

transparency from their leaders during hard times, and this is becoming more and more obvious. As a result, engaging in more structured and active community dialogue could only help the powers that be understand perceptions, fight-off misinformation, and even adjust their approach accordingly in order to get the best results¹⁷.

We believe that understanding these changes requires a bilateral approach that can capture the entire picture. We have to observe how the need for isolation and the authorities imposing lockdown has changed the mindset of the entire population but we need to come at this from two angles: One must be the way people look at the world and the emotional changes that they're going through while the other has to take into account the citizen-authority relationship and how or if it will change from now on.

In order to limit the spread of the virus, countries have been forced to impose restrictions that would have otherwise been frowned upon; this much we know. But the implementation of these changes has generated relevant behavioral changes that run of the risk of becoming permanent and show the potential of giving birth to a whole new society¹⁸.

From a social standpoint, this has presented challenges in terms of not only dealing with what the present brings but also worrying about the future. Now knowing when the pandemic will end, not knowing if they will be able to go to work or *if* they will be able to get back to work has generated changes in people's perceptions and this will keep influencing their relationship with those in charge as well.

Furthermore, this everyday crisis reveals the ability to manage individual and collective events by individuals and

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ I. Chifu, *Spectrul pandemiei amenință umanitatea: psihoza COVID-19 în variate forme*, https://adevarul.ro/news/societate/spectrul-pandemiei-ameninta-umanitatea-psihoza-covid-19-variate-forme-1_5f26f51d5163ec42719a587d/index.html, retrieved on 08.08.2020.

decision-makers alike, bringing to light the usefulness of political choices that are generally made by democratic societies to elect those that should be in charge¹⁹.

In a nutshell, people are not only becoming more and more aware of the things they are doing every day in order to get through life but they have also been forced to face who they are as individuals and this, in turn, has led to a more thorough scrutinizing who we are putting in charge and why they can get there in the first place. As a side note, it's obvious that such a train of thought can have a massive impact on populism in the long run.

If citizens are reconsidering their choices, the no-substance speech of such leaders will be in serious jeopardy and this is something that we should consider going forward. However, as we have stated before, this is closely connected to how long COVID-19 decides to keep being an influencing factor in our everyday choices or how much time we need to find a cure that prevents it from doing so.

What is the main psychological change that was heavily forced upon us by the virus? The feeling of being stuck. With the ever-accelerating global flow of money, ideas, goods, and even people, time seems to move at a faster and faster pace. There are some critics of capitalism out there who have even argued that the world needs to learn how to slow down again. Well, COVID-19 has done exactly that and the force of the change has led to a more profound emotional trauma than if we had gradually chosen to go through the same steps.

The 1980s neoliberal reforms of capitalism resulted in a new and severely-weakened welfare state. At the same time, technological advancements in production and new discoveries like the Internet led to an unprecedented acceleration of our day

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

to day life. People were drawn into this relentless stream much like a moth is drawn to the flame, without realizing it can get hurt if it gets too close to the heat.

The COVID-19 pandemic is the equivalent of the flame suddenly going out while the moth has to deal with the new and unfriendly darkness. It is strange, it is different, and while, at some point, there may have been moths that knew how to deal with it, and this one does not.

People are reacting in the exact same way to being stuck in the house. While, for a large part of the population, this seems to have led to a rekindling of ignored relationships, the real trauma is the internal dialogue that each of us was forced to have with our very own self. The lure of the relentless stream we were stuck in was that it presented an excuse for not planning very far ahead. It allowed us to not have to process everything we were going through and just simply live. Both governments and people were more responding to events rather than actively planning for the future²⁰.

After the long grind of the 5-day work week, the weekend allowed weary citizens to “escape” the confinements of day to day life and let loose. Once again, the pandemic has taken all of this away. When you are forced to stay inside the house for most of the day, it’s really not that important whether it’s Monday or Friday.

For years and years, society was able to constantly chase the future through our use of technology. COVID-19 was not only able to stop this chase but, since a vaccine or proper treatment is not going to be ready for the general population any time soon, it has made everyone feel trapped in the present²¹. This is the real

²⁰ *Coronavirus: how the pandemic has changed our perception of time*, <https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-how-the-pandemic-has-changed-our-perception-of-time-139240>, retrieved on 08.10.2020.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

drama of the entire event. An entire world used to going after the future is simply forced to live in a deteriorated present.

This is the reason why citizens are reconsidering their political choices, couples are reconsidering their life choices, and perhaps politicians are reconsidering their policy choices. As we said, if this situation lasts long enough, we run the risk of not being the same people when we're going to get through to the other side. For this precise reason, it is essential to maintain our ability to run risk analyses and evaluate the current condition of certain events and society as a whole.

Because, make no mistake about it, this is Maslow's pyramid all over again. Once people have more or less figured out how to live in this new type of world, the first places that are going to feel the impact of this process will be the Parliaments of the world. The specter of our psychological transformation is going to lead to a profound transition of our society and it is imperative that we are ready for it.

It's certain that the following period of time will, at some point, generate an economic crisis but the truth is that it is going to be different from anything that we have been through so far. Not because of the economic challenges but because the people will be different. Problems like the ongoing climate crisis, social inequalities, and the way governments engage in their daily responsibilities may very well be scrutinized through different eyes and lead to a profound transformation.

Withdrawal from the physical space of society leads to reflections and inner thoughts for everyone but that does not mean everyone goes through this experience in the same way. For extroverts, people who enjoy interacting with others and despise being alone, the pandemic offered a hard challenge. The feeling of being confined, of being stuck between walls, something that is so commonly seen in prisons, was now able to be witnessed in the open world.

For introverts, on the other hand, some may say that the whole experience was easier since such citizens are already accustomed to spending a lot of time on their own. However, the human mind does not work the same when it does something of its own accord and when it is forced to do it, even if the actual action is identical.

Isolation and the withdrawal of some liberties will lead to a “prison-like” feeling in individuals who are prone to such traumas. The question that we must ask ourselves is how profound of a change are we talking about and how concerned we should be about the possibility of such scenarios repeating themselves over and over again²².

As a result, both leaders and the general population should not try to weather this crisis as something that we simply have to endure and that will pass, restoring the world to the point it was before it began. Instead, there is a fundamental need for accepting and embracing the change in front of us.

The people have to accept that they have changed so that they can see the change in others, while leaders have to start taking into account that their electorate is not going to be the same, perhaps ever. Corona time has given everyone a lesson in terms of temporal thought and flexibility but others lie ahead and it is imperative we are ready for them. We use the term “*we*” because, even from a political standpoint, any democratic society requires both parts, citizens and leaders, to function properly, to be able to exist as a whole.

Perhaps the most important training that we have received is the one concerning the need to be prepared, no matter what. Our world had gotten to a point where the mantra of “*living the day*” was promoted in such a way that planning for the future was seen as a sign of weakness. Now that we have experienced something

²² I. Chifu, *op.cit.*

that still has the ability to put the entire world on hold, perhaps the entire concept of *early warning* and simply being prepared will become a much friendlier notion for “the people”.

Humanity will get through this because the passing of time is the one constant we all have. When the next crisis does arrive, however, perhaps it will be comforting to know that we are able -and should – trick time, plan ahead and expect changes in the future, even when we feel stuck in the present²³.

Populism and the post-COVID-19 era

Most of the circles regarding political sciences seem to think that populism will be one of the victims of the COVID-19 pandemic as the people, scared for their actual lives, will go back to the arms of their governments and cease all thoughts of change until such a real threat goes away. Sadly, after having lightly broached how populism has fared so far during the pandemic and after analyzing the way people changed while in their quarantine bubble, we do not think this to be the case.

First things first, we feel the need to get into some theoretical details in order to better sell the point we are about to make. Populism cannot be treated in binary terms, i.e. will it go up and down after the crisis goes away because it is not like this ideology to keep going in a straight line. For instance, left-wing populism may be more or less identical to right-wing populism in terms of what it stands for, but such a flexible set of ideas is much more dependent on the country it is active in that more established political frameworks.

As such, its reactions to certain events can be quite different from one scenario to the other so pinpointing a pattern proves to be difficult. For instance, no more than ten years ago, the economic recession boosted little-known left-wingers in countries such as

²³ *Coronavirus: how the pandemic has changed...*

Spain and Greece while parties that were already established such as the FN in France completely failed to capitalize on such an opportunity²⁴.

As things stand right now, it appears that this crisis will be bad for populists like Donald Trump, especially considering 2020 is an election year in the United States. However, leaders like Erdoğan in Turkey or the PiS in Poland may just dodge the bullet. Italy was among the countries that were hit hardest by the coronavirus and the Fire Star Movement lost quite a large number of its supporters while Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte is seen as having steered the country in quite a competent manner so far.

Something that may yet prove troublesome is the appearance of a non-ideological populist actor, if something like this can indeed exist, that focuses on conspiracy theories, anti-vaxxers, and the plethora of unstable notions that have been making their way through society in the era of coronavirus.

In some ways, populism is the epitome of an ideology being completely focused on its core. When that core is having “the people” go up against “the authority” that has forgotten all about their needs, it’s easy to see why the post-COVID-19 era can bring in a lot of issues.

Let’s get into a little bit of detail just to make sure we’ve got the entire picture properly described: Analysts who simply have a basic, working understanding of populism are resting assured on the idea that the ideology is only working when it finds itself in the opposition. When populists find themselves in power, one may think that they cannot continue to speak up for “the people” versus “the authority” when *they are* the authority at that point.

Up to a point, this argument may indeed prove to have some value. People who are thinking about the “*but Donald Trump is*

²⁴ A. Chrysogelos, D. Roháč, *Will populism turn out to be of the “victims” of the COVID-19 pandemic, as many commentators have claimed?*, available at <https://martenscentre.eu/news/how-covid-19-crisis-affecting-eu-legitimacy>, retrieved on 08.12.2020.

in power and he's still a populist" rhetoric can now feel vindicated because the example serves as a perfect reminder of what Ian Werner Müller has been saying all along: "Populists in power invariably fall back on the argument that they are the only morally legitimate representatives of that people and that, furthermore, only some of the people are actually the real, authentic people who are deserving of support and, ultimately, good government"²⁵.

In terms of the coronavirus, what this means is that we cannot rely on the virus to simply wash away every populist leader, party, and idea, because those that are already in power are completely capable of creating their own speech in such a way as to justify even more authoritarian measures. Now, of course, some people would say that forceful applications of the law are not something strictly relegated to populist leaders and they may be right.

The one thing that separates such rulers from other types of leaders, democratic or otherwise, is the fact that they really believe they are entitled to use any instruments in their arsenal in order to purge the society and obtain "the real people". Not even considering the fact that obtaining a type of society where almost everyone is in agreement about everything is not a real objective (Müller, 2016), we still can identify the very real danger of post-COVID-19 citizens being attracted to potential leaders who can sell their work as "justified".

This is, therefore, the first reason why we still identify populism as being dangerous, even after the end pandemic will be over or more or less controlled. While most other ideologies will still be the same and people may or may not feel attracted to them, populist has the capacity of justifying any measures it takes as being "good" and citizens are much more likely to be drawn to something when they feel it is inherently good.

If the reader still requires proof of that, we need only remind ourselves about the events that occurred in the early days of the COVID-19 outbreak. People were told that even the seasonal flu

²⁵ I.W. Müller, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

is more dangerous than the coronavirus. Experts were advising against wearing facemasks, and even President Trump's ban on travel from China (which, by the way, had a variety of loopholes in it), was described as promoting *Sinophobia*²⁶.

What do these errors have in common? They were all made in good faith by authorities who believed that they were protecting their citizens against the new threat. Why then, should people be less sensitive to the plethora of messages populists might come up with to support their ideas post-pandemic?

The second reason why we believe populism won't be over after the coronavirus has everything to do with the economy. At its roots, the set of ideas started from an economic framework and will always have a leg on "the riches" of the authority compared to the debts that the people have to go through. Past experiences seem to suggest that periods of financial distress bring in a new wave of support for populism since citizens are taking a harder look at the elites who don't have to share in their economic struggles²⁷.

Also, capitalism offers no guarantee that the upcoming financial crisis is going to affect people evenly. Individuals of a higher status, of high education, and working high-end jobs, in other words, "elites", might very well be able to face what's coming much better than those who are engaged in blue-collar professions and are prone to the perennial "nine-to-five" job.

This dangerous combination can add fuel to the fire that is the populist speech and could make the case for such leaders without them putting in a lot of effort. As we said, the last economic crisis led to a rise in the importance of populism so we would do well to take note of what this next one can do. People might have changed due to the coronavirus, but we've yet to see a guarantee that they have changed in a way that is incompatible to the populist way of thinking.

²⁶ A. Chrysosgelos, D. Roháč, *op.cit.*

²⁷ *Ibidem.*

So what can we take from everything that has been going on so far? We can infer that social changes occur much faster than political ones do. We can observe that while the people may have already gone through some changes due to the coronavirus and being locked down (and some of those changes might be for the better), the political framework will take a while to adapt to this new status quo and will require some time to try its hand and dabble in some new approaches.

Why does populism continue to be a further danger going down the road? To answer this we can look at the work of Carl Schmitt and how he was describing, in the 1920s nonetheless, liberalism as an outdated ideology. While this is not the point that we are arguing in this paper, it does serve as a very good argument for it.

“The unanimous opinion of one hundred million private persons is neither the will of the people nor public opinion. The will of the people can be expressed just as well and perhaps better through acclamation, through something taken for granted, an obvious and unchallenged presence, than through the statistical apparatus that has been constructed with such meticulousness in the last fifty years”²⁸.

In Schmitt’s opinion, the will of the people is not expressed as well through parliamentary procedures as it is through actually looking at the choices that they make in their day to day lives when they are not forced to put a stamp on a piece of paper. Populism can easily adapt to those choices and make them feel legitimate and right, even when they might not be.

This is the reason why discourses against organizations such as the EU or NATO work so well, even if, from a socio-political standpoint, they have no basis to stand on. Citizens tend to trust their feelings when faced with genuine crisis situations and while,

²⁸ Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 16-17.

right now, this seems to have led them back to a renewed faith in the state and its powers, there is no guarantee that the future will bring the same thing. This is especially true considering that the term “liberalism” is more or less regarded as “maximizing the freedom of personal lifestyles”²⁹.

When the state is forced to take some of this freedom away, as it has been the case with the coronavirus, the people might start to lose that faith again and, if we can take one thing for granted from everything that we have seen and learned so far, is that populism will never miss that chance and will always be there ready to take advantage, whether we’re talking about “the old people” or “the new people” that have forcefully evolved from the clutches of COVID-19.

Bibliography:

- Chifu, I., *Spectrul pandemiei amenință umanitatea: psihoza COVID-19 în variate forme*, www.adevarul.ro
- Chrysogelos, A., Roháč, D., *Will populism turn out to be of the “victims” of the COVID-19 pandemic, as many commentators have claimed?*, www.martenscentre.eu
- Dartnell, L., *The Covid-19 changes that could last long-term*, www.bbc.com
- Espejo, P.O., *Teflon Populism: Will it Slip or Falter?*, www.21global.ucsb.edu
- Limon, M., *Is COVID-19 proving to be the “Achilles’ heel” of the world’s populist leaders?*, www.universal-rights.org
- McCaffrey, D., *Analysis: Will COVID-19 usher in a new wave of populism in Europe?*, www.euronews.com
- Müller, I. W., *What Is Populism?*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2016.
- Schmitt, C., *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988)
- ****Coronavirus: how the pandemic has changed our perception of time*, www.theconversation.com
- ****Talking to community: Behavioural change in the age of COVID-19*, www.icrc.org
- ****22 times Trump said the coronavirus would go away*, www.washingtonpost.com

²⁹ I.W. Müller, *op.cit.*, p. 53.

III. THE IMPACT ON DEMOCRACY AND POLITICS

1. THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC'S IMPACT ON DEMOCRACY

Claudiu Mihai Codreanu

Introduction

In October 2019, months before the coronavirus pandemic unfolded, the Global Health Security Index of the NTI revealed that “no country is fully prepared to handle an epidemic or pandemic”, in a study that assessed health security and related capabilities across 195 countries¹.

In addition to this, the 2020 World Economic Forum Global Risk Report has paid attention to the fact that health systems around the world are already under new pressures, resulting from vulnerabilities caused by changing environmental, demographic, societal and technological patterns².

Nevertheless, the world is now engulfed in a pandemic, but there might be a shining light at the end of the tunnel if governments and civil societies take the crisis as an opportunity for democratic reform.

¹ NTI, “Inaugural Global Health Security Index Finds No Country Is Prepared for Epidemics or Pandemics”, *The Nuclear Threat Initiative*, October 24, 2019, <https://www.nti.org/newsroom/news/inaugural-global-health-security-index-finds-no-country-prepared-epidemics-or-pandemics>. [accessed August 30, 2020].

² World Economic Forum, *The Global Risks Report 2020*, 15th edition, *World Economic Forum*, Geneva, 2020, p. 7.

Measures for containing the deadly coronavirus from spreading have been taken in most world states, and there is a question if democracies or autocracies handled it better. So far, up until this Summer studies have shown that the daily growth rate has been reduced after the adoption of social distancing measures (including lockdown) by world governments³ and also that only in 11 European countries there have been more than 3 million deaths averted by government interventions and measures between the end of February and the beginning of May⁴.

Hence, this chapter presents research on the future of democracy after the pandemic. After the literature review on theories regarding democracy and crises, I identify the main features of the coronavirus pandemic. Afterward, the chapter contains an analysis of the state of democracy during the pandemic and of the possibility of enhancing democracy after the pandemic crisis. I find that there is some evidence indicating that this pandemic crisis can be a window of opportunity for the implementation of substantial reforms and structural changes.

My argument is that the pandemic, with all of its effects, could eventually contribute to a strengthening of democracy, through digitalization (local and regional public administration, government, electoral process) and an increase in transparency, a higher level of solidarity and public trust. The pandemic could show worldwide public officials, experts, and citizens, that the welfare state must be reformed and strengthened, that inequalities (both national/regional and global) must be addressed and reduced, and that there is a need for a new emphasis on the social aspects of our democracies. Also, the role of the state might be enhanced, both in society and in the economy.

³ Charles Courtemanche, Joseph Garuccio, Anh Le, Joshua Pinkston, and Aaron Yelowitz. "Strong Social Distancing Measures in the United States Reduced the COVID-19 Growth Rate", *Health Affairs* 39, no. 7, 2020, p. 1.

⁴ Seth Flaxman, Swapnil Mishra, Axel Gandy, H. Juliette T. Unwin, Thomas A. Mellan, Helen Coupland, Charles Whittaker, Harrison Zhu, Tresnia Berah, Jeffrey W. Eaton, Mélodie Monod, Imperial College COVID-19 Response Team, et al, "Estimating the effects of non-pharmaceutical interventions on COVID-19 in Europe", *Nature* 584, 2020, pp. 259-260.

1. Key aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic

Starting in China and spreading rapidly to the rest of the world, the pandemic took hundreds of thousands of lives all over the world, according to the official figures provided by governments (the numbers might be even higher). Most states took various kinds of measures to protect their citizens and most governments enforced states of emergencies, curfews and/or lockdowns to prevent the rapid infection of a large part of their population and a collapse of their health systems.

SARS-CoV-2 (or severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2) is, above all, a respiratory virus. But the disease it causes sets the virus apart from influenza or other coronaviruses, with evidence suggesting that “SARS-CoV-2 can infect cells in the walls of blood vessels that help regulate clotting”⁵ (or blood flow and coagulation).

Thus, seemingly odd COVID-19 symptoms, such as blood clots or heart failure, may originate from how the virus affects blood and the circulatory system⁶. And so, this just adds to the dangerousness of this virus and the effect that it can have on the world’s population, and also on states’ health systems worldwide.

A study published in August 2020 estimated that only across 11 Western European countries approximately 3,1 million COVID-19 deaths (2,8-3,5 million) have been averted by government measures (e.g. lockdowns) only during the period between the beginning of the pandemic and the 4th of May 2020. Flaxman et al. (2020) note that there are some limitations regarding COVID-19 mortality data available, with deaths outside hospitals being underreported, but the authors relied on ECDC data.⁷

⁵ Ariel Bleicher, and Katherine Conrad, “We Thought It Was Just a Respiratory Virus”, *UCSF Magazine*, Summer 2020, <https://www.ucsf.edu/magazine/covid-body>. [accessed August 15, 2020]

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Seth Flaxman, Swapnil Mishra, Axel Gandy, H. Juliette T. Unwin, Thomas A. Mellan, Helen Coupland, Charles Whittaker, Harrison Zhu, Tresnia Berah, Jeffrey W. Eaton, Mélodie Monod, Imperial College COVID-19 Response Team, et al, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

In addition to this, the implementation of government-imposed social distancing measures and/or lockdowns significantly reduced the COVID-19 daily growth rate, and especially during the first two months of the pandemic (until the end of April 2020)⁸.

2. Theories of democracy and crises

2.1. Basic democratic standards

In this study, I shall focus primarily on liberal democracies and so this section highlights some characteristics of a democratic regime, but also concepts regarding crises. Liberal democracy, as defined by Hague and Harrop (2001) is a form of democracy in which “the scope of democracy is limited by constitutional protections of individual rights, including freedom of assembly, property, religion and speech”⁹.

According to Boin et al. (2005), public leaders in a liberal democracy, as opposed to an autocracy, have to take into account the political, legal and moral order when managing a crisis, which can reduce efficiency or effectiveness in favor of other values¹⁰.

Regarding democracy, Robert Dahl identified five criteria, or standards, for a democratic process: effective participation, voting equality, enlightened understanding, control of the agenda and inclusion of adults¹¹. For this study, taking into account the need to perfect, enhance and strengthen democracies, there are more criteria or indicators to be taken into consideration.

⁸ Charles Courtemanche, Joseph Garuccio, Anh Le, Joshua Pinkston, and Aaron Yelowitz, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁹ Rod Hague, Martin Harrop, and Shaun Breslin, *Comparative politics and government: an introduction*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2001, p. 35.

¹⁰ Arjen Boin, Paul't Hart, Eric Stern, and Bengt Sundelius, *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, p. 8.

¹¹ Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1998, pp. 37-38.

A necessary but not sufficient condition for a democracy to properly function is the holding of free and competitive elections that meet international requirements. But, more than this, if freely elected governments are to violate the rights of individuals and/or minorities, or if the executive overrides the functions of the legislature and so the rule of law is not respected, the regimes are not characterized as democracies, according to Linz and Stepan (1996).¹²

2.2. Crises and the opportunity for reforms

The COVID-19 pandemic turned into a crisis, as world governments started fighting with, mostly, the unknown, as information about the virus was mostly preliminary and uncertain at the beginning. According to Eric Stern (2003), a crisis “is a situation, deriving from a change in the external or internal environment of a collectively, characterized by three necessary and sufficient perceptions on the part of the responsible decision-makers: 1. A threat to basic values; 2. Urgency; 3. Uncertainty”¹³.

Nevertheless, a crisis can be perceived as an opportunity to implement and/or trigger major institutional or policy changes, and crises can be used as means for reforms. Crises create opportunities for developments that would not even be politically feasible in an ordinary period, offering a window for revising policies, sometimes even radically.

More than this, democratization studies have usually indicated that a crisis can be considered as a necessary condition for change. But this does not mean that it works like this every time. Crises create windows of opportunities for pushing through brave reform packages, but leaders might not always seize them.

¹² Juan J. Linz, and Alfred Stepan, “Toward consolidated democracies”, *Journal of democracy* 7, no. 2, 1996, p. 14.

¹³ Eric K. Stern, *Crisis decisionmaking: A cognitive institutional approach*, Swedish National Defense College, Stockholm, 2003, p. 8.

More than this, crises may bring forward radical reform proposals that could bring positive structural changes unimaginable before the crisis. But, in the long run, there is no guarantee that they will succeed.¹⁴

In addition to this, Brückner and Ciccone (2011) argue that improvements and refinements of democratic institutions triggered by shocks can be significant, as a result of a study regarding flood effects in Sub-Saharan Africa¹⁵. Such substantial shocks can break the balance of obsolete and/or autocratic political systems and set forward the basis on structural reform¹⁶. The coronavirus pandemic stands as an example of such a shock, and it might be a driver for reforms of democratic institutions.

3. The state of democracy during the pandemic crisis

In June 2020, Edgell et al. put forward an index – the Pandemic Democratic Violations Index – tracking state responses related to managing the COVID-19 pandemic and the extent to which these measures violated democratic standards. The authors of the study tracked six different types of violations of democratic standards: no time limit on emergency measures; discriminatory measures, de-jure violation on non-alienable rights from the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; restrictions on media freedom; disproportionate limitations on the role of the legislature; abusive enforcement.¹⁷

The research showed that most democracies in the world managed to avoid violating democratic standards, or only made

¹⁴ Arjen Boin, Paul 't Hart, Eric Stern, and Bengt Sundelius, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-132.

¹⁵ Markus Brückner, and Antonio Ciccone, "Rain and the democratic window of opportunity", *Econometrica* 79, no. 3, p. 945.

¹⁶ Francis Fukuyama, "The Pandemic and Political Order", *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2020-06-09/pandemic-and-political-order>. [accessed August 30, 2020]

¹⁷ Amanda B. Edgell, Sandra Grahn, Jean Lachapelle, Anna Luhrmann, and Seraphine F. Maerz, "An Update on Pandemic Blacksliding: Democracy Four Months After the Beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic", *V-Dem Institute*, Policy Brief no. 24, June 30, 2020, p. 1.

minor violations while addressing the pandemic and its effects. The large majority of democracies imposed emergency responses without contravening liberal-democratic standards. Even though a large part of world governments recorded concerning violations and developments, most of them were already authoritarian before the emergence of the pandemic.¹⁸

Even more, most of the states that violated democratic standards were “fully autocratic” before the pandemic. Among the countries that used the pandemic as a mean to undermine democratic institutions (Hungary, India, Philippines, Serbia, etc.) only Hungary stands as a concerning example, even though its democracy was already weakened before.

Another such case is Slovakia, where the military quarantined several Roma settlements before they met the established criteria set by the government. Overall, more than 20 countries implemented restrictive measures that affected the democratic freedoms and rights of particular groups based on their ethnicity, race, color, or social origin – measures that might not have been justified entirely by public health concerns (but this applied almost entirely to autocratic countries or countries with already weakened democratic institutions).¹⁹

Emergency measures implemented by states may affect democratic institutions and rights, but this must happen with serious limits and they must be proportionate²⁰.

So far, it seems that the public was satisfied with the measures that democratic states took. In a study of 15 countries (EU members prior to the 2004 enlargement except for Luxembourg and with the addition of Norway), Bol et al. (2020) found that lockdowns have actually increased voting intentions for the political

¹⁸ Amanda B. Edgell, Sandra Grahn, Jean Lachapelle, Anna Luhrmann, and Seraphine F. Maerz, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

party of the President or Prime Minister, and also satisfaction with democracy and trust in government. The study covered the period between March 2 and April 3.²¹

During the strict lockdown period in Spring 2020, satisfaction in democracy and trust in government increased across the political spectrum, and there is little evidence that it was a result of a rally-around-the-flag effect caused by the health crisis, but an evaluation of governments' performance of handling the pandemic.²²

3.1. Some downsides during the pandemic and on the short-term

Nevertheless, a discussion must cover the negative impact that the pandemic had on democracy, especially regarding elections. Even though elections are not by far the only condition for a democratic system, they are nonetheless one of the most important processes. The pandemic has considerably limited some aspects of elections and campaigning. But, once again, the negative effects are temporary and the positive ones could further enhance the democratic process.

Additionally, democratic freedoms that were limited during the pandemic (e.g. freedom of assembly) must be fully restored as soon as the epidemiological developments permit it. So far, there are no strong indicators that democracies might limit such freedoms indefinitely, with various street protests going on since May 2020 in several democratic states.

In addition to this, the economic impact of the lockdown and the restrictive measures imposed because of the pandemic were asymmetrical and can lead to an increase in inequalities. Whilst office workers are more likely to have the opportunity to keep

²¹ Damien Bol, Marco Giani, André Blais, and Peter John Loewen, "The effect of COVID-19 lockdowns on political support: Some good news for democracy?", *European Journal of Political Research*, 2020, pp. 1-3.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

their jobs and work from home, blue-collar workers had their activity suspended and a significant proportion of them even lost their jobs.

In order to address the potential worsening of inequalities, governments must take into account policies such as the implementation of a universal basic income (UBI) or consolidating universal basic services, whilst keeping an eye on taxes and/or corruption (for example, enhancing tax transparency and dismantling tax havens).²³

3.2. Democracies handled better both the pandemic and its effects in other areas

So far, professionalism and expertise managed to handle better the pandemic than populist demagoguery, with the pandemic crisis also exposing the lack of competence of populists (e.g. Brazil)²⁴.

During the pandemic, one of the most important characteristics that democracies had (and autocracies did not) is accountability to the people – elected officials are more prone to react quickly and protect citizens by letting the world know if an epidemic is spreading uncontrollably so that they can get help. The cases of the fast and efficient responses of Taiwan, Korea, or Japan in the early phase of the pandemic are relevant in this case, as compared to China.²⁵

In democracies, various mechanisms pressure governments and can guide or push them to prioritize public interest by protecting both the citizens' health and their material well-being²⁶.

²³ Luke Cooper, and Guy Aitchison, "The dangers ahead: Covid-19, authoritarianism and democracy", *LSE Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit*, 2020, p. 8.

²⁴ Francis Fukuyama, *op. cit.*

²⁵ Ilan Alon, Matthew Farrell, and Shaomin Li, "Regime Type and COVID-19 Response", *FIIB Business Review*, 2020, p. 6.

²⁶ Israel Butler, "A Democratic Narrative for the Coronavirus", *Carnegie Europe*, June 23, 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/06/23/democratic-narrative-for-coronavirus-pub-82119>. [accessed August 15, 2020]

In another example, Frey, Chen and Presidente (2020) studied the effectiveness of lockdowns imposed by democratic and autocratic states, analyzing data provided by Google Mobility Reports and the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker. Their research, which tracked 111 countries over the strictest lockdown period (March-May 2020), finds that autocracies introduced tougher lockdowns, but democracies managed to reduce more effectively geographic mobility in their countries.

More than this, the same results were obtained even after taking into account state capacity. So, democratic countries managed to implement effective responses to the pandemic in respect of reducing geographic mobility. An explanation for this effect is that democracies experience less social unrest and provide more public goods, compared to autocracies, thus people in democratic societies are more likely to adhere to and support government interventions.²⁷

In addition to this, most democracies all over the world managed to address the coronavirus pandemic with only minor (or even none) violations of democratic standards. Even though there have been recorded concerning developments in dozens of countries, most of them were already autocratic before the pandemic. In the EU, for example, only Hungary recorded major and systematic violations during the pandemic.²⁸

For now, it may be just a hypothesis, but in the end, it might turn out that democratic countries managed best the pandemic and largely limited its effects on the population without using authoritarian and overly-militaristic measures. When it comes to numbers, it might look that democratic states accounted for more deaths than autocracies, but authoritarian countries, like Russia,

²⁷ Carl Benedikt Frey, Chinchih Chen, and Giorgio Presidente, "Democracy, Culture, and Contagion: Political Regimes and Countries Responsiveness to Covid-19", *Covid Economics*, no. 18, 2020, pp. 10-11.

²⁸ Amanda B. Edgell, Sandra Grahn, Jean Lachapelle, Anna Luhrmann, and Seraphine F. Maerz, *op. cit.*

China and Iran have been accused of publishing incomplete or misleading data regarding COVID-19 deaths and confirmed infections²⁹.

Even more, if countries with a population of 40-60 million people like Italy, France, Spain and the UK each reached over 30.000 deaths from the coronavirus in several months (March-July), and also the U.S. reached 180.000 deaths in August (with a population of less than 350 million), it is highly unlikely that India had only 60.000 deaths in August, or that Iran truly had only 20.000, especially considering that the Western countries mentioned have better health systems and lower poverty rates than the latter countries (not to be mentioned that Iran and India are closer to China than Spain or Italy, which can mean that the virus might have hit earlier than in Europe).

French President Emmanuel Macron, called into question China's handling of the coronavirus outbreak as early as April 2020, stating that it would be "naïve" to suggest that China managed better the crisis and that things "happened that we don't know about"³⁰. Similar rhetoric, but more direct, was used also by U.S. President Donald Trump, who asked in a press conference "does anybody really believe the numbers of some of these countries?", singling out China.³¹

4. Democracy after the pandemic crisis - opportunities for reform?

It may seem that democratic states have curbed some rights and liberties to counter the pandemic and contain the spread of the virus. It may look like authoritarian leaders are taking control and are gaining popularity. And consequently, it may be possible

²⁹ BBC, "Coronavirus: Macron questions China's handling of outbreak", *BBC*, April 17, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52319462>. [accessed August 15, 2020].

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

that some countries will see their democracies eroded. But on the other hand, the pandemic also seems to have brought out to light the limits of authoritarian and populist leaders and policies.

The loss of jobs, businesses and the general way of life shows that nothing is earned forever. This means that governments and international organizations must pay more attention to ensure that people are protected from this kind of change and have a well prepared and well-managed safety net. And this kind of change could get more frequent in the future, especially because of climate change, which is even referred now as ‘climate crisis’ or ‘climate emergency’, to emphasize the urgent need to address it.

So, there must be some ways that states could protect their citizens from losing everything because of the effects of a pandemic, or other events. Besides unemployment benefits, guaranteed minimum income, or economic incentives, the effects of the coronavirus pandemic could make a case for the introduction of a Universal Basic Income (UBI).

Furthermore, in order to make some assumptions regarding what might come after the pandemic in terms of the state of democracy, firstly the coronavirus pandemic must be identified as a global crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic meets all of the criteria set by Eric K. Stern (threat to basic values, urgency, uncertainty), and also it represents a shock, globally.

Relying upon the theoretical assumptions elaborated in the second section of this chapter, which asserted that crises are opportunities for significant reform, the coronavirus pandemic has a high potential to be a substantial opportunity for great reform.

The first argument for this is the magnitude of the crisis and the effects it had on states across the whole and on people. The pandemic affected almost every single aspect of private and public life. Secondly, all the loss that the pandemic created can

become a driver for questioning governments and asking for more social protection and more accountability for public authorities. And thirdly, liberal democracies managed better both the containment of the virus and the social and economic effects of the pandemic.

4.1. The specter of wide-spread digitalization

With stay-at-home orders in place and major businesses and institutions opting for work-at-home programs, digitalization becomes a more and more important aspect, and the need for using digital tools to simplify and improve the relationship between citizens, businesses and governments is higher than ever.

For example, the Greek government took the opportunity in early April to digitalize the relationship between citizens and government services, including some aspects regarding public health services (like an electronic prescription service). The government even introduced for its citizens an SMS system to obtain permits to leave their homes during the lockdown.³²

After the experience with the strict lockdowns, which discouraged citizens to go physically to government institutions, public administration might just get the push it needed to implement significant digitalization processes.

There is a significant opportunity to keep and build upon practices employed during the first stage of the coronavirus pandemic and to bring the relation between citizens and governments to the 21st century. More than this, digitalization has the potential to decrease corruption, and also to increase public transparency. Ultimately, digitalization can favor a boost in democratic participation, especially when it comes to deliberation and even voting.

³² Euronews, “Greece begins digital odyssey as coronavirus crisis sparks innovation”, *Euronews*, April 6, 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/04/06/greece-begins-digital-odyssey-as-coronavirus-crisis-sparks-innovation>. [accessed August 15, 2020]

4.2. In the end, the pandemic crisis may actually improve and strengthen democracies

The pandemic managed to highlight the weaknesses and deficiencies of institutions all over the world. More than this, even though the pandemic widened the gap between the rich and the poor, its effects can boost social solidarity and ignite the development and implementation of upgraded and improved social protection, similar to how World War I and the Depression drove, eventually, to the growth of welfare states.³³

Furthermore, democracies performed better than autocracies even during the coronavirus pandemic crisis, at least in the first part of the pandemic, and this might mean in the future that the preference for democracy will only grow. Even regarding lockdowns, even though autocratic states imposed more stringent (and even violent) lockdowns, democracies managed to reduce more effectively mobility in their countries, whilst not using violent or extreme measures³⁴.

Conversely, the pandemic crisis revealed the vulnerabilities and weaknesses of world democracies, especially when it comes to social and economic inequalities. But this might not be a negative aspect. The pandemic revealed the urgency to address these issues and might drive governments to act on them after the crisis.

There is also the prospect of greater cohesion and international solidarity. In this regard, a recent example is the European Union reaching a historic agreement on a 750 billion Euros coronavirus pandemic recovery fund³⁵. The EU is the most likely actor to push through radical democratic reforms, and also to drive such reforms in other countries across the globe.

³³ Francis Fukuyama, *op. cit.*

³⁴ Carl Benedikt Frey, Chinchih Chen, and Giorgio Presidente, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

³⁵ Daniel Boffey, and Jennifer Rankin, "EU leaders seal deal on spending and €750bn Covid-19 recovery plans", *The Guardian*, July 21, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/20/macron-seeks-end-acrimony-eu-summit-enters-fourth-day>. [accessed August 30, 2020].

More than this, there is a need for reforming and updating our democracies to the realities of the 2020s (or of this century). But this is not something new, with this need being highlighted even at the January 2020 World Economic Forum – the need to reform democracy and reform capitalism in order to save our planet³⁶. Therefore, one of the most important processes for the world after the pandemic will be digitalization and bringing public administration and democratic processes closer to the citizen and easier to access, observe and monitor.

Actors in democracies have the opportunity to promote and also address social and economic inequalities and to increase solidarity and cohesion. The crisis brought by the coronavirus pandemic generated a significant opportunity for reforms that could strengthen democracies and governments can launch policies or rebuild institutions in ways that might have been unthinkable in the ‘world before’.

Nevertheless, we must pay attention to the shocking potential events of the future (and even to a future pandemic). According to the 2020 World Economic Forum Global Risk Report, natural disasters are become more frequent and more intense, as well as extreme weather, thus climate change is manifesting more rapidly and harder than it was estimated before³⁷. Even more, climate change acts as an amplifier for other risks.

Moreover, the 2020 WEF Global Risk Report noted the top 10 global risks in terms of likelihood and of impact: extreme weather, climate action failure, natural disasters, biodiversity loss, human-made environmental disasters, climate action failure, weapons of mass destruction, biodiversity loss, extreme weather and water crises – 9 of them being related to the current climate emergency³⁸.

Given the above, the next significant global crisis might be brought by climate change. This means that in the context of such an uncertain future, democracies must act fast to improve their institutions, otherwise, the next crisis might catch some

³⁶ World Economic Forum, *op. cit.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁸ World Economic Forum, *op. cit.*, 2020.

governments right in the middle of reforms, or in the middle of acting like it is still ‘business as usual’.

Conclusion

The coronavirus pandemic seems to be far from over and could span over several years. But this also means that governments, businesses and citizens would become more resilient and that physical distancing, masks and frequent hand washing will become the new norm. Also, this means that the COVID-19 pandemic’s effects on democracy will probably be seen more clearly in several years.

Even more, the return to the ‘world before’ should not be the objective after the crisis. The world before coronavirus was far from perfect. This does not mean that we should live forever in the ‘stay-at-home world’ of the pandemic, but that we should take on this opportunity to rebuild and to further enhance our democracies on the local, regional, national and global levels.

Taking into account the fact that this crisis has been somehow unpredictable and that even some of its short-term effects may not be known, and also how long will it go on and if it will amplify, I must conclude that we, as researchers, are on uncharted territories. The pandemic has the potential to intensify during the flu season and the number of infections and deaths may go higher than the first stage (or wave), with top UK experts commissioned by the government’s chief scientific adviser estimating that in the “reasonable worst-case scenario” the coronavirus might kill up to 120.000 hospital patients in Britain alone during the winter³⁹.

References:

- Alon, Ilan, Matthew Farrell, and Shaomin Li, “Regime Type and COVID-19 Response”, *FIIB Business Review*, pp. 1-9, 2020.
 BBC, “Coronavirus: Macron questions China’s handling of outbreak”, *BBC*, April 17, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52319462>. [accessed August 15, 2020]

³⁹ Ian Sample, “UK experts fear up to 120,000 Covid-19 deaths this winter”, *The Guardian*, July 14, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/14/action-to-stop-winter-covid-19-second-wave-in-uk-must-start-now>. [accessed August 15, 2020]

- Bleicher, Ariel, and Katherine Conrad, "We Thought It Was Just a Respiratory Virus", *UCSF Magazine*, Summer 2020, <https://www.ucsf.edu/magazine/covid-body>. [accessed August 15, 2020]
- Boffey, Daniel, and Jennifer Rankin, "EU leaders seal deal on spending and €750bn Covid-19 recovery plans", *The Guardian*, July 21, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/20/macron-seeks-end-acrimony-eu-summit-enters-fourth-day>. [accessed August 30, 2020]
- Boin, Arjen, Paul 't Hart, Eric Stern, and Bengt Sundelius, *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005.
- Bol, Damien, Marco Giani, André Blais, and Peter John Loewen, "The effect of COVID-19 lockdowns on political support: Some good news for democracy?", *European Journal of Political Research*, pp. 1-9, 2020.
- Brückner, Markus, and Antonio Ciccone, "Rain and the democratic window of opportunity", *Econometrica* 79, no. 3, pp. 923-947, 2011.
- Butler, Israel, "A Democratic Narrative for the Coronavirus", *Carnegie Europe*, June 23, 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/06/23/democratic-narrative-for-coronavirus-pub-82119>. [accessed August 15, 2020]
- Cooper, Luke, and Guy Aitchison, "The dangers ahead: Covid-19, authoritarianism and democracy", LSE Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit, 2020. Available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/105103/4/dangers_ ahead.pdf. [accessed August 15, 2020]
- Courtemanche, Charles, Joseph Garuccio, Anh Le, Joshua Pinkston, and Aaron Yelowitz. "Strong Social Distancing Measures in the United States Reduced the COVID-19 Growth Rate", *Health Affairs* 39, no. 7, pp. 1-7, 2020.
- Dahl, Robert A., *On Democracy*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1998.
- Edgell, Amanda B., Sandra Grahn, Jean Lachapelle, Anna Luhrmann, and Seraphine F. Maerz, "An Update on Pandemic Backsliding: Democracy Four Months After the Beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic", *V-Dem Institute*, Policy Brief no. 24, June 30, 2020. Available at: https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/b9/2e/b92e59da-2a06-4d2e-82a1-b0a8dece4af7/v-dem_policybrief-24_update-pandemic-backsliding_200702.pdf. [accessed August 15, 2020]
- Euronews, "Greece begins digital odyssey as coronavirus crisis sparks innovation", *Euronews*, April 6, 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/04/06/greece-begins-digital-odyssey-as-coronavirus-crisis-sparks-innovation>. [accessed August 15, 2020]
- Flaxman, Seth, Swapnil Mishra, Axel Gandy, H. Juliette T. Unwin, Thomas A. Mellan, Helen Coupland, Charles Whittaker, Harrison Zhu, Tresnia Berah, Jeffrey W. Eaton, Mélodie Monod, Imperial College COVID-19 Response Team, et al., "Estimating the effects of non-pharmaceutical interventions on COVID-19 in Europe", *Nature* 584, pp. 257-261, 2020.

- Frey, Carl Benedikt, Chinchih Chen, and Giorgio Presidente, "Democracy, Culture, and Contagion: Political Regimes and Countries Responsiveness to Covid-19", *Covid Economics*, no. 18, pp. 222-238, 2020.
- Fukuyama, Francis, "The Pandemic and Political Order", *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2020-06-09/pandemic-and-political-order>. [accessed August 30, 2020]
- Hague, Rod, Martin Harrop, and Shaun Breslin, *Comparative politics and government: an introduction*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2001.
- Linz, Juan J., and Alfred Stepan, "Toward consolidated democracies", *Journal of democracy* 7, no. 2, 1996, pp. 14-33.
- NTI, "Inaugural Global Health Security Index Finds No Country Is Prepared for Epidemics or Pandemics", *The Nuclear Threat Initiative*, October 24, 2019, <https://www.nti.org/newsroom/news/inaugural-global-health-security-index-finds-no-country-prepared-epidemics-or-pandemics>. [accessed August 30, 2020]
- Sample, Ian, "UK experts fear up to 120,000 Covid-19 deaths this winter", *The Guardian*, July 14, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/14/action-to-stop-winter-covid-19-second-wave-in-uk-must-start-now>. [accessed August 15, 2020]
- Stern, Eric K., *Crisis decisionmaking: A cognitive institutional approach*, Swedish National Defense College, Stockholm, 2003.
- World Economic Forum, *The Global Risks Report 2020*, 15th edition, World Economic Forum, Geneva, 2020. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-risks-report-2020>. [accessed August 15, 2020]

2. IN TIMES OF CRISIS, REAL DEMOCRACIES ARE THE REAL WINNERS

Bhatti Kiran

The last decade made us worry a lot about the pace of change and our capability to adapt and correctly address issues of concern in a world moving on prestissimo rhythms. We all thought we reached a very fragile point. And we certainly believed that any added tension would damage furthermore the hard-achieved and maintained stability. However, we live to fight another battle. A battle that will leave its stance on international arena's functioning print, changing the instruments used to analyze and evaluate our vulnerabilities, risks and threats.

After all, coronavirus came overnight, awakening us in front of an unseeable and untouchable monster – portraying our most vivid fears and threatening our very existence – with no instructions, leading the international arena into a thick and blurry fog, that shoots up fear and anxiety (sentiments which already fueled the existing turbulences)¹ to a new record.

But this is totally justifiable given that for a long time, crisis imposing worldwide great risks to individuals' existence, asking for huge sacrifices in terms of resources, rights and liberties, and leading to an outstanding death toll, were a distant memory for the better part of the world.

So, with no clear enemy to appoint to, for the frustration to be managed, everyone started focusing on the coping mechanisms

¹ Dominique Mosi, *The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation, and Hope are Reshaping the World*, Anchor, 1June 2020, 176 p.

to find the guilty ones. However, the discussion rapidly became politicized and the sole purpose of these debates became a blindfolded attempt to find the political system that would offer a greater advantage in dealing with COVID-19.

Still, this was not a straightforward research. It was more a duel, an affair of honor and prestige in which the main combatants were, on one side, the representatives of the liberal-democratic system and, on the other side, the advocates for a more authoritarian and less liberal system (illiberal system²).

However, none of the claims are reliable enough given that the most of them are based on figures that are still changing, that are not accurate enough and rely solely on interpretations of figures with insufficient or inexistent clear evidence to uphold them.

For now, what is crystal clear, is only that there are impressive death rates in some democratic states but also some authoritarian states, and at the same time, some outbreaks with low death rates in both cases.³

But accurate interpretations need more than death counts. And the number of variables with great significance for such a discussion is so large and so vulnerable to the ongoing crisis that would be naïve to believe, at least at this point, that someone could isolate the correct variables and access precise counts so to establish the impact of political regimes on the quality of administrations' responses and generate precise answers to the questions on the matter.

If we look more closely at the numbers, we can observe positive trends in states with an increased level of civic empowerment⁴

² Anna Lührmann, Sebastian Hellmeier, *Populism, Nationalism and Illiberalism: A Challenge for Democracy and Civil Society*, Heinrich Böll Foundation, February, 2020, p. 6-11.

³ Richard Youngs, Elene Panchulidze, *Global Democracy & Covid-19: Upgrading international support*, European Endowment for Democracy, 14 July 2020, p. 6.

⁴ *Civic Engagement Index (CEI)*, OECD, Better Life Index, 2019, <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/civic-engagement/>.

and reduced corruption levels⁵. And such characteristics are representative of states with strong democracies. But there are some exceptions to the rule as the figures show, meaning that the regime type is still irrelevant.

What is sure is that “the factors responsible for successful pandemic responses have been state capacity, social trust, and leadership. Countries with all three – a competent state apparatus, a government that citizens trust and listen to, and effective leaders – have performed impressively, limiting the damage they have suffered. Countries with dysfunctional states, polarized societies, or poor leadership have done badly.”⁶

Yet, there are some features that make liberal-democracies more suitable for dealing with a crisis in general⁷, but this depends on Administrations’ capability to use them efficiently.

Therefore, the appropriate approach, for the moment, is not a relative one, but one that focuses on democracies’ crisis management quality, for the measures to ensure efficiency in the long run. As such, liberal-democratic systems will not suffer any regression and, in the best-case scenario, will reinforce its values.

Past experiences showed that for dealing with pandemics, endurance is the key. And individuals tend to obey health measures and restrictions better if they feel that they have a voice in the political affairs of the state⁸. Meaning that, over time, democracies have a better outcome given that their socio-political environment is constructed on trust and inclusion – characteristics ensured by its bottom-up decisional structure. Besides, Administrations must

⁵ *Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)*, Transparency International, 2019, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi>.

⁶ Francis Fukuyama, *The Pandemic and Political Order*, Foreign Affairs, July/August 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2020-06-09/pandemic-and-political-order>.

⁷ Shlomo Ben-Ami, *Why democracies are better at managing crises*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 20 May, 2020.

⁸ C. Marston, A. Renedo, S. Miles, *Community participation is crucial in a pandemic*, *The Lancet*, Vol 395, May 4 2020, pp 1676-1677.

also keep their head in the game for the recovery to go smoothly, and democracies have the best-suited instruments to incentivize its leaders to do so.

Since this type of political regime stand on transparency and gives individuals access to information, it gives voice to the most important observatory body, namely the society, which can pressure their government to act according to their interests. And they even have the right instruments to constrain and punish their unsuited actions or low level of effectiveness, as they have the power to elect their representatives and to organize riots.⁹

Moreover, democracy through its principle of solidarity will, for sure, accelerate the recovery process. Whether we talk about health services or economic aid, cooperation structures already in place will facilitate transfers of know-how and resources so to reach stability faster.

Therefore, given the past experiences and the above-presented features of democracy, it becomes clearer why “over time, democracies tend to suffer fewer deaths from epidemics and score better on health and human development indicators”¹⁰.

Still, COVID-19 implications vary from one state to another, as it made use of particular states’ structures and regimes vulnerabilities, putting a lot of strain on democracy. So, for liberal democracies to make use of all its potential advantages to adequately address the ongoing crisis in the long term, it is crucial to adopt actions taking into consideration that they have also to protect and harvest liberal-democratic values.

Until now, rigorous levels of restrictions were justified in almost every case given the impact of the virus upon human health, its

⁹ M. Angel, L. Otaola, *Democracy as truth: Why democracies are better at preventing pandemics*, International IDEA, 12 May, 2020, <https://www.idea.int/news-media/news/democracy-truth-why-democracies-are-better-preventing-pandemics>.

¹⁰ The Economist, *Diseases like covid-19 are deadlier in non-democracies*, 18 February 2020, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2020/02/18/diseases-like-covid-19-are-deadlier-in-non-democracies>.

rapid spread and the lack of an approved specific treatment. Yet, it is crucial for them to be somehow limited given that some of the measures can erode basic democratic liberties if they are transformed from emergency responses into policy, prolonging the measures indefinitely to facilitate the interests of the few.

And regretfully, such situations are expected to occur in states in which democracy has already suffered some regressions or in states where democracy is still a fragile concept¹¹. Here, political leaders are inclined to use the circumstances to ease their power grab through “emergency” policies that thwart principals endorsed by states’ constitution such as freedom of expression, fair elections, media independence, and equality and inclusion – through discrimination based on the untruthful association of pandemics with certain social categories or minorities.

Until April 14th, as the crisis spiraled, 47 countries have postponed elections as part of their contingency plan.¹² In most cases, the decision was justified and based on constitutional provisions that enabled them to enact such measures. But these types of decisions can prove to be dangerous for democracies if they are postponed for too long because leaders may use this timeframe to “silence” their opposition.

Yet, equally dangerous for fair elections could be Administrations’ excessive efforts to keep in place the electoral agenda, pushing for electoral special voting conditions that would facilitate result tampering. Also, in countries where leaders use social vulnerabilities in their favor, usually, media freedom is rarely respected, and therefore campaigning during lockdowns may prove to be exceedingly difficult for the opposition, as it deepens the already existing wide political gap. And we even have some cases in which the health crisis was not about human security, but political competition.

¹¹ A. Lührmann, A. B. Edgell, S. F. Maerz, *Pandemic Backsliding: Does Covid-19 Put Democracy at Risk?*, V-Dem Institute, Policy Brief, no 23, 2020.

¹² Katherine Ellena, *The Legal Quagmire of Postponing or Modifying Elections*, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 14 April 2020, <https://www.ifes.org/news/legal-quagmire-postponing-or-modifying-elections>.

Poland came as a beacon for the international arena as the state's presidential elections proved that states with doubtful values and norms as a direct result of democracy erosion can hardly come with real solutions in times of need, as the national-conservative, Christian democratic and right-wing populist party, known as Law and Justice (PiS), speculated state's current vulnerabilities to secure power. Yet, this was remotely surprising given that time made it clear for everyone, but polish society, that liberal democracy is no more Law and Justice party's true colour.

Even though democracy regression started right after the moment when Law and Justice came to rule the country as a result of Poland's "fervent need for reform", as their leaders put it, the current crisis has proved for certain that the measures taken by the Administration do not represent the interests of its society.

That is because, at the peak of COVID-19 induced crisis, the current Administration continued to reject the idea of postponing elections, despite the ever-increasing numbers, just because polls suggested that the President at that time and their appointed candidate for the ongoing Presidential elections, Andrej Duda, would have won by far.¹³

And their stance on the matter was so hard that, the party's leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, even "refused a declaration by the parliament for the state of national emergency, which would have automatically meant a postponement of the election by up to three months – as stipulated by the constitution"¹⁴.

However, as the situation became critical and the opposition's pressure on the administration has increased, lockdown had to be

¹³ Claudia Ciobanu, *Democracy Digest: Duda vs. Duda in polish elections*, Reporting Democracy, 10 April 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/04/17/democracy-digest-duda-vs-duda-in-polish-election/>

¹⁴ Marcin Zaborowski, *The Authoritarian Turn*, Visegrad Insight, 27 April 2020, <https://visegradinsight.eu/authoritarian-turn-presidential-election-poland/>

enacted and a state of emergency declared, meaning that elections had to be re-planned. So, on the verge of elections, PiS came with another disputed proposal to keep in place the election agenda, namely the postal vote, as another proof of their true colors.

According to the new regulation, the responsibility of organizing the poll and counting the votes would have been removed from the non-partisan judicial electoral committee and given to the Post Office – a state-owned company run by a party member who was until recently the state's Deputy Minister of Defense. Moreover, the entire postal voting process, as defined in the new law imposed by PiS, would have clearly violated the Constitution and several international standards recognized by EU and OSCE.

However, the proposal rapidly came to an end as the lack of capacity to organize such a procedure on short notice and the controversy around the subject, made it impossible for its advocates to put it into practice. Yet, this led to another not so “legal” but at least right answer for its society as party members came to understand that such a proposal was too bold even for them. So, Law and Justice party's leader unconstitutionally “annulled” the elections through a deal with the opposition party's leader.

However, it is not the unlawful procedure through which they solved the problem that came as a shock, but their boldness to come out in the open and announce in advance the Supreme Court's ruling as if the process was biased. And all these undemocratic moves, in just a month.

But this is not the sole example. In Ethiopia, elections were also postponed as the COVID-19 crisis evolved, allowing the current Prime-minister, Abiy Ahmed, and its Administration to prolong its incumbency, in an effort to ensure efficient guidance through the crisis. Yet, this has deepened the already existing tensions created by the absence of a precise new electoral agenda as the Council of Constitutional Inquiry only recommended for

the elections to be held nine to 12 months after the coronavirus is deemed not to be a public health concern.¹⁵

And, in the long run, this might turn to be dangerous for the fragile stability and slow evolution of democracy, as the country is still quite divided on ethnic grounds as identarian issues remained unsolved. Therefore, the recent evolutions may deteriorate as the opposition will use the situation to undermine the actual Administration. Until now, a few such attempts could have been observed. For example, the two main opposition parties in the state immediately declared the decision unlawful.

And, a top Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) member and House of Federation speaker, Keria Ibrahim, resigned as she felt that the measures were violating the constitution and they were upholding dictatorship.¹⁶ This was a mere reflection of the TPLF position on the matter, as the party started menacing the Government that will have its elections in the Tigray region, where Ethiopia's most influential ethnic groups are located.

Such threats on democracy were also encountered in Niger as "coronavirus-related disinformation has been used to disrupt electoral processes. The national electoral commission issued an official communication reporting that malign actors faked an announcement by electoral authorities that voter registration processes had been suspended in certain regions. This indicates that, even if organizers manage to take sufficient precautions to ensure the safety of elections, pandemic-related disinformation might still disrupt democratic processes"¹⁷.

¹⁵ AlJazeera, *Ethiopian parliament allows PM Abiy to stay in office beyond term*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/6/10/ethiopian-parliament-allows-pm-abiy-to-stay-in-office-beyond-term>.

¹⁶ Dawit Endeshaw, *Speaker of Ethiopia's upper House resigns after polls postponed*, Reuters, June 8, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-politics-idUSKBN23F2IN>

¹⁷ Fernanda Buril, Staffan Darnolf, *Low Voter Turnouts, Fear, Disinformation and Disrupted Supply Chains: How Election Commissions Are Unprepared for COVID-19*, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, March 27, 2020, <https://www.ifes.org/news/low-voter-turnouts-fear-disinformation-and-disrupted-supply-chains>

Besides, “less democratic” Governments acquainted with “unorthodox” practices or authoritarian leaders across the world, with no electoral agenda, have also used COVID-19 to ensure their dominance. As everyone was focused on the healthcare crisis, they launched attacks on the opposition to further suppress opposition parties through parliamentary power cut downs and opposition voices through actions aimed to silence journalists, activists and healthcare staff.¹⁸

In Hungary, as the Administrative body enacted a state of emergency, it passed several decrees and adopted the Authorization Act, to give the Government “enhanced powers to rule by decree, enabling it to bring forward, amend or withdraw legislation and amend the Hungarian Criminal Code to expand the definition of the crime of Scaremongering”¹⁹.

However, the details of this new policy transformed the initiative in an attack against media as now the legislation targets any malicious communications, adding more confusion about the laws which target freedom of expression and diminishes the space within which media and civil society can express their opinions free without facing penalties – which now are more punitive.

Also, several other countries used extreme measures against their political opponents. In Bangladesh, Thailand, Venezuela and Cambodia political “enemies” faced a lot of pressure and even detention.²⁰ In this category, however, Bolivia makes it right to the top, as the leaders passed a law through which “individuals who incite non-compliance with [that] decree or misinform or

¹⁸ Kenneth Roth, *How Authoritarians Are Exploiting the COVID-19 Crisis to Grab Power*, Human Rights Watch, April 3, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/03/how-authoritarians-are-exploiting-covid-19-crisis-grab-power>

¹⁹ Polyák Gábor Merte, *Hungary's Two Pandemics: COVID-19 and Attacks on Media Freedom*, European Center for Press and Media Freedom, Media Freedom Rapid Response, June, 2020, <https://www.ecpmf.eu/hungarys-two-pandemics-covid-19-and-attacks-on-media-freedom/>

²⁰ Kenneth Roth, *Op. cit.*

cause uncertainty to the population will be subject to criminal charges for crimes against public health”, ensuring up to 10 years of jail for its critics.²¹

In Russia, the state’s actions also targeted healthcare workers as several doctors invested in saving humans infected with the new virus, “suddenly” committed suicide after making “inappropriate” statements on state’s crisis management.²²

Moreover, COVID-19 induced crisis became also a “good” discrimination instrument as proved by India²³ and several Arab and EU states. Despite having “the best intentions”, leaders in these countries have in some cases indirectly and in others deliberately, harvested inequality as they attacked minorities and vulnerable groups. Therefore, Muslims became the main target in India, while refugees and asylum seekers (especially Syrians) became the aimed target for some Arab and EU states.

In some cases, minorities and vulnerable groups including the LGBT community were portrayed as a “source” of the disease. This was the case in Hungary where the first ones to be infected with COVID-19 were two workers from Afghanistan, who were used by the members of the Government as an explanatory reason for their position on EU migration policies.

An equally disturbing problem was the excessive use of force given that in certain states, security forces were given extensive roles in emergency measures enforcement to an extent that is for

²¹ Committee to Protect Journalists, *Bolivia enacts decree criminalizing ‘disinformation’ on COVID-19 outbreak*, April 9, 2020, <https://cpj.org/2020/04/bolivia-enacts-decree-criminalizing-disinformation/>

²² Mary Ilyushina, *Three Russian doctors fall from hospital windows, raising questions amid coronavirus pandemic*, Cable News Network, May 7, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/04/europe/russia-medical-workers-windows-intl/index.html>

²³ Meenakshi Ganguly, *India’s Steps to Contain Covid-19 Have Failed to Curb Anti-Muslim Rhetori: Discrimination Will Affect the Country’s Fight Against the Pandemic*, Human Rights Watch, April 18, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/18/indias-steps-contain-covid-19-have-failed-curb-anti-muslim-rhetoric>

certain condemnable. Yet, in almost all the cases, the situation was a mere reflection of states' leadership style and interests, as the story goes for the Philippines.

There, Rodrigo Duterte was already known for its violence as he reached an impressive death toll while fighting the battle widely known as the "war on drugs". However, time did not make it easier for us to understand how an elected president could come in front of its nation and "announce" that security forces are instructed to kill everyone who is not respecting the state's emergency provisions.²⁴

Yet, this was possible in the Philippines where the Administration seems to respond to all its major problems with gun fires, making it look like the Philippines leader uses instead of crisis management manuals, the books on war strategy to address the ongoing crisis.

Such cases were a lot more often encountered in Africa where, until the 4th of April, as showed by humans watch data, more people died due to police excessive violence than of infection with COVID-19 in Uganda, South Africa and Kenya.²⁵ However, Latin America is no exception as several states handled the situation in the same manner, enforcing military interventions that led to unlawful killings.

Serious concerns come also from states' economic activity during the crisis as states which have already lost their democratic integrity or were still constructing their identity as democracies tend to put forward the interest of the few, or of the "empowered" ones, leading to a big times corruption surge. And mainly, this happens just because the already corrupted ones speculate the system blindness as oversight procedures are partially frozen.

²⁴ Amnesty International, *Philippines: President Duterte gives "shoot to kill" order amid pandemic response*, April 2, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/04/philippines-president-duterte-shoot-to-kill-order-pandemic/>

²⁵ Isaac Mugabi, *COVID-19: Security forces in Africa brutalizing civilians under lockdown*, DW News, April 20, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/covid-19-security-forces-in-africa-brutalizing-civilians-under-lockdown/a-53192163>

Therefore, states guided by more authoritarian and less liberal values used healthcare simplified procurement procedures meant to ensure adequate supply in times of need, in their interests. Such cases were registered in Russia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bangladesh, Bolivia and Italy. However, the last two cases were the most outrageous as Bolivia's healthcare minister and Sicily crisis management leader were arrested on corruption grounds.²⁶

Also, important concerns arise from the intensive use of technology during lockdowns as everyone had to move its activity "online", including Administrations which started to use different techs to monitor or to facilitate public activity. But in several cases, this became a soft spot for espionage, cyber-attacks and inner unlawful surveillance, raising serious doubts on different states' agendas and their capacity to respect and protect individual's right to privacy in such circumstances. And here comes South Korea, Russia, Iran and China as examples to uphold the claim as their use of technology brought a lot of discussions.²⁷

All in all, what we can be sure of is that across the world, states have employed similar measures to cope with COVID-19 induced crisis. Yet, their impact was quite different as its implications were a mere representation of states' particular vulnerabilities and risks as a result of their political influences, leadership style, social integration and economic situation.

However, our research shows that it is not only liberal democracies that face challenges. But some of its particular "representations", as Administrations deviated from democratic values, imposing their "own type" of democracy. And exactly those particular changes distorted their regimes capacity to efficiently address the current crisis as their characteristics are usually inspired by authoritarian and illiberal regimes, disabling democratic instruments that are specifically created for such situations.

²⁶ Chelsea Dreher, Alexandra Brown, *COVID-19 Corruption: Key Risks to Democratic Institutions*, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, April 28, 2020, <https://www.ifes.org/news/covid-19-corruption-key-risks-democratic-institutions>

²⁷ Human Rights Watch, *COVID-19: A Human Rights Checklist*, April 14, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/14/covid-19-human-rights-checklist>

Therefore, real concerns come from hybrid systems as in such states democratic values are extremely fragile, and their capacity to uphold international values and ensure human security is doubtful. Especially now when the international arena is dealing with a spike in populism and illiberalism that pushes states to use this situation to further compress political space and nourish the existing trends. So, it is not surprising at all that illiberal-populist politicians in both autocracies and democracies have performed badly, as they not only refused to take factual evidence seriously, but they also used the emergency to nourish their nationalist narratives.²⁸

But despite all these negative implications and possible risks, democracy scored important points as it once more proved that it best deals with the crisis, as its mechanisms are adaptable and capable to come not only with answers that are efficient in the short-term, but also on the long-term.

Therefore, the first and most important feature of democracy is its response mechanism. In general, authoritarian, populist and illiberal states failed to come with a concrete and solid long-term solution and a normalization plan as they were more concerned with their looks and their immediate responses – which in almost all the cases were limited to restrictions.

But despite all our naïve hopes that the lockdown could have solved the problem, the crisis is still ongoing. So, for the virus to be eradicated, the entire world has to be cautious on a longer time, meaning that it needs a plan which not only determines individuals to further accept healthcare provisions but also re-adapts the world to work under conditions of distress as daily activities have to continue.

And here come states with tradition in democracy, especially the ones with a “competent state apparatus, a government that

²⁸ Richard Youngs, Elene Panchulidze, *Global Democracy & Covid-19: Upgrading international support*, European Endowment for Democracy, July 14, 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/07/14/global-democracy-and-covid-19-upgrading-international-support-pub-82297>

citizens trust and listen to, and effective leaders” (real democracies), and international organizations and NGOs that are the concrete result of liberal democracy. Not only that these “agents” have the perfect infrastructure to generate solid action plans, but it also disposes of significant emergency resources that can be accessed and used as needed (see EU action on the crisis²⁹).

Yet, this is possible only as long as liberal-democratic values are upheld as democratic states with good practices should be more able to efficiently impose restrictive provisions for a longer period of time. And this will be crucial as the ongoing crisis will generate even more problems in the long run if no concrete plan on how to handle the situation without locking down everyone is given. Especially now, when societies already have experienced it, making them believe that over-restrictive measures and lockdowns are far worse than the actual disease.

But is this exact feeling that in some cases have reanimated the civil society because when they were deprived of some basic rights and liberties, individuals realized how important they are. And this led to some major positive outcomes as increased civic engagement in decision-making processes (elections) and Government monitoring. Yet, this happened in countries where lately democratic pushbacks re-surfaced as the “online” shift gave the opposition sufficient power to voice its views and concerns. At the same time, it determined civic organizations to engage pro-actively in Governments’ monitorization, as did states from Western Balkans, Nigeria and Argentina³⁰.

“In addition to these new initiatives, many long-existing and more traditional NGOs have redirected their activities towards

²⁹ European Council, Council of the European Union, *COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/coronavirus/> and European Commission, *Coronavirus response*, https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response_en#:~:text=The%20European%20Commission%20is%20coordinating,impact%20in%20the%20European%20Union.&text=This%20is%20European%20solidarity%20at%20its%20best

³⁰ BIRD, *Digital Rights in the Time of COVID-19*, News Box, March 23, 2020, <https://bird.tools/mapping-digital-rights-during-coronavirus-outbreak/>

the emergency and gained a new lease of life by doing this. This has been the case, again, in relatively open cases like Brazil, India and Kenya as well as the most difficult contexts like Syria.”

As for civic engagement in decision making, we could take the example of Poland, where the turnout at Presidential elections hit an all-time record³¹ as the pro-democratic opposition regained its voice. And yes, it can be argued that much of this civic engagement is due to last year’s political evolution, but no one could dismiss the role played by the ongoing crisis.

In some states, societies helped by national civic groups finally found the power to give voice to their grievances, as Administrations’ reckless or lax measures became the last straw needed for them to act. This was the case in Egypt, and also some European countries.

An outstanding evolution could be observed also in the fight against disinformation. As everyone already knew how dangerous misinformation might be during a crisis, multiple international and local NGOs launched, right from the beginning dedicated force tasks to counter such outrageous attempts. Here a long list of international bodies should be mentioned for their promptitude and assertiveness as their work proved to be vital given that in some cases fake news could have over-exposed individuals to deadly risks.

Therefore, I would like to reinforce once again the importance of some of the most relevant forms that liberal-democracy have taken, as the EU, WHO, UNESCO and UN managed in times of need and despite all the restrictions to surpass its blockages and take mindful actions on short notice.

Yet, civil society creativity was the real surprise for the international arena, as it came with a novelty, now known as “online protests”. This brand-new way of manifesting social

³¹ Statista, *Final results of presidential election in the first and second round in Poland in 2020*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1129140/poland-presidential-election-results/>

disapproval, which of course is not the equivalent of street riots as they cannot have the same impact, managed to keep a leash on authoritarian and illiberal leaders as citizens made their voice heard.

So, as we look closer and closer, we come to understand that democracies have a lot to gain as their “reinforcement” leads to better crisis management and an effective and efficient approach to deal with the ongoing COVID-19 induced crisis. And, by far, any qualitative research would give liberal democracies a better chance in the long run, whereas quantitative studies are for now only misleading (depending on the variables used, may favor autocracies).

Bibliography:

- A. Lührmann, A. B. Edgell, S. F. Maerz, *Pandemic Backsliding: Does Covid-19 Put Democracy at Risk?*, V-Dem Institute, Policy Brief, no 23, 2020.
- Aarti Narsee, *Coronavirus and European Civil Society*, June 23, 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/06/23/coronavirus-and-european-civil-society-pub-82112>
- Alberto Alemanno, *Coronavirus and Europe's Incomplete Union*, June 23, 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/06/23/coronavirus-and-europe-s-incomplete-union-pub-82111>
- AlJazeera, *Ethiopian parliament allows PM Abiy to stay in office beyond term*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/6/10/ethiopian-parliament-allows-pm-abiy-to-stay-in-office-beyond-term>.
- Amnesty International, *Philippines: President Duterte gives “shoot to kill” order amid pandemic response*, April 2, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/04/philippines-president-duterte-shoot-to-kill-order-pandemic/>.
- Anna Lührmann, Amanda B. Edgell, Sandra Grahn, Jean Lachapelle, Seraphine F. Maerz, *Does the Coronavirus Endanger Democracy in Europe?*, June 23, 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/06/23/does-coronavirus-endanger-democracy-in-europe-pub-82110>
- Anna Lührmann, Sebastian Hellmeier, *Populism, Nationalism and Illiberalism: A Challenge for Democracy and Civil Society*, Heinrich Böll Foundatio, February, 2020.
- BIRD, *Digital Rights in the Time of COVID-19*, News Box, March 23, 2020, <https://bird.tools/mapping-digital-rights-during-coronavirus-outbreak/>

- C. Marston, A. Renedo, S. Miles, Community participation is crucial in a pandemic, *The Lancet*, Vol 395, May 4 2020.
- Carl Benedikt Frey, Giorgio Presidente, Chinchih Chen, Covid-19 and the future of democracy, May 20, 2020, <https://voxeu.org/article/covid-19-and-future-democracy>
- Chelsea Dreher, Alexandra Brown, COVID-19 Corruption: Key Risks to Democratic Institutions, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, April 28, 2020, <https://www.ifes.org/news/covid-19-corruption-key-risks-democratic-institutions>.
- Civic Engagement Index (CEI), OECD, Better Life Index, 2019, <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/civic-engagement/>.
- Claudia Ciobanu, Democracy Digest: Duda vs. Duda in polish elections, Reporting Democracy, April 10, 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/04/17/democracy-digest-duda-vs-duda-in-polish-election/>
- Committee to Protect Journalists, Bolivia enacts decree criminalizing 'disinformation' on COVID-19 outbreak, April 9, 2020, <https://cpj.org/2020/04/bolivia-enacts-decree-criminalizing-disinformation/>.
- Corruption Perceptions Index(CPI), Transparency International, 2019, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi>.
- Dawit Endeshaw, Speaker of Ethiopia's upper House resigns after polls postponed, Reuters, June 8, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-politics-idUSKBN23F2IN>.
- Democracy Reporting International, Democracy In Intensive Care 1 Thoughts On Political Participation And Democracy Support In The Context Of Covid-19, April 2020.
- Discrimination Will Affect the Country's Fight Against the Pandemic, Human Rights Watch, April 18, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/18/indias-steps-contain-covid-19-have-failed-curb-anti-muslim-rhetoric>.
- Dominique Mosi, The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation, and Hope are Reshaping the World, Anchor, June 1, 2020
- European Council, Council of the European Union, COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/coronavirus/> and European Commission, Coronavirus response, https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response_en#:~:text=The%20European%20Commission%20is%20coordinating,impact%20in%20th%20European%20Union.&text=This%20is%20European%20solidarity%20at%20its%20best.
- European Parliament, Coronavirus: a timeline of EU action, July 13, 2020, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20200424STO77802/coronavirus-a-timeline-of-eu-action>
- Fernanda Buril, Staffan Darnolf, Low Voter Turnouts, Fear, Disinformation and Disrupted Supply Chains: How Election Commissions Are Unprepared for COVID-19, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, March 27,

- 2020, <https://www.ifes.org/news/low-voter-turnouts-fear-disinformation-and-disrupted-supply-chains>.
- Francis Fukuyama, *The Pandemic and Political Order*, Foreign Affairs, July-August 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2020-06-09/pandemic-and-political-order>.
- Francis Z. Brown, *How Will the Coronavirus Reshape Democracy and Governance Globally?*, April 6, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/06/how-will-coronavirus-reshapedemocracy-and-governance-globally-pub-81470>
- Guy Verhofstadt, *Is Covid-19 Killing Democracy?*, May 18, 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/18/is-covid-19-killing-democracy/>
- HANS KUNDNANI, *Technocracy and Populism After the Coronavirus*, June 23, 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/06/23/technocracy-and-populism-after-coronavirus-pub-82113>
- Human Rights Watch, *COVID-19: A Human Rights Checklist*, April 14, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/14/covid-19-human-rights-checklist>.
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), *National Endowment for Democracy, Open Letter: A Call To Defend Democracy*, June 26, 2020, <https://www.idea.int/news-media/multimedia-reports/call-defend-democracy>.
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *Managing Elections during the COVID-19 Pandemic Considerations for Decision-makers*, Policy Brief, July 2020.
- Isaac Mugabi, *COVID-19: Security forces in Africa brutalizing civilians under lockdown*, DW News, April 20, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/covid-19-security-forces-in-africa-brutalizing-civilians-under-lockdown/a-53192163>.
- Israel Butler, *A Democratic Narrative for the Coronavirus*, June 23, 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/06/23/democratic-narrative-for-coronavirus-pub-82119>
- István Hegedűs, *Coronavirus and Democratic Erosion in Hungary*, June 23, 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/06/23/coronavirus-and-democratic-erosion-in-hungary-pub-82117>
- Jerry Lavery, *Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19 through Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) Assistance*, CEPPS, 14 April 2020, <https://www.ifes.org/publications/mitigating-impact-covid-19-through-democracy-human-rights-and-governance-assistance>.
- Johns Hopkins University, *COVID-19 Map – Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center*, 2020, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>
- Jonathan Murphy, *Parliaments and Crisis: Challenges and Innovations*, Inter Pares, EU Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2020.
- Katherine Ellena, *The Legal Quagmire of Postponing or Modifying Elections*, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 14 April 2020, <https://www.ifes.org/news/legal-quagmire-postponing-or-modifying-elections>.

- Kenneth Roth, How Authoritarians Are Exploiting the COVID-19 Crisis to Grab Power, Human Rights Watch, April 3, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/03/how-authoritarians-are-exploiting-covid-19-crisis-grab-power>.
- M. Angel, L. Otaola, Democracy as truth: Why democracies are better at preventing pandemics, International IDEA, 12 May, 2020, <https://www.idea.int/news-media/news/democracy-truth-why-democracies-are-better-preventing-pandemics>.
- Marcin Zaborowski, The Authoritarian Turn, Visegrad Insight, 27 April 2020, <https://visegradinsight.eu/authoritarian-turn-presidential-election-poland/>.
- Mary Ilyushina, Three Russian doctors fall from hospital windows, raising questions amid coronavirus pandemic, Cable News Network, May 7, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/04/europe/russia-medical-workers-windows-intl/index.html>.
- Meenakshi Ganguly, India's Steps to Contain Covid-19 Have Failed to Curb Anti-Muslim Rhetoric. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/18/indias-steps-contain-covid-19-have-failed-curb-anti-muslim-rhetoric>.
- Miguel Angel, Lara Otaola, Democracy as truth: Why democracies are better at preventing pandemics, International IDEA, May 12, 2020, <https://www.idea.int/news-media/news/democracy-truth-why-democracies-are-better-preventing-pandemics>.
- Nicos Alivizatos, Veronika Bálková, Iain Cameron, Oliver Kask, Kaarlo Tuori, Respect For Democracy, Human Rights And The Rule Of Law During States Of Emergency – Reflections, European Commission For Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission), May 26, 2020, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/belgrade/-/venice-commission-respect-for-democracy-human-rights-and-the-rule-of-law-during-states-of-emergency-reflections>.
- Ottavio Marzocchi, The Impact of Covid-19 Measures on Democracy, Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights in the EU, LIBE, EU Parliament, April 23, 2020, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_BRI\(2020\)651343](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_BRI(2020)651343).
- Paweł Marczewski, Poland's Democratic Slide During the Coronavirus, June 23, 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/06/23/poland-s-democratic-slide-during-coronavirus-pub-82118>.
- Petros Fassoulas, Democracy and the Coronavirus Infodemic, June 23, 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/06/23/democracy-and-coronavirus-infodemic-pub-82115>.
- Polyák Gábor Mertek, Hungary's Two Pandemics: COVID-19 and Attacks on Media Freedom, European Center for Press and Media Freedom, Media Freedom Rapid Response, June, 2020, <https://www.ecpmf.eu/hungarys-two-pandemics-covid-19-and-attacks-on-media-freedom/>.
- Richard Youngs, Democracy Is the Missing Link in EU Coronavirus Recovery Plans, May 13, 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/05/13/democracy-is-missing-link-in-eu-coronavirus-recovery-plans-pub-81821>.

- Richard Youngs, Elene Panchulidze, Global Democracy & Covid-19: Upgrading international support, European Endowment for Democracy, July 14, 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/07/14/global-democracy-and-covid-19-upgrading-international-support-pub-82297>.
- Richard Youngs, Elene Panchulidze, Global Democracy and COVID-19: Upgrading International Support, European Endowment for Democracy, The Carter Center, European Partnership for Democracy, European Network of Political Foundations, IFES, IRI, NDI, NED, Parliamentary Centre, WFD, July 15, 2020.
- Richard Youngs, Geopolitics and the Covid-19 pandemic: a distorted turn in EU external relations, Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, June 2020.
- Richard Youngs, How the Coronavirus Tests European Democracy, June 23, 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/06/23/how-coronavirus-tests-european-democracy-pub-82109>
- Satista, Final results of presidential election in the first and second round in Poland in 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1129140/poland-presidential-election-results/>
- Satista, Final results of presidential election in the first and second round in Poland in 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1129140/poland-presidential-election-results/>.
- Shlomo Ben-Ami, Why democracies are better at managing crises, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, May 20, 2020.
- Shlomo Ben-Ami, Why democracies are better at managing crises, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 20 May, 2020.
- Snežana Samardžić-Marković, A democratic governance response to COVID-19, CDDG, June 18, 2020.
- The Economist, Diseases like covid-19 are deadlier in non-democracies, February 18, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2020/02/18/disease> HYPERLINK “<https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2020/02/18/diseases-like-covid-19-are-deadlier-in-non-democracies>”s-like-covid-19-are-deadlier-in-non-democracies
- The Economist, Diseases like covid-19 are deadlier in non-democracies, 18 February 2020, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2020/02/18/diseases-like-covid-19-are-deadlier-in-non-democracies>
- The Global State of Democracy In Focus, *Populist government and democracy: An impact assessment using the Global State of Democracy Indices*, February 2020.
- Todd Landman, Luca Di Gennaro Splendore, Pandemic democracy: elections and COVID-19, Journal of Risk Research, May 23, 2020.

3. AUTHORITARIAN GOVERNMENTS IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

Trăistar Mihaela

Nowadays, humanity is facing one of the greatest challenges of the Century: the COVID-19 crisis. This has created a common global concern and a fight against an invisible enemy. Sars-CoV-2 is an infectious disease caused by a new coronavirus discovered in China in December 2019.

COVID-19 is a multifaceted issue. It touches all individuals, the foundations of the local and global community, calling for more synergy among them. But this is not the first challenge of this kind that our world faces.

Health crises have influenced the history of human beings and the world around them. Epidemic after epidemic swept the world, for at least 3.000 years. They have shaken and destroyed empires, changed demographics, altered climate, caused discriminations, more and more complex economic, financial, and political implications.

Humanity has undergone crises of different nature, but they all have something in common. A crisis seems inherent to human nature and development processes. All of them have influenced more layers of history, and indirectly us. But at the same time, each crisis has a defining context and features.

The Oxford dictionary defines a crisis as *“a time of great danger, difficulty, or confusion when problems must be solved or*

important decisions must be made”¹. This definition highlights two main aspects of a crisis. First, the crisis as a *de facto* situation or the result of a series of actions, events, or processes. Second, the crisis as a turning point when important decisions that address trigger factors are required. In the case of COVID-19, the spotlight goes on decision-making at both individual and collective levels.

The COVID-19 crisis carries with it the particularities of our time. What started in China has soon spread to the interconnected world. COVID-19 has built upon the existing inequalities and confrontations. Governments found themselves fighting a battle on more fronts when a health crisis became a social, economic, financial, and political one.

We see attacks to democracy and human rights, to multilateral mechanisms, the spread of deadly fake news, the shadow of an economic recession, the stop of migration, more poverty, less access to education, continuous and devastating conflicts. The consequences of a fail of preparedness, transparency, and reaction are still frightening.

The COVID-19 crisis has accentuated the rivalry between the major global players USA and China. If until the beginning of 2020 they were involved in a deep trade war, now – they are also engaged in a diplomatic conflict, accusing each other of making the new coronavirus.

China’s global image has been deeply affected by its association with COVID-19: “*Chinese virus*”, “*Wuhan virus*”, etc. For the European Union, China is a systemic rival and strategic competitor. Italy is an important stake in the new Chinese initiative to upgrade the old Silk Road through The Belt and Road Initiative.

Along with Greece, Italy has become China’s “*gateway*” to Europe and amid intensified connectivity between Rome and Beijing – Italy has also been COVID-19’s “*gateway*” to the EU. Currently, through a series of donations and aid to less developed

¹ Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/crisis.

countries, China is trying to create the image of a global donor, another kind of “*soft power*”.

While the world is trying to diminish and solve the COVID-19 pandemic, the difference between democratic and authoritarian rulers is getting more visible.

The democratic countries are often trying their best to overcome the crisis with the least harm on human life and economy while most of the authoritarian leaders are trying to obtain more power by using COVID-19 as an excuse, even as a tool. And the media is playing one of the main roles in this case, disseminating information to the people.

With the spread of the new coronavirus, we can see that it has influenced the field of both domestic and foreign policy of states and international and supranational organizations.

The new coronavirus has a substantial potential for the political destabilization of some states. That period proved to be fertile ground for populist leaders, who instigate hatred and division. The credibility of some political leaders is weakening.

You might now wonder what is going to happen with the fate of democracy and human rights. Let's look at a simple example. Back during the Middle Age, when the bubonic plague advanced across Europe, states have adopted extraordinary measures meant to deal with those extraordinary times, when more than 25 million Europeans were killed by the pandemic (in just four years).

The cost of these measures was people's rights. And it is happening again now. *“As many observers have begun to document, the pandemic is leading to a rapid expansion of executive power around the world, with potentially dramatic implications for democratic space.”*²

² Frances Z. Brown, “How Will the Coronavirus Reshape Democracy and Governance Globally?”, in *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/06/how-will-coronavirus-reshape-democracy-and-governance-globally-pub-81470>.

A lot of countries around the world have declared states of emergency,³ restricting citizens' rights (for example, the freedom of movement, of expression and media). Moreover, illiberal leaders are using the crisis as a tool to strengthen their position of power.

Last but not least, there is a high risk that states may use the pandemic as an excuse to restrict public gatherings (the real reason would be to slow down the wave of anti-government protests that have "*attacked*" the world politics over the last years).

The coronavirus pandemic and new restrictions have also been used as a tool to limit or even establish control over the press. States such as Egypt, China, Hungary, Brazil, have limited and restricted media agencies.

Egypt, for example, has withdrawn the credentials of Western reporters from The Guardian. China also cut off ties with Western correspondents and sent Americans journalists home.

The tension created by the COVID-19 pandemic has increased in the population and created a favorable environment for the creation of protests and mass riots.

One of the disastrous consequences of the current pandemic is the rise and consolidation of authoritarianism in many governments around the world. Will authoritarianism decrease when we return to the pre-pandemic situation?

With the proclamation of the state of emergency and measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus, authoritarian governments have taken advantage of these moments of crisis.

The most relevant example is that of Brazil, where leader Bolsonaro was unexpectedly caught in a video in which he expressed his anger over the impossibility of obtaining information from the police that compromised his family.

³ *Ibidem.*

He claimed that in order to protect his family, he would change all the cabinet ministers. The video is from a cabinet meeting. The Brazilian leader was trying to get involved illegally in a criminal investigation where his son is accused.

The video also captured the statements of the Minister of Environment, Ricardo Salles, calling on the government to push through further deregulation of environmental policy while people are distracted by the coronavirus pandemic: *“We need to make an effort while we are in this calm moment in terms of press coverage, because they are only talking about COVID-19, and push through and change all the rules and simplify norms”*.⁴

Brazil has recorded more than 100,000 deaths linked to COVID-19, the world’s second-highest figure, as the outbreak in the country shows no sign of easing.

The coronavirus pandemic has also affected Egypt’s already weakened democracy. In 2019, following amendments to the Egyptian constitution, the army became the supreme authority of the state.⁵

These changes removed the last “*shadow*” of Egypt’s democratic system. With the spread of the COVID-19 cases, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi used the “*new normal*” to further strengthen the army’s power through new amendments. These changes have led to the minimization of human rights, the right to protest and the freedom of expression.

Another state in which the leadership has benefited from the COVID-19 crisis is Georgia. For example, ruling party members have proposed a law restricting citizens’ rights and freedoms, not just during emergencies.

⁴ Associated Press in Rio de Janeiro, “Brazil: blow to Bolsonaro as judge orders release of expletive-ridden video”, in The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/22/bolsonaro-brazil-cabinet-video-court-judge>.

⁵ *** “The Alarming Message Of Egypt’s Constitutional Amendments”, in Transparency International, <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/the-alarming-message-of-egypts-constitutional-amendments>.

The Azerbaijani authorities also took advantage of the severe blockade measures to combat dissent.⁶

The areas where human rights and freedoms were thus marginalized are most affected by the adverse effects of the coronavirus pandemic and the authoritarian governments holding supreme power.

One such region is Central Asia, which is made up of five former Soviet republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan.

In the spring, Kazakhstan's leadership adopted and amended new laws regulating citizens' protests. The new changes came into force quickly and limited the duration, space and number of people who can participate in the protests.

The Senate of the Parliament of Kazakhstan has approved the draft laws on "*Procedure for the organization and regulation of peaceful assemblies in the Republic of Kazakhstan*" and "*Introduction of amendments and completions to some legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the procedure for the organization and regulation of peaceful assemblies in the Republic Kazakhstan*".⁷ The bill was quickly approved by the Majilis (Parliament of Kazakhstan) and presented to the Senate.

The new law on rallies is being criticized by experts and civil society. According to experts, the document significantly limits the right of citizens to peaceful rallies and the rights of journalists attending these public events. Many human rights activists have expressed dissatisfaction with the debate on this bill without their participation.

⁶ *** "Azerbaijan: Crackdown on Critics Amid Pandemic", in Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/16/azerbaijan-crackdown-critics-amid-pandemic>.

⁷ Almaz Kumenov, "Kazakhstan: President signs off on contentious rally law", in Eurasianet, <https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-president-signs-off-on-contentious-rally-law>.

It is important to mention that with the departure of Nursultan Nazarbayev, the first president, who has been in charge of the state for about 30 years and the inauguration of the new president Zhomart Toqayev, the country was faced by dozens of protests.

Kazakhstan's civil society is protesting against the state leader, Chinese investment, the repression of ethnic Kazakhstan in Xinjiang and the violation of the fundamental rights of citizens. With the spread of the new coronavirus in Kazakhstan, the ruling political class took advantage, adopting laws that drastically limit human rights.

More widely, there has been a gradual loss of public trust in Central Asian governments' competence in recent years, resulting from weak policy implementation capacity, rampant corruption, and limited citizen engagement.⁸

Another Central Asian republic in which the situation is worsening day by day is Turkmenistan. It is one of the only states to claim that there is no COVID-19 in its territory.

Turkmenistan has one of the most authoritarian governments in the world and is called the "*North Korea of Central Asia*."

Although the state borders neighboring countries with a huge number of cases of infection, the Ashgabat authorities continue to insist that there are no cases of COVID-19 infections in the country.

In this context, international experts warn of an impending crisis. A WHO mission came in July to verify the accuracy of the information. This mission was hardly accepted by the Turkmen authorities, delayed and postponed as long as possible.

Authorities in Turkmenistan have reportedly evacuated hundreds of people detained in quarantine areas, which could be an attempt to

⁸ Saltanat Janenova, "*The Palgrave Handbook of the Public Servant*", Palgrave Macmillan-Cham, pp. 1-19.

hide suspicious cases of the new coronavirus ahead of a visit by experts from the World Health Organization.

Over the past decade, the Turkmen authorities, especially their leader Gubarguly Berdimuhamedov, have promoted Turkmenistan's advantageous geostrategic and geopolitical position, which would be a crossroads of the Eurasian continent, trying to claim that the country is a trade “*hub*” for goods shipped from east to west and from north to south.

Berdimuhamedov is supposed to have even written a book, in which he addressed this subject – “*Turkmenistan – the heart of the Great Silk Road.*” If this is true, then how did this state at the “*intersection of roads*” manage to avoid coronavirus, something that has affected every country to its north, south, east and west?

In this context, the authoritarian governments in the former Soviet bloc have responded to the pandemic by reinforcing their grip on power even further, temporary measures introduced during the emergency, such as harsh legislative measures and new surveillance tools, are likely to remain a permanent feature of the new normal.⁹

The European Union has also been marked by the political abuse of populist leaders. In Hungary, even though the power of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to govern by decree seems to end, the actions to undermine the rule of law continue.

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has secured a legal mandate to rule by decree without any type of parliamentary oversight – named the “*Draft Law on Protecting Against Coronavirus.*”¹⁰ The bill's vast powers included the right to punish anyone who spread “distorted truths” or broke quarantine orders. Although

⁹ Clint Witchalls, “*How Central Asia's authoritarian regimes have used coronavirus to their advantage*”, in The Conversation, <https://theconversation.com/how-central-asias-authoritarian-regimes-have-used-coronavirus-to-their-advantage-138498>.

¹⁰ Elisabeth Zerofsky, “*How Viktor Orbán Used the Coronavirus to Seize More Power*”, in The New Yorker, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-europe/how-viktor-orban-used-the-coronavirus-to-seize-more-power>.

the act has a 90-day sunset clause, Orbán has already used the powers to make it illegal for transgender individuals to alter their birth records, hardly a public health priority.¹¹

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, for example, has suspended courts as he faces corruption charges, and when a parliamentary ally cited the crisis as the grounds for refusing a vote on the Knesset speaker, a move that would oust Netanyahu, the Israeli Supreme Court said the postponement would “undermine the foundations of the democratic process.”¹²

There have also been crackdowns on pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong in recent months. Protesters and civil society in Hong Kong claimed that the Chinese authorities used the serious situation with coronavirus to restrict protests and suppress freedoms.¹³

In the southern African states, the authorities have used the “COVID-19 tool,” to limit and control free news agencies. For example, in the Eswatini kingdom of southern Africa, journalists who criticized the crisis management by the authorities were harassed by the police.¹⁴

Madagascar too has seen journalists arrested for criticizing the government’s response to the crisis, which has included the promotion of an herbal cure for COVID-19.¹⁵

¹¹ Shaun Walker, “Hungary seeks to end legal recognition of trans people amid Covid-19 crisis”, in The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/02/hungary-to-end-legal-recognition-of-trans-people-amid-covid-19-crisis>.

¹² Umut Uras and Farah Najjar, “Global coronavirus cases exceed 25 million: Live news”, in Aljazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/08/brazil-coronavirus-deaths-surpass-120000-live-updates-200829232301925.html>.

¹³ Mary Hui, “While the world wasn’t looking, Beijing re-wrote the rules in Hong Kong at startling speed”, in Quartz, <https://qz.com/1857362/china-re-wrote-the-rules-in-hong-kong-amid-coronavirus-pandemic/>.

¹⁴ *** “Eswatini: News website persecuted for criticizing King Mswati”, in Reporters without Borders, <https://rsf.org/en/news/eswatini-news-website-persecuted-criticizing-king-mswati>.

¹⁵ *** “Madagascar journalist Arphine Helisoa jailed on false news, incitement allegation”, in Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/2020/04/madagascar-journalist-arphine-helisoa-jailed-on-fa/>.

In states where authoritarianism is on the rise and authoritarian governments are becoming more entrenched, there is little room for the free press and human rights activists to help improve society.

Therefore, international and multilateral organizations, such as Transparency International, European Commission and European Council, the Organization of American States, the G20, the Southern African Development Community, International Monetary Fund, and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development should contribute to the maintenance and observance of human rights and freedoms and to the observation of states where corruption and the rule of law thrive and develop.

An extremely important aspect is that in the fight against the virus by imposing a series of restrictions, democratic governments have implemented methods that authoritarian governments used even before the pandemic.

Thus, the greatest risk is the continued maintenance of restrictions that could violate human rights and freedoms, and reduce democracy. The tools that were used during the state of emergency and during the period when the cases of infection were at their peak can remain in the post-pandemic period, becoming permanent.

Authoritarian governments have taken full advantage of the spread of the virus and the worsening of the pandemic. Human rights, even if limited in an authoritarian state, have continued to be limited and even repressed for the “*official*” purpose of ensuring public safety.

Thus, both authoritarian and less authoritarian political systems have become pragmatic in implementing certain strategies and tactics for their benefit. The vulnerable point was that the citizens were willing to comply with all the restrictions imposed to defeat the virus.

They have been and continue to be willing to sacrifice, to a certain extent, both their rights and their freedom to ensure the

common good. Many measures that have been taken, and many of those that will be taken, are temporary and necessary to fight the virus.

Today, humanity is in its most favorable and evolved period. The digital age and the accelerated development of all technologies have made it possible to improve and raise the standard of living of all people.

Technology has also come as a helpful tool in limiting and stopping the spread of the virus. Thus, the ability of technology to locate, track, and prevent the spread of coronavirus has come as a first advantage as opposed to pandemics in previous centuries.

Most people on the planet are digitally connected, they have a mobile phone from which you can identify data about their location, home and places where they interact with other people.

Advanced interconnectivity in the 21st century has a number of advantages that significantly improve people's lives. At the same time, the easy identification of personal data is also a disadvantage that can lead to the invasion of personal space and citizens' rights.

Google recently launched a COVID-19 kit that can identify the movements and history of individuals' locations. In this way, governments can more easily identify locations where people can transmit or catch the virus.

Although it seems an exaggeration and a violation of personal life, the application does not store and does not seek to collect other personal data of each citizen. In this way, Google excludes the possibility of tracking the individual in society at the micro-level.

Several states have resorted to the help of technology to identify the locations and interactions of people who have been detected with the new coronavirus. One such example is South Korea.

The government has initiated a comprehensive process to track the movements of those who have tested positive. They publicly displayed the location data of the people, in order to identify the other citizens who could have come in contact with the person tested positive, but also to limit the movement of the citizens in those locations.

In a short time, the example of South Korea was followed by several countries such as Singapore, China and other states in the region.

A system of health codes has emerged in China that identifies each individual with one of three colors: red (severe), yellow (self-isolation), and green. To have access to public places, such as the subway, central markets and even the workplace, it was mandatory to have the color green. Once you received the red color, the police immediately received the address where you are.

The application has been implemented in over 200 cities in China, and the mechanisms by which it works are not known to the general public. Unlike the application developed by Google, it can also identify the specific location of each individual.

Ant Financial, a sister company of the e-commerce corporation Alibaba, developed the app in Hangzhou with the support of the local government and police: the degree of collaboration between the Chinese tech giant and the Chinese Communist Party is unprecedented, although Ant Financial says that all those involved with the data adhere to security and privacy regulation, each time a user scans the app, their location is sent to the app's servers, which are controlled by the central government.¹⁶

According to Maya Wang, a Human Rights Watch affiliate, China often uses major events *"to introduce new monitoring tools that outlast their original purpose."*¹⁷

¹⁶ Andy Wang, "Authoritarianism in the Time of COVID", in HIR, <https://hir.harvard.edu/covid-authoritarianism/>.

¹⁷ Min Joo Kim and Simon Denyer, "A 'travel log' of the times in South Korea: Mapping the movements of coronavirus carriers", in The Washington Post, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/coronavirus-south-korea-tracking-apps/2020/03/13/2bed568e-5fac-11ea-ac50-18701e14e06d_story.html.

In times like these, transparency matters more than ever. In order to save lives and contain the Coronavirus, many countries are imposing limits on public life and declaring states of emergency to speed up decision-making and the allocation of resources.

However, the concentration of power should not lead to its abuse. It's vital that emergency power is exercised only for the purpose for which they were granted. We must remain vigilant against threats to freedoms and justice in our societies during these extraordinary times.

There are many risks and dangers that authoritarian governments bring and intensify during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The only certainty we have left is that the world after COVID-19 will be different from what it was before the pandemic. And the most important thing is that the tools seen as solutions during the pandemic do not become weapons for governments and authoritarian despots in the post-pandemic period.

The COVID-19 crisis has taught us the importance of honest leadership with a long term vision which translates into policies oriented towards prevention, resilience, and early actions.

In the future, to avoid a similar crisis we should scale up foresight (for example through more cooperation with scientists and academia) and develop an integrated risk assessment and management system. This has to be synchronized globally and implemented locally.

The importance of the latter was demonstrated by how decentralization helped governments to better manage the COVID-19 crisis.

Better governance also means the prioritization of social needs and the development of more social protection programs. To quote a representative of the World Economic Forum: *A virus*

has taken away the luxury of planning. We can no longer wait for the right moment to time such reforms, but we can still make sure they are the right ones.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said the world economy would shrink at its fastest pace in decades, raising fears it will be the worst recession since the 1930s Great Depression.

What will the post-crisis crisis look like? The IMF called the crisis COVID-19 – “*the great closure*”. The potential for an economic crisis, post-crisis COVID19 is imminent. It is important that each state develops a strategy and an economic recovery plan directly proportional to the resources at its disposal.

At the same time, if each state pursues its interest – we will have huge economic chaos. The poorest countries have all the prerequisites to collapse, and viable solutions would be financial support from developed countries and financial organizations from Bretton Woods, increasing partnerships and strengthening trade relations.

From a social point of view, development cleavages could deepen, so a fair social policy is needed to support vulnerable social strata. COVID-19 has shown that a person's life is extremely fragile.

This period must teach us to be better with ourselves, more humble. I believe that we can overcome this challenge only through solidarity, generosity, and despite all fears to cooperate with each other.

However, I do not think that there can be a change of mentality in a few months, so it would be good to start from ourselves: to think globally, but to act locally. Let's learn the art of living in times of crisis.

I believe with certainty that in this period, the states, more than ever, must cooperate, only in this way will they be able to defeat the invisible enemy.

The concrete tools for cooperation may be information, exchange of experience, the pursuit of common interest, alignment at the regional or even global level.

Citizens' initiatives spread immediately solidarity while political actors were still uncertain of how to react to the virus. When the world shut down, these initiatives crossed unexpected borders.

When the fragility of international bodies and cooperation became evident, its demand was stronger than ever. Soon the sentence "*crises know no borders*" became a motto for international solidarity. Covid-19 did not break the system, it exposed a broken system.

One might think now that there is no light at the end of this tunnel. However, I would argue that despite all the challenges, the ultimate choice on how we want to model our democracies remains up to us as societies.

The COVID-19 outbreak is not a threat to the rule of law and human rights – it is more of a test. Citizens continue to play an essential role in controlling the movements of political leaders, every form of action is more than welcomed.

*"Civil society groups mobilizing responses on the front lines of the pandemic may actually reinforce democratic vitality at the local level."*¹⁸ Thus, it is our common shared responsibility to find the means to overcome the challenges that our democracies might face and to always keep in mind that *"every challenge provides that light – a greater depth of understanding about life and truth"*.

The truth is that we are at a crossroads, both domestically and internationally. I certainly believe that the pandemic should not be a tool for populist leaders or those with electoral ambitions.

¹⁸ Carlota Pérez, "*Democracy in times of coronavirus*", in Atalayar, <https://atalayar.com/en/content/democracy-times-coronavirus>.

Global solidarity and collaboration is the best way for political actors to fight the invisible enemy. That period reveals that we should not focus on what makes us different, but on the factors that make us cooperate regardless of nationality, ethnicity, skin color, or political orientation.

I hope that we will be able to start a new period without populism, nationalism, but with global cohesion. Although it may seem like a *cliché*, it is certain that “*in the middle of every crisis there is a great opportunity*.”

The first glimpse of light appeared when we have witnessed an increasing level of global solidarity. “*The COVID-19 outbreak has exposed humanity’s vulnerability, but at the same time it has reinforced the need for cooperation – both within and between states,*”¹⁹ writes Richard Sakwa, Professor of Russian and European Politics at the University of Kent.

As far as I am concerned, I believe that a pandemic is a major catalyst for global solidarity. Despite some forms of competition for scarce medical resources and protective clothing, we have seen major cases of international support.

How would the post-COVID world look like? It is a world that has learned its lessons and knows from where to start building its new normality. It is a world that emerges from the lock-down with different perspectives. But it walks in solidarity towards the same goals, with strong and coordinated leadership at every level that keeps it united.

Bibliography:

*** “Azerbaijan: Crackdown on Critics Amid Pandemic”, in Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/16/azerbaijan-crackdown-critics-amid-pandemic>, 2020.

¹⁹ Richard Sakwa, “*Normality: Coronavirus And State Transformation*”, in Russia in Global Affairs, <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/normality-coronavirus/>.

- *** “Eswatini: News website persecuted for criticizing King Mswati”, in Reporters without Borders, <https://rsf.org/en/news/eswatini-news-website-persecuted-criticizing-king-mswati>, 2020.
- *** “Madagascar journalist Arphine Helisoa jailed on false news, incitement allegation”, in Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/2020/04/madagascar-journalist-arphine-helisoa-jailed-on-fa/>, 2020.
- *** “The Alarming Message Of Egypt’s Constitutional Amendments”, in Transparency International, <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/the-alarming-message-of-egypts-constitutional-amendments>, 2020.
- Almaz Kumenov, “Kazakhstan: President signs off on contentious rally law”, in Eurasianet, <https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-president-signs-off-on-contentious-rally-law>, 2020.
- Andy Wang, “Authoritarianism in the Time of COVID”, in HIR, <https://hir.harvard.edu/covid-authoritarianism/>, 2020.
- Associated Press in Rio de Janeiro, “Brazil: blow to Bolsonaro as judge orders release of expletive-ridden video”, in The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/22/bolsonaro-brazil-cabinet-video-court-judge>, 2020.
- Carlota Pérez, “Democracy in times of coronavirus”, in Atalayar, <https://atalayar.com/en/content/democracy-times-coronavirus>, 2020.
- Clint Witchalls, “How Central Asia’s authoritarian regimes have used coronavirus to their advantage”, in The Conversation, <https://theconversation.com/how-central-asias-authoritarian-regimes-have-used-coronavirus-to-their-advantage-138498>, 2020.
- Elisabeth Zerofsky, “How Viktor Orbán Used the Coronavirus to Seize More Power”, in The New Yorker, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-europe/how-viktor-orban-used-the-coronavirus-to-seize-more-power>, 2020.
- Frances Z. Brown, “How Will the Coronavirus Reshape Democracy and Governance Globally?”, in Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/06/how-will-coronavirus-reshape-democracy-and-governance-globally-pub-81470>, 2020.
- Mary Hui, “While the world wasn’t looking, Beijing re-wrote the rules in Hong Kong at startling speed”, in Quartz, <https://qz.com/1857362/china-re-wrote-the-rules-in-hong-kong-amid-coronavirus-pandemic/>, 2020.
- Min Joo Kim and Simon Denyer, “A ‘travel log’ of the times in South Korea: Mapping the movements of coronavirus carriers”, in The Washington Post, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/coronavirus-south-korea-tracking-apps/2020/03/13/2bed568e-5fac-11ea-ac50-18701e14e06d_story.html, 2020.

Richard Sakwa, “Normality: Coronavirus And State Transformation”, in *Russia in Global Affairs*, <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/normality-coronavirus/>, 2020.

Saltanat Janenova, “The Palgrave Handbook of the Public Servant”, Palgrave Macmillan-Cham, 2020.

Shaun Walker, “Hungary seeks to end legal recognition of trans people amid Covid-19 crisis”, in *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/02/hungary-to-end-legal-recognition-of-trans-people-amid-covid-19-crisis>, 2020;

Umut Uras and Farah Najjar, “Global coronavirus cases exceed 25 million: Live news”, in *Aljazeera*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/08/brazil-coronavirus-deaths-surpass-120000-live-updates-200829232301925.html>, 2020.

4. THE IMPACT OF THE COVID PANDEMIC ON THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

Alexandru Voicu

The world finds itself thrown into one of the biggest crises in the last decades, with profound effects, both at a social and an economic level, causing anxiety around the citizenry of every country, people fearing for their future as the Covid-19 pandemic brought about the biggest economic disruptions of our times. This public health crisis has required countries to take a series of restrictions to stop the spread of the virus and the aftermath that ensued in this context brought about a severe reduction in economic activity, causing deep recessions in many of the most advanced economies on this globe.

According to the latest World Bank report on the outlook of this situation, “with advanced economies contracting, China experiencing record-low growth, and EMDE growth savaged by external and domestic headwinds, the global economy is expected to shrink by 5.2 percent this year in a baseline forecast. This would be the deepest global recession since World War II, and almost three times as steep as the 2009 global recession”¹. The outlook is uncertain and bleak, primary because of the measures that may have to continue to be taken in order to stop the spread of the virus, which remains in full gear throughout the world and it can be seen in the case of the USA and its resurgence in countries in Europe after most severe restrictions had been lifted.

¹ The World Bank, *Global Economic Prospects*, June 2020, p. 5.

The UN's Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to the COVID 19 Crisis² warns about the dire effects that this pandemic will have on societies, attacking them at their core by increasing social anxiety and economic hardships. Nonetheless, countries are starting to reopen after the severe initial shock of the pandemic and crafting a path forward and the countries of Europe, for example, are now going through this and are focusing on relaxing physical distancing in stages, tracking the spread of the disease better through improved testing and contact tracing and putting in place social and economic policies to support the transition from this pandemic stricken times to those when a vaccine will have appeared.

Each country is taking a different approach, some being more cautious than others. For example, France and Spain are taking a similar approach in the sense that they are imposing different level of restrictions on each region in their country, according to the severity in those places, trying to open their countries again to economic activity, while also clamping down on the hot spots that continue to rise of the number of COVID cases in each country.³ Nonetheless, the future is uncertain because of the pandemic itself and the way it continues to prove to be a serious challenge to all the governments around the world.

In April, when talks in Europe about reopening were starting to turn into reality, German chancellor, Angela Merkel, was warning about the fragility of Germany's early success against the coronavirus, saying that "this interim result is fragile. We are on thin ice, one could even say on thinnest ice"⁴. Other world leaders have taken on this message as well, and the current situation where countries are seeing resurgences of cases and are

² United Nations, *A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to Covid-19*, available at <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/UN-framework-for-the-immediate-socio-economic-response-to-COVID-19.pdf>.

³ World Health Organization, *Health System Response Monitor*, available at <https://www.covid19healthsystem.org/searchandcompare.aspx>.

⁴ CNN, *Merkel warns Germany is on the 'thinnest ice' as Europe realizes social distancing is here to stay*, April 23, 2020, available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/23/europe/merkel-coronavirus-social-distancing-europe-intl/index.html>.

forced to reimpose wide restrictions on citizen's everyday life are a proof of this volatile state that we find ourselves in.⁵

Nonetheless, while now countries are trying to craft a path forward for themselves, their response has been met with a lot of severe criticism considering the stress test that it had represented for the human rights and the rule of law in these democracies. According to a report by Democracy Reporting International, the emergency state that each European country had placed itself in and the series of decrees that followed place limits on the state of human rights, disseminating the troubling legality in which they found themselves in, but also the corrections that were added later to fix the legal shortcomings.⁶

However, one particular case discussed in this report is the one represented by Hungary, a particular topic brought into the public view during the negotiations for the economic rescue plan drawn up by the EU and the subsequent talks for the allocation of funds.⁷ According to the report, “while the initial emergency response in Hungary was limited to a 14-day period, Parliament then passed a law that allows the government to suspend existing laws, adjust their implementation and – the only country in the EU to do so – adopted new legislation that criminalizes speech about the pandemic. Statements that may distort the truth and spread panic can now be punished with prison sentences of up to three years”⁸.

Using emergency powers that the prim-minister gave himself in the context of the COVID pandemic, the government in

⁵ France24, *United States, Europe battle resurgence of Covid-19 cases*, 26 June 2020, available at <https://www.france24.com/en/20200626-united-states-europe-battle-fresh-covid-19-surges>.

⁶ Democracy Reporting International, *The rule of law stress test. EU members states' responses to covid-19*, May 2020, available at <https://democracy-reporting.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-BP-Rule-of-Law-Stress-Test-FINAL.pdf>.

⁷ Euronews, *Hungary claims victory in EU recovery fund talks*, 20 July 2020, available at <https://www.euronews.com/2020/07/22/hungary-claims-victory-in-eu-recovery-fund-talks>.

⁸ *Democracy Reporting International*, p. 1.

Budapest withdrew financial resources from local administrations and placed important state companies under partial military supervision while questions at government press conferences have been preselected and censored, pro-government public television tightly enforcing control over the information about the pandemic.⁹ This has led up to a worrying situation about the erosion of democracy in Hungary, Freedom House changing officially the status of Hungary's democratic status to a hybrid regime, the first of its kind in the EU.¹⁰

The EU has been facing for years the populism which grew up and gain strength from challenges such as the 2008 economic crisis or the refugees coming from the Middle East, political extremism who argues for simple solutions becoming more and more notorious across Europe and the globe, governments like those in Hungary and Poland, solidifying their ground and using these types of crises to advance their interests. However, around the globe, regimes in developing countries or authoritarian regimes are handling the pandemic in such a way that strengthens their power and quells dissent. I would like to highlight here the case of China and its way of handling the beginning of the spread of the virus inside its country, showcasing the capabilities that it has developed over the years as a police state.

Throughout these months, China has been trying to present itself as the champion against the COVID pandemic. While governments in the West were under increasing pressure to stop the spread of the virus and to find a solution to the increasingly visible economic problems, China took the opportunity to try to change the narrative around the coronavirus and its efforts to fight it, both domestically and internationally. At the forefront, there is China's "mask diplomacy," representing the assistance provided by China to states currently facing the coronavirus pandemic.¹¹

⁹ ISTVÁN HEGEDÛS, *Coronavirus and Democratic Erosion in Hungary*, Carnegie Europe, available at <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/06/23/coronavirus-and-democratic-erosion-in-hungary-pub-82117>.

¹⁰ Freedom House, *Nations in transit 2020*, available at <https://freedomhouse.org/country/hungary/nations-transit/2020>.

¹¹ Alicia Chen, Vanessa Molter, *Mask Diplomacy: Chinese Narratives in the COVID Era*, June 16 2020, available at <https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/covid-mask-diplomacy>.

Firstly, this type of effort focuses on the distribution and provision of important resources in the context provided by the pandemic, such as medical assistance, equipment, and consumables, as a means of securing support from the masses and elites from the countries where these resources are being sent to. Secondly, this process plays an important role in creating long-term relationships in which other countries turn to depend on China in regards to certain supply chains.

“China is very close to a victory against the pandemic, and we should not hesitate to say that the health crisis is almost over in China. This is like a miracle, which China accomplished cautiously where most of the world struggled against the coronavirus. It was indeed the result of strong determination from leadership and collective efforts from different sectors. China has not only succeeded to convey a message to the world of victory over the pandemic but has also proved itself a true champion in this fight”¹². This was written in a China Daily article in May 2020 and it echoes the official declarations given by different Chinese officials.

Nonetheless, this rings hollow when faced with the reality of when the virus first spread out in China. Doctor Li Wenliang attracted global attention after being chastised by various Chinese authorities for his role in spreading ‘false rumors’ about the spread of coronavirus. Li Wenliang, who was forced by law enforcement to sign a document promising not to continue his actions, died as a result of the disease he had warned people about. He was not alone, and many other doctors and medical experts in Wuhan were reprimanded for their role in spreading information about the new coronavirus before it was politically approved.¹³

¹² China Daily, *China: Champion of coronavirus fight*, 12 May, 2020, available at <http://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202005/02/WS5eace540a310a8b241153332.html>.

¹³ Shannon Tiezzi, *Wuhan Whistleblower Doctor Dies of Coronavirus*, The Diplomat, February 7, available at <https://thediplomat.com/2020/02/wuhan-whistleblower-doctor-dies-of-coronavirus/>.

Chinese officials have been claiming that the COVID pandemic inside Chinese territory has been brought under control but won't allow independent verification. Besides expelling foreign journalists, Chinese authorities have also been detaining independent Chinese reporters who ventured to Wuhan.¹⁴

Tight control over the media is a hallmark of the communist regime in Beijing and recently, on May 7, Citizen Lab, a Toronto-based research lab published an intensive analysis¹⁵ on how WeChat is being used by the Chinese government to assert influence over the flow of information in the country, more specifically about how it conducts surveillance of images and files shared on the platform and how it uses the monitored content to train censorship algorithms, one of the most important instruments during the lockdown period in Wuhan and the overall fight against the COVID pandemic.

One such particular case is exactly the case mentioned above, that of doctor Li Wenliang. From when Hubei province admitted its first coronavirus-infected patient in early December, the local government had tried to limit the information flow. Doctor Li Wenliang was one that tried to break this control. Upon the aftermath of his death, the government tried to block social media posts that were mentioning his name or were blaming the Chinese government for his death and the recurring situation going on in China, where the pandemic was gaining steam.¹⁶

Alongside this, China's already famous facial recognition system, which is a part of the everyday life of Chinese citizens,

¹⁴ Rosie Perper, *A 4th Chinese citizen journalist was reportedly detained after livestreaming what life was like in Wuhan at the height of its coronavirus outbreak*, Business Insider, May 19, 2020, available at <https://www.businessinsider.com/zhang-zhan-fourth-chinese-journalist-arrested-for-livestreaming-in-wuhan-2020-5>.

¹⁵ Jeffrey Knockel, Christopher Parsons, Lotus Ruan, Ruohan Xiong, Jedidiah Crandall, and Ron Deibert, *WE CHAT, THEY WATCH*, Citizen Lab report, May 7 2020, available at <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/101395/1/Report%2023127—wechattheywatch-web.pdf>.

¹⁶ Shawn Yuan, *Grief, anger in China as doctor who warned about coronavirus dies*, Al Jazeera, February 7, 2020, available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/chinese-doctor-sounded-alarm-wuhan-coronavirus-dies-200207004935274.html>.

has been well integrated to work as the main instrument in handling the epidemic. Facial recognition and surveillance have quickly spread in China as the Chinese government prioritizes public security, promotes the development of artificial intelligence (AI), and works to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Leading facial recognition and surveillance companies including Hikivison, Dahua, iFlytek, SenseTime, and most recently Jiadu Technology, which have been asked for assistance to advance AI technologies with applications advancing facial recognition and surveillance as part of China's "National AI Team".¹⁷ In China, facial recognition cameras have been equipped with AI-enabled body temperature detection technology to prevent people who may be infected with COVID-19 from traveling.

This bears the images of the restrictions and privacy invasion instruments operated by the CCP in Xinjiang, which has turned into an experimental ground for the use of intrusive mechanisms on the population. The Orwellian regime became so intrusive that the life of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang has become one of survival. The autonomous region is dotted with points of control, police stations, and security cameras. According to the situation report from Xinjiang published by Human Rights Watch (HRW) in September 2018, the Chinese authorities are monitoring members of the Uighur ethnic minority, installing scannable QR codes on the front doors of their homes. These contain their personal information and Chinese officials scan it every few days to constantly check how many people live in that house.¹⁸

According to the report, the checkpoints are extended throughout the region and are equipped with face recognition cameras. They examine people and vehicles on roads in residential areas and at any point where crowds might gather, such as bus

¹⁷ Meng Jing, Sarah Dai, *China recruits Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent to AI 'national team'*, South China Morning Post, November 21, 2017, available <https://www.scmp.com/tech/china-tech/article/2120913/china-recruits-baidu-alibaba-and-tencent-ai-national-team>.

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, *China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims*, September 2018, available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs>.

stops, train stations, entry points into towns and villages, hotels, restaurants and markets. Examples of this type are extremely numerous. Uighurs are often visited by Chinese officers to have their houses checked for religious literature and religious paintings or pictures. They must also keep a detailed report in which they note the visits they have had, whether friends, relatives or neighbors, and the content of the conversations.

Xinjiang authorities perform a mandatory mass collection of biometric data, such as voice or DNA samples, and use Big Data systems to identify and track Xinjiang residents. They function as a filter system, choosing people with certain behaviors or characteristics that they consider to be a potential threat to the CCP's authority. These systems allowed the authorities to implement extreme control over the population, groups and individuals being subject to differentiated restrictions depending on the level of trust assigned.

For example, every Uighur is required to install a satellite navigation system on vehicles that transmit data to the authorities and install an application on the phone that transmits to the authorities all existing information on that telephone. In an interview with an Uyghur person in the HRW report, she mentions that her husband was detained and sent to a re-education center just because he mentioned on the phone the possibility of moving to another country.

Regarding the coronavirus, other countries have also learned to utilize these types of tactics and instruments. Southeast Asia, which is neighboring China, has been a place where COVID gave a powerful excuse to clamp down on freedom on speech, journalists being detained in countries such as Thailand or Cambodia. Mixing criticism with misinformation, the governments in these countries are borrowing China's playbook in quelling dissent and trying to impose more control on the flow of information.¹⁹

¹⁹ Mu Sochua, *Coronavirus 'Fake News' Arrests Are Quieting Critics*, Foreign Policy, May 22, 2020, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/22/coronavirus-fake-news-arrests-quiet-critics-southeast-asia/>.

This bears significance for the future. China has sought in recent years to differentiate itself as a distinct power, with a different model of development than that proposed in the last decades by the West, Belt and Road also being a representation of this. Xi Jinping said in his speech to the 19th Congress that “the Chinese nation now stands tall and firm in the east”²⁰, led by Xi Jinping the supreme leader, as evidenced by the importance attached to his theoretical guide, socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Under these conditions, in the words of Xi Jinping, “an era that sees China moving closer to center stage and making greater contributions to mankind”²¹, represents an important moment in which China presents itself as a leading hope for developing countries, an alternative model that represents “a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence; and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind”.

This means accepting and promoting the Chinese political model as a viable one, capable of it leads mankind to a common state of prosperity, designating a much fiercer competition between two political and economic systems, the authoritarian and democratic ones. For example, Belt and Road is not just a project for expanding business opportunities, it is expanding into a multitude of areas designed to transform China’s image into that of a globally responsible player and promote the Chinese model of development.

According to the aforementioned strategic document, “Vision and actions on the joint construction of the Economic Belt of the Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road of the XXI century“, Belt and Road is a much more comprehensive strategy, highlighting its role in strengthening cultural ties, political relations, connections between people, in the field of finance, etc.²²

²⁰ Xinhua, *Full text of Xi Jinping’s report at 19th CPC National Congress*, November 2017, available at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c_136725942.htm.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Chinese Gov., *Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative*, available at http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2017/06/20/content_281475691873460.htm.

An example of this is the effects of Chinese influence on the EU's internal cohesion. In July 2016, Hungary and Greece, some of the main beneficiaries of Chinese investment, opposed the inclusion of a direct reference to China in an EU statement on the Hague Tribunal's ruling on the illegality of China's legal arguments in the South China Sea. In March 2017, Hungary derailed the EU consensus by refusing to sign a joint EU letter denouncing the reported torture of lawyers detained in China. In June 2017, Greece blocked an EU statement to the UN Human Rights Council criticizing the Chinese government's human rights violations, and later opposed the creation of an EU-wide mechanism for more rigorous analysis of third countries' investments in Europe, mainly the Chinese investment.

In Xinjiang and Tibet, China is exploring new technologies and practices that increase the power of the CCP-created police state, which is expanding nationwide. This model of high-tech authoritarianism briefly presented in the previous pages is in great demand in countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, or Latin America. In recent years, proving the success of the new measures implemented in Xinjiang and Tibet, China has begun to export the surveillance system implemented in these regions, especially in countries where human rights are non-existent and democratic institutions do not exist or are too weak.²³ In the long run, this will shape the type of society that will be created in those states, as opposed to the model of a free society based on democratic principles.

For example, SenseTime was established in 2014 and is one of the largest companies in China in the field of artificial intelligence, being involved in the affairs in Xinjiang. Its facial recognition system is a priority for the Mongolian government in the administration of high-security prisons. China is also exporting

²³ Nikkei Asian Review, *China exports AI surveillance tech to over 60 countries: report*, December 16, 2019, available at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/China-tech/China-exports-AI-surveillance-tech-to-over-60-countries-report>.

its facial recognition system to Africa, where in March the Zimbabwean government signed a strategic partnership with Chinese startup CloudWalk Technology to start a nationwide facial recognition program, an agreement made under the auspices of Belt and Road.²⁴

Other countries such as Ecuador and Venezuela are places where Chinese surveillance technology has been imported in the name of public security, Chinese companies being present in Egypt, or Saudi Arabia as well. These exports make China a major player in setting standards for security surveillance programs, thus softening discussions on individual freedoms and rights, thus promoting new rules that already find fertile ground in places around the world where China expanded its influence.

This is highly important in these times where the pandemic has given way to more restrictive measures that may be seen initially to be meant only for stopping the spreading of the COVID epidemic. In Israel, the government has authorized his country's internal security agency to track citizens using an instrument for cellphone data collection developed for counterterrorism to punish those defying isolation orders.

In Thailand, Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha of Thailand has assumed the authority to impose curfews and censor the news media in the context provided by the pandemic. Likewise, the example of Hungary offered earlier is a good reminder in these times. There is a real risk that measures taken in the name of stopping the spread of the virus and keeping a functioning society in the midst of it all do not backfire and only give power to autocratic regimes and diminish democracy in places like the heart of Europe, where Hungary has been demoted by the Freedom House to a hybrid regime.

²⁴ Yuan Yang, Madhumita Murgia, *Facial recognition: how China cornered the surveillance market*, December 6, 2019, available at <https://www.ft.com/content/6f1a8f48-1813-11ea-9ee4-11f260415385>.

Bibliography:

- The World Bank, *Global Economic Prospects*, June 2020.
- United Nations, *A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to Covid-19*, available at <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/UN-framework-for-the-immediate-socio-economic-response-to-COVID-19.pdf>.
- World Health Organization, *Health System Response Monitor*, available at <https://www.covid19healthsystem.org/searchandcompare.aspx>.
- CNN, *Merkel warns Germany is on the 'thinnest ice' as Europe realizes social distancing is here to stay*, April 23, 2020, available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/23/europe/merkel-coronavirus-social-distancing-europe-intl/index.html>.
- France24, *United States, Europe battle resurgence of Covid-19 cases*, 26 June 2020, available at <https://www.france24.com/en/20200626-united-states-europe-battle-fresh-covid-19-surges>.
- Democracy Reporting International, *The rule of law stress test. EU members states' responses to COVID-19*, May 2020, available at <https://democracy-reporting.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-BP-Rule-of-Law-Stress-Test-FINAL.pdf>.
- Euronews, *Hungary claims victory in EU recovery fund talks*, 20 July 2020, available at <https://www.euronews.com/2020/07/22/hungary-claims-victory-in-eu-recovery-fund-talks>.
- HEGEDŰS, ISTVÁN, *Coronavirus and Democratic Erosion in Hungary*, Carnegie Europe, available at <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/06/23/coronavirus-and-democratic-erosion-in-hungary-pub-82117>.
- Freedom House, *Nations in transit 2020*, available at <https://freedomhouse.org/country/hungary/nations-transit/2020>.
- Chen Alicia, Molter Vanessa, *Mask Diplomacy: Chinese Narratives in the COVID Era*, June 16, 2020, available at <https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/covid-mask-diplomacy>.
- China Daily, *China: Champion of coronavirus fight*, May 12, 2020, available at <http://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202005/02/WS5eace540a310a8b241153332.html>.
- Tiezzi, Shannon, *Wuhan Whistleblower Doctor Dies of Coronavirus*, The Diplomat, February 7, available at <https://thediplomat.com/2020/02/wuhan-whistleblower-doctor-dies-of-coronavirus/>.
- Perper Rosie, *A 4th Chinese citizen journalist was reportedly detained after live-streaming what life was like in Wuhan at the height of its coronavirus outbreak*, Business Insider, May 19, 2020, available at <https://www.businessinsider.com/zhang-zhan-fourth-chinese-journalist-arrested-for-livestreaming-in-wuhan-2020-5>.

- Jeffrey Knockel, Christopher Parsons, Lotus Ruan, Ruohan Xiong, Jedidiah Crandall, and Ron Deibert, *WE CHAT, THEY WATCH*, Citizen Lab report, May 7, 2020, available at <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/101395/1/Report%23127—wechattheywatch-web.pdf>.
- Yuan Shawn, *Grief, anger in China as doctor who warned about coronavirus dies*, Al Jazeera, February 7, 2020, available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/chinese-doctor-sounded-alarm-wuhan-coronavirus-dies-200207004935274.html>.
- Jing Meng, Dai Sarah, *China recruits Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent to AI 'national team'*, South China Morning Post, November 21, 2017, available at <https://www.scmp.com/tech/china-tech/article/2120913/china-recruits-baidu-alibaba-and-tencent-ai-national-team>.
- Human Rights Watch, *China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims*, September 2018, available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs>.
- Sochua Mu, *Coronavirus 'Fake News' Arrests Are Quieting Critics*, Foreign Policy, May 22, 2020, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/22/coronavirus-fake-news-arrests-quiet-critics-southeast-asia/>.
- Xinhua, *Full text of Xi Jinping's report at 19th CPC National Congress*, November 2017, available at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c_136725942.htm.
- Chinese Gov., *Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative*, available at http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2017/06/20/content_281475691873460.htm.
- Nikkei Asian Review, *China exports AI surveillance tech to over 60 countries: report*, December 16, 2019, available at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/China-tech/China-exports-AI-surveillance-tech-to-over-60-countries-report>.
- Yang, Yuan, Murgia, Madhumita, *Facial recognition: how China cornered the surveillance market*, December 6, 2019, available at <https://www.ft.com/content/6f1a8f48-1813-11ea-9ee4-11f260415385>.

IV. THE IMPACT ON THE LEADERSHIP

LEADERSHIP, DECISIONS AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN TIMES OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Georgiana Marcu

As the new coronavirus spreads globally, it is creating unprecedented pressures and it provides a test for societies and their leaders – as well as for leadership theory. In the last six months, the entire world turned upside down and the odds are low that normal life will return to something resembling the status quo anytime soon.

In light of this new reality, this chapter analyses leadership in the time of the coronavirus and the ways that governments and leaders could take action against the spread of the virus. Now and in the future, people will judge leaders' responses to this crisis and the consequences that their decisions produce at the local, regional, national, and international levels. Perhaps more than ever before in recent history, the responsibility of leadership is of significantly important consequence: due to their actions (or lack thereof), people's lives are literally at stake.

“The crucial role of leadership in ensuring that we, as a global community, ‘do the right things ... and protect the citizens of the world.’” – Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO)¹.

¹ WHO. WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19. March 11, 2020 <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-may-2020> [accessed August 2, 2020]

Life changed all over the world in early 2020 when a new virus, COVID-19 appeared almost out of nowhere and began to spread around the world at alarming rates. As of late August, more than 25 million people worldwide have been infected and approximately 3.5 million have died from the coronavirus.²

As we now know, this pandemic originated in Wuhan, China; however, the situation in China is now stable, whereas other countries like the United States, Brazil, and India continue to see new infection rates rise as their populations struggle to comply with basic precautions like social distancing, hand washing, and wearing face masks³.

At the beginning of the pandemic crisis, we were sure that was the last day of this situation and our lives will be like in the past, but in reality, the uncertainty grew day by day. In front of this situation, time is an essential factor.

Without warning, our way of life changed in just a few days as governments around the world took action based on the recommendations of international medical and scientific experts, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), as well as advice from national experts within their administrations, along with recommendations from the European Union's headquarters in Brussels.

Hotels and restaurants were shuttered, airplanes were grounded, Schengen borders were locked down, people started to work from home, schools and universities were closed, factories paused their activities, and millions of people were thrown out of their jobs without any alternative. And, depending on the socio-economic safety nets available in their countries, some of these unemployed workers had access to emergency income replacement (i.e. "unemployment insurance") to keep food on the table and a roof over their heads while millions of others did not.

² European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. COVID-19 situation update worldwide, as of 30 August 2020. <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/geographical-distribution-2019-ncov-cases> [accessed July 31, 2020]

³ *Ibid.*

The coronavirus has had a major impact on the socio-economic, social, and political levels and this pandemic crisis turned out to be a health crisis. Also, the COVID-19 crisis caused a global, national, economic, political and societal crisis. In what concerns the politicians and the citizens, the crisis brings out the best and also the worst things. A short description of this crisis is made by Solmaz Filiz Karabag, professor at Linköping University: “The coronavirus crisis could be characterized as a disruptive period of instability, uncertainty, and danger”⁴.

The beginning of 2020 was very different and it starts abruptly in many countries all over the world. For the first three months of this year, confusion, chaos and panic were the most common feelings between people due to the unknown concepts and notions about this virus and also due to authorities’ decision to establish quarantine as a measure to combat the spread of the virus.

The crisis impacts the free movement of people and goods and also the medical system was affected during this period. During the last months, a lot of researchers from different fields like economics, political, sociology, medicine, business, etc., start to study the coronavirus crisis and try to shape the same new ideas and short and long perspectives about the evolution of this crisis.

According to McDonald-Gibson, the crisis is a test for the European Union in what concerns the reshape of the EU after coronavirus. On the one hand, this moment is opportune for the EU to adopt necessary measures to stop the disintegration of the European Community that were visible already before the pandemic crisis caused by the coronavirus.

⁴ Solmaz Filiz Karabag, *An Unprecedented Global Crisis! The Global, Regional, National, Political, Economic and Commercial Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic*, Journal of Applied Economics and Business Research 2020 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340337249_An_Unprecedented_Global_Crisis_The_Global_Regional_National_Political_Economic_and_Commercial_Impact_of_the_Coronavirus_Pandemic [accessed August 1, 2020]

On the other hand, after the coronavirus period for the EU will be a good opportunity to develop and adopt different ways in what concerns the reform of federal institutions. Both sentences are just presupposition because the reality of life is probably to change from one day to another.

Concerning the decisions and the behaviors of EU leaders during the crisis (especially at the beginning of this period) we could see that at the official level, all the EU leaders talk about European values and solidarity, but in reality, what happened was totally different.

In March 2020 when Italy sought medical supplies, none of the European countries had a positive response, and also when Italy asked European Central Bank for financial support to manage the crisis, the Bank rejected the request.

Non-compliance with the principle of solidarity by the European Union members created the way for other countries to put in practice their soft power. Thus, in front of this situation, countries such as China⁵, Russia and Cuba are sending medical gear and health experts to Italy in order to help the Italian authorities to manage as well as possible the health crisis.

Until now some strategies and reports had been tested but the results are uncertainties and also uncalculated due to the novelty of the virus. In front of this situation, it is important to analyze how governments, nations and leaders see these strategies and what measures were adopted until now and will be implemented in the future. Also, it is very important to see how the strategy impacts the management decisions, relations between countries and international actors, behaviors of consumers and people, and also the impacts of economic activities.

⁵ Kurt M. Campbell and Rush Doshi, *The Coronavirus Could Reshape Global Order. China Is Maneuvering for International Leadership as the United States Falts*. Foreign Affairs website.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-03-18/coronavirus-could-reshape-global-order>[accessed August 2, 2020]

Until now, **Israel, Taiwan and South Korea** are seen at the international level as the most successful countries in what concerns the measures that the leaders adopted and implemented to combat the coronavirus pandemic crisis without putting in practice a lot of hard decisions as China adopt it to stop the COVID-19⁶.

The health crisis affected countries not only at the economic level but also at the social and political level. In the first phase of the crisis, the COVID-19 impacted the stock markets and, after that, the price of oil and raw materials had increased. In the second phase of the health crisis, the fiscal and monetary policies and also the gross national production, trade, employment, and social policies were affected by the virus. In some countries all over the world, the price wars of raw materials, especially oil, have already started and it will be hard to manage if the crisis deepens.

As part of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, it is also very important to study how this crisis affects the political and the leadership in countries all over the world and how the same important representatives/leaders will change opinions and also will reconsider their global operations and relations.

How will coronavirus shape the governance after the outbreak?

In my opinion, for a leader, one of the hardest things to do is to make decisions for other people. But in times of pandemic, the most important mission of leaders is to make the best decisions especially when the crisis comes with a lot of unknown elements.

As we know, there are places all over the world where democracy is under threat and the coronavirus crisis is a factor that could aggravate the democratic return and also the authoritarian consolidation. Some leaders and governments have already used

⁶ Graham-Harrison E., *Coronavirus: how Asian countries acted while the west dithered*, The Guardian.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/21/coronavirus-asia-acted-west-ditheredhong-kong-taiwan-europe> [accessed 2 August, 2020]

the pandemic and the lockdown to expand their executive power and restrict the same important individual rights.

The COVID-19 has the power to transform and to reset the same pillars of what democratic governance means. Some relevant examples on this line are: social civic mobilization through people, the electoral process, and also control of civic people imposed and coordinated by military forces.

Political impact

As we know, the economic impact is visible all over the world and it is the most important caused by COVID-19. But the political impact can't be ignored. In countries with developed economies, the impact of coronavirus at the political level could be as important and substantial as the economic impact.

At the international level, there are some leaders such as **U.S. President**, Donald Trump, **Japanese Prime Minister**, Shinzô Abe, or **South Korean President**, Moon Jae-in, which are criticized for mishandling the new coronavirus and also because they allowed the increase of cases as a result of their attitude and decisions⁷. In the **United States**, a recession would reduce the chances that President Donald Trump will be re-elected during the upcoming elections. As for **Prime Minister Abe**, in the international press speculations are growing day by day in what concerns his decision to leave the office earlier than expected⁸.

In **South Korea**, hundreds of thousands of citizens signed a petition to remove President Moon from office⁹.

⁷ Chris Miller, *COVID-19 Crisis: Political and Economic Aftershocks*. Foreign Policy Research Institute. 2020.

Link: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/03/covid-19-crisis-political-and-economic-aftershocks/> [accessed August 2, 2020]

⁸ Ben Dooley, *Shinzo Abe, Japan's Political Houdini, Can't Escape Coronavirus Backlash*. The New York Times, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/05/world/asia/japan-abe-coronavirus.html> [accessed August 3, 2020]

⁹ Chris Miller, *COVID-19 Crisis: Political and Economic Aftershocks*. Foreign Policy Research Institute. 2020

Link: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/03/covid-19-crisis-political-and-economic-aftershocks/> [accessed August 2, 2020]

Restriction of democratic space and centralizing power during coronavirus pandemic crisis

At the beginning of the crisis, the most common decision implemented by authorities was to impose the quarantine at the national level in order to limit contact between people and to have time to impose measures that limit the spread of the virus. Thus, most authorities have restricted citizens' freedom of movement, public gatherings, and more than fifty countries declared states of emergency starting from March 2020. In what concerns democratic power, there are four interrelated areas that I analyzed here. It is about: *centralization of power, limitation of fundamental rights, expanded state surveillance and dismissing protests*.

In the following, I will present each of these areas in what concerns restrictions imposed by authorities during the emergency period.

Centralization of power

The emergency period was not just a period of analyzing and taking decisions by governments and also it was a period during which the checks and balances system was weakened and also to erode the most important accountability mechanisms. The leaders improved their power in the last months.

A relevant example is Hungary where the prime minister used the pandemic to make an authoritarian power grab. So, at the beginning of the crisis, on the 25th of March, the Hungarian parliament adopted a new law¹⁰ that offered to the prime minister, Viktor Orban, the right, through a legal mandate, to take decisions by decree without any clause or any parliamentary oversight.

The Hungarian example is not the only one. Rodrigo Duterte, the President of the Philippines, was given almost unlimited

¹⁰ Dalibor, Rohac, *Hungary's prime minister is using the virus to make an authoritarian power grab*. The Washington Post, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/03/25/hungarys-prime-minister-is-using-virus-make-an-authoritarian-power-grab/> [accessed August 3, 2020]

power¹¹ during the emergency period through a law voted by the country parliament. In Cambodia, the government received unlimited access to use martial power in what concerned the limitation of the political rights of citizens.

Limitation of fundamental rights

The most common decision adopted by authorities, especially during the emergency period, was to limit the right of free expression. The explanation often used by governments was that the decision was taken to fight against misinformation about the new coronavirus and the impact of the virus. In Jordan, through a law adopted during the pandemic, the prime minister has the right to suspend any freedom of expression. More than that, in the framework of the National Defence Law, starting with the 17th of March, the Jordan Council of Ministers has the power to suspend all printing and sale of newspapers¹². The reason given is that these materials contribute to the spread of COVID-19.

China adopts the same behaviors as Jordan. Thus, concerning the response to the crisis, the Chinese government had censored¹³ all the information related to this. More than that, Chinese journalists were banned from reporting some information about the COVID-19 virus or about the outbreak.

International Centre for Non-For-Profit Law, European Centre for Non-for-Profit Law and United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures elaborated the *COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker* within they analyzed how the human rights and fundamental

¹¹ Selam Gebrekidan, *For Autocrats, and Others, Coronavirus Is a Chance to Grab Even More Power*. The New York Times. 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/30/world/europe/coronavirus-governments-power.html> [accessed August 3, 2020]

¹² *COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker*. International Center for not-for-profit Law, 2020 <https://www.icnl.org/covid19tracker/?location=&issue=11&date=&type=> [accessed August 4, 2020]

¹³ Sarah Cook, *The World Sees a Public Health Crisis. Beijing Sees a Political Threat*, The Diplomat, 2020.

<https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/the-world-sees-a-public-health-crisis-beijing-sees-a-political-threat/> [accessed August 4, 2020]

freedoms were protected during the emergency period all over the world. The entire article could be read here on their website¹⁴.

Expanded state surveillance

COVID-19 determined governments all over the world to use new technologies to keep an eye on the people who had tested positive with coronavirus. For example, in South Korea and Israel, governments are using locations available on citizens' smartphones in order to track down the people who could be exposed to the virus.

In Singapore, the authorities are tracing the contact and publishing information about the cases that they know. The surveillance is not per se an anti-democratic measure, but to a political abuse is just a step if all these measures are implemented and authorized by the governments without transparency or oversight¹⁵.

Dismissing protests

Even if more countries decided to relax some measures starting with May 2020 in order to unblock the economy and to limit as much as possible the decrease of gross national product, in what concerns protests and other public manifestation the governments decide to continue restricting public gatherings.

For example, the Algerian government decided to ban all protests during these times, even if last year after the major public manifestation a lot of political reforms were implemented and adopted by the authorities¹⁶. It will be important to see for how long the situation will remain as it is now.

¹⁴ *COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker*. International Center for not-for-profit Law, 2020 <https://www.icnl.org/covid19tracker/?location=&issue=11&date=&type=> [accessed August 4, 2020]

¹⁵ Francez Z. Brown, Saskia Brechenmacher and Thomas Carothers, *How Will the Coronavirus Reshape Democracy and Governance Globally?* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/06/how-will-coronavirus-reshape-democracy-and-governance-globally-pub-81470> [accessed August 4, 2020]

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The electoral process is disrupted due to the pandemic

The electoral processes around the world had been disrupted during the last months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the United States, the presidential primary vote was delayed. In the European Union, the governments of several countries such as Italy, Serbia, Spain, and North Macedonia decided to postpone the elections when the situation allows.

Also, the United Kingdom took the same decision as the European countries mentioned above. In the upcoming months, elections are scheduled in countries such as Burundi, the Dominican Republic, Malawi, Mongolia, etc., but is impossible to talk about exact dates¹⁷.

Electoral disruptions destitute citizens from their right to choose their leaders in a time when countries all over the world need good leadership in order to manage as much as possible the entire situation and the crisis. For a short time, delayed elections could be justified, but some leaders prefer to delay the elections for no reason and use Covid-19 a pretext¹⁸.

The positive aspect of these periods is that some changes in what concern the electoral process could be adopted to put in practice the electronic vote, vote by correspondence, or vote by email. A relevant example is South Korea that is working to establish a system for voters that gives them the option to vote from home or hospitals for the upcoming parliamentary election.

Leadership during the pandemic

Telling people the good news is easy, even if it is not true. In a world where all people seek comfort and solace, few people like to hear bad news from their leaders, especially in bad times. This is a test for leaders.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

To have a better understanding of leadership in times of coronavirus, I will give an example. In 1882, Henrik Ibsen wrote *An Enemy of People*, and through his book he tried to explain, using illustrations, that telling the truth was both unpopular and necessary.

An Enemy of People is about a mayor's decision to not close the public baths that have been poisoned by the local tannery at the beginning of the tourist season. The civil society called the mayor the 'enemy of people'. Also, Ibsen explained that direct democracy had its limitations and we could not ignore it¹⁹.

In what concerns the Coronavirus, the problem is similar to the situation that happened in the *An Enemy of People*, but now the most important actors are Donald Trump and Boris Johnson. At the beginning of the crisis, both of them denied the significance and potential of the crisis, and also, ignored the recommendations and advice about social distancing and the duty to wear face masks as much as possible. But the situation changed dramatically when the virus spread quickly all over the world and the medical system began to collapse²⁰.

In times of crisis, there isn't time to talk about popularity even if it concerns the democratic leadership. Even if a leader could sacrifice his career or popularity, in times of crisis it is important to do the right things.

Using the Tame/Wicked/Critical Problems frame²¹ we could understand better the role of leadership during coronavirus time. Firstly, Tame Problems can be complicated, but there is a solution/ a way to solve this. At a theoretical level, we know how to manage the coronavirus, but it is required some time for testing and to make the right decisions.

¹⁹ Keith Grint, *Leadership, Management and Command in the time of the Coronavirus*. SAGE Publications. Leadership 0(0) – I-6. 2020, p. 2, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340880139_Leadership_Management_and_Command_in_the_time_of_the_Coronavirus [accessed August 4, 2020]

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

Secondly, the Wicked Problems are complex and there are situations when this kind of problems could not be solved, but there are ways to improve the existing situation, to ameliorate it through a collective response. Thus, the role of leaders is to mobilize the community and to implement the decisions taken. During the emergency period and even after, the leaders asked communities to stay at home, to self-isolate, to wear face masks, to use as little as possible public spaces, and so on.

Critical Problems are crises and the leaders' roles are to prevent a catastrophe. A relevant example that decision-making took is to close schools and to order the business to shut down for the foreseeable future. The role of leadership is to help people from their communities/countries to manage the situation wherever possible like quarantine in the first phase and social distancing.

In face of this crisis, the role of political leaders is to tell people the truth even if it's not a pleasure to hear this and also is important for political leaders to tell the people which are their responsibilities²². In times of coronavirus, for political leaders will not be important for the popularity or serving the minority interests, because the role of political leadership is to do the right things for the community, with the risk of losing elections and popularity.

Specific for the USA or UK is radicalism, and the coronavirus shows us that the free market has its limits. More than that, the new COVID-19 revealed one of the known myths of the contemporary: to be equally suspect²³. Both the USA and UK have chosen some strategies in order to respond to this crisis and these were very different compared with European countries. Both Johnson and Trump undermine the importance of science and the knowledge of experts for so long.

The Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, decided to quarantine the country for just a few hours. More than that, the

²² *Ibid.*, p. 3

²³ *Ibid.*

consequences are reflected on the poorest people of the country. Leadership is about what leaders do, it is not about who these people are.

Leaders and their behavior in what concern the crisis management

Mette Frederiksen, Denmark's Prime Minister decided to close the country's borders on 13 March and a few days later the schools, kindergartners, universities and other institutions were closed. She took this decision when other countries didn't know exactly how to manage the crisis and what decision was right. At the beginning of April, according to a poll, 79% of Danes thought that she was doing a good job to limit the spread of the coronavirus around the country. This percentage increase is 40% higher than in March.

Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil's President, is one of the few world leaders who took decisions to play down the threat of new coronavirus. He sabotaged the quarantine measures that state governors take all over the country. Decisions taken by Bolsonaro to shut down the economy will wreck his chances to be re-elected in upcoming elections²⁴.

Donald Trump, United States' President, was accused by democrats then he squandered about six weeks during which he played down the new coronavirus instead of taking the same important decisions and preparing for it. In what concerns Trump's rhetoric, he is fiercely anti-socialist. Putting in practice Trump's vision of "Make America great again" is a long progress that required a lot of interventions in the economy imposed by the US government²⁵.

²⁴ Covid-19: how world leaders responded to the crisis. The Guardian. 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/12/covid-19-how-world-leaders-responded-to-the-crisis> [accessed August 5, 2020]

²⁵ Katherine Barbieri, *COVID-19 impact: How the pandemic is affecting politics. A political scientist's take on partisan politics in the U.S. and a turn toward authoritarianism in Hungary*. Communications and Public Affairs, 803-777-8161. 2020, https://www.sc.edu/uofsc/posts/2020/04/covid_impact_on_politics_barbieri.php#.XzKZ3ygzY2z, [accessed August 5, 2020]

During this period, some of the most important actions in what concerns country relations such as trade relations between the United States and China, the existing tensions between Iran and the United States, relations between Russia and state actors such as Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and also the internal politics of the United States were out of the screens²⁶.

If we have a look at similar past crises, we could see that the COVID-19 circumstances and the health crisis during these times are very different. Even if it is impossible to compare the present authoritarian regimes with the totalitarian regimes existing during the last century, at the first glance, the new Covid-19 crisis favored the undemocratic trends.

Even if up to this moment, there is not enough information to express this supposition, at the global level are some countries that adopted policies and programs in order to limit sovereignty. Hungary is the best example of this point of view. The Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, needs just a few days to take full power within the country and to put on pause all the projects and prerogatives of the legislative power in Hungary²⁷.

Democracy debate in times of crisis

In times of crisis, there are a lot of changes and the success of the debate between authoritarianism and democracy will be influenced by the most efficient crisis management. As we know, before the pandemic, the United States and China were fighting over world control.

Once with the spread of Covid-19, the US president accused China of being responsible for the virus. Donald Trump expressed public that Covid-19 is a virus made in China. On the other side, the Chinese government invested in defending its high-tech authoritarian approach.

Among countries that have democratic regimes, there are two types of behaviors. On one side, some leaders decide to denigrate

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

scientific advice and take decisions to prioritize the economy over people's lives. Relevant cases are Brazil and the United States. The decisions and responses to Covid-19 took by President Donald Trump and President Jair Bolsonaro are characterized by "secretive, narcissistic, paranoid, hubristic and impulsive decision-making"²⁸.

On the other hand, there are some countries like Finland, New Zealand and South Korea that managed the situation with responsibility and formed empathetic responses. Leaders of these countries decided to follow the science-based advice to control the spread of new coronavirus and to manage the situation. "A combination of transparency, prudence, empathy, timing and courage" is the key to achieving good results in these countries²⁹.

Democracy and leadership

The quality of the elected leadership will have the power to influence and to change the way of democracies in the near future. As we could see, there are a lot of leaders, with different views and skills, but the leaders, who have attitudes such as empathy and who take into account the science, are able to deal with the crisis and to overcome the most important challenges that the new coronavirus throws up³⁰.

The quality of the leadership elected by the people is demonstrated in times of crisis where the things happened very fast and it is not time to wait.

At the global level, five countries performed in what concerns the control of this pandemic. Four of these five countries are governed by women and for all of them, two are the most important actions taken into account: the number of citizens' lives saved and the well-being of countries' populations. The four women leaders are Jacinda Ardern (Prime Minister of New Zealand), Sanna

²⁸ Lawrence Hamilton, *What sets good and bad leaders apart in the coronavirus era*. The conservation UK, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/what-sets-good-and-bad-leaders-apart-in-the-coronavirus-era-140013> [accessed August 5, 2020]

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Marin (Prime Minister of Finland), Angela Merkel (Chancellor of Germany), and Tsai Ing-wen (President of the Republic of China).

The current President of South Africa, Matamela Cyril Ramphosa, understands the crisis situation and he took severe actions during the lockdown in order to minimize the number of persons infected with the new coronavirus. Thus, in front of this situation, his jobs had been made more efficient and with more responsibility than Trump or Bolsonaro's job.

Nevertheless, Ramphosa took two decisions that displeased the citizens of South Africa.

Firstly, he banned the sale of tobacco. His motivation behind this decision was that the Covid-19 is a respiratory disease and tobacco would have a negative impact on people's health. For addicted people, this was not the best decision because they cannot just quit instantly³¹.

Secondly, Ramphosa decided to allow religious gatherings to take place. In South Africa, these events are widening. Thus, according to art. 37 of Disaster management act, 2002: (Act No. 57 of 2002); Determination of alert levels and hotspots³² "all gatherings are prohibited except a gathering at – a) a faith-based institution which is limited to 50 persons or less, depending on the size of the place or worship..."³³ Due to his decisions, the steps and the good leadership of Ramphosa were undermined by his condescending attitude to citizens' needs.

The democratic regimes could help leaders to make the right decision, but democracy is not the deciding factor. The kind of the leader, the priorities that he/she established at the beginning of the mandate, if he/she is interested in ensuring the well-being of the citizens, these attitudes matter most.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Department of Co-operative governance and traditional affairs. No. 608. 28 May 2020. Disaster Management Act, 2002: (Act no. 57 of 2002): Determination of Alert Levels and Hotspots, https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202005/43364gon608-translations.pdf [accessed August 6, 2020]

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Supriya Garikipati and Uma Kambhampati³⁴, two economics professors, started to take a look at the new coronavirus, especially regarding the number of cases and the death rates. Also, they include in these research variables such as population size and health services. These professors started their research when they saw that female leaders performed better than their male counterparts.

The first difference that the professors identify between female and male leaders was that women are risk-averse in what concerns people's lives versus economic outcomes.

Good and bad leaders during the coronavirus pandemic

Covid-19 pandemic was a challenge also for people and leaders around the world and this crisis brought out the positive and negative parts of politicians and citizens. In the fight with coronavirus, the democracies have managed the situation better than non-democracies.

As I said above, in front of this difficult situation, the leaders of democratic countries decide to act in two different directions. On one hand, around the world, some leaders decide to denigrate all the scientific advice and they put the economy before human lives.

The two relevant examples are Brazil and the United States. On the other hand, there were also some prudent, emphatic and well-organized countries that took into consideration the recommendation and advice of scientists. Relevant examples are countries such as Finland, New Zealand, South Korea³⁵.

Both types of leadership exposed above were evident even before this pandemic period. The decision-making process in the

³⁴ Supriya Garikipati and Uma Kambhampati, *Women leaders are better at fighting the pandemic*. Article. Voxeu website, <https://voxeu.org/article/women-leaders-are-better-fighting-pandemic> [accessed August 7, 2020]

³⁵ Paul Keaveny, *What sets good and bad leaders apart in the coronavirus era*. The Conversation website, <https://theconversation.com/what-sets-good-and-bad-leaders-apart-in-the-coronavirus-era-140013> [accessed August 7, 2020]

USA and Brazil is secretive, paranoid, narcissistic and hubristic. These are terms that can be used to characterize the leaders of these countries.

On the other hand, the leaders of Finland, New Zealand and South Korea decided to use transparent methods, to be emphatic, prudent, and also, they took actions in order to control the spread of the virus around their countries and to decrease the propagation of fake news. Using these attitudes good results were achieved.

Transparent communication, an important skill in times of pandemic

During a crisis, one of the most important things that leaders must do is communicate with important stakeholders. As experts say, the executive and legislative powers must communicate very clearly and quickly without misinformation. Leaders must communicate with citizens to be able to present and explain the protocols and also the decisions taken in order to keep them safe.

Another important aspect in what concerns communication is transparency. So, the leaders have to be transparent and to send a clear message during the pandemic because during these times people are nervous about this situation and they don't know exactly how to manage this situation and the leader's role is to keep them engaged, informed and safe³⁶.

The entire world was upside down once with the arrival of COVID-19 which exposed the limits of the free market, of economic and health systems, of political life, and also had a strong impact on what concerned people's life.

In times of crisis, some of us are looking for leaders who are positive and charismatic, just because we think that it could be a solution to stop the spread of the virus, but in reality, things don't happen like this.

“If leadership is partly about making people face up to unfortunate truths – and it surely is – then we need leadership

³⁶ Korn Ferry Perspective, *Leadership in an outbreak*, 2020.

<https://www.kornferry.com/insights/articles/perspective-leadership-in-an-outbreak>
[accessed August 8, 2020]

that embodies this, at the same time as we manage the research and resources to keep the systems going”³⁷.

Following the decisions and the leader’s responses to the new coronavirus crisis, there are at least two lessons to be learned from this experience. First, it is very important to find the best way and the right solutions in order to make the health and the well-being of people the “raison d’être of countries government”³⁸. To put into practice this, it is required to have a policy that allows people to express and also to assess their needs.

Second, there is not a surprise that the leaders who don’t take into consideration the recommendation and they responded worst to this Covid-19 crisis, they are the leaders who are found among the supporters of conspiracy theories and misinformation. More than that, the oligarchs must be kept out of political power under democratic regimes³⁹.

Conclusion

In times of crisis, the leaders need to choose the right actions that prevent the economic crisis that could appear after this period. The most important task for the leaders is to reassure the citizens and to convince them that the right decisions were taken and it is very important to respect all of them even if they will like it or not.

Any wrong movement will affect the trust of people in the leaders and in front of this situation the leader power will be eroded.

It is a little bit too early to declare what kind of political system managed the most efficient crisis, because up to now

³⁷ Keith Grint, *Leadership, Management and Command in the time of the Coronavirus*. SAGE Publications. Leadership 0(0) – 1-6, 2020, p. 6, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340880139_Leadership_Management_and_Command_in_the_time_of_the_Coronavirus [accessed August 8, 2020]

³⁸ Lawrence Hamilton, *What sets good and bad leaders apart in the coronavirus era*. The conservation UK, <https://theconversation.com/what-sets-good-and-bad-leaders-apart-in-the-coronavirus-era-140013> [accessed August 7, 2020]

³⁹ *Ibid.*

(August 2020) at the global level there are some countries, authoritarian regimes, that managed relatively well so far, the Covid-19 crisis (examples: Vietnam and Singapore). But, on the other side, there are authoritarian regime countries such as Iran that don't have the power to take important steps to minimize the negative impact of this crisis.

Also, democratic countries like Taiwan and South Korea take some measures that worked flawlessly and generated stability. Other democracies, like the United States and Italy, are not good examples of crisis management⁴⁰.

A good strategy to limit the damage of an emergency is to have a rigid attitude and to have the power to impose the decisions that would be respected by the citizens. Individual cooperation through persuasion is the most important skill that a leader must have when it comes to taking action and solving a crisis.

In the next months, we will have more information about the crisis, its impact on the economic and political systems, and also about the leaders and their decisions. Still, it is important to know the directions and decisions taken by the leaders at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic.

Bibliography:

Ben Dooley, *Shinzo Abe, Japan's Political Houdini, Can't Escape Coronavirus Backlash*. The New York Times. 2020.

Link:<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/05/world/asia/japan-abe-coronavirus.html>

Chris Miller, *COVID-19 Crisis: Political and Economic Aftershocks*. Foreign Policy Research Institute. 2020.

Link:<https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/03/covid-19-crisis-political-and-economic-aftershocks/>

⁴⁰ Francez Z. Brown, Saskia Brechenmacher and Thomas Carothers, *How Will the Coronavirus Reshape Democracy and Governance Globally?* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/06/how-will-coronavirus-reshape-democracy-and-governance-globally-pub-81470> [accessed August 8, 2020]

- COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker. International Centre for not-for-profit Law. 2020.
Link: <https://www.icnl.org/covid19tracker/?location=&issue=11&date=&ty=Covid-19: how world leaders responded to the crisis>. The Guardian. 2020
Link: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/12/covid-19-how-world-leaders-responded-to-the-crisis>
- Dalibor Rohac, *Hungary's prime minister is using the virus to make an authoritarian power grab*. The Washington Post. 2020. Link: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/03/25/hungarys-prime-minister-is-using-virus-make-an-authoritarian-power-grab/>
- Department of Co-operative governance and traditional affairs. No. 608. 28 May 2020. Disaster Management Act, 2002: (Act no. 57 of 2002): Determination of Alert Levels and Hotspots. Link: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202005/43364gon608-translations.pdf
- European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. COVID-19 situation update worldwide, as of 30 August 2020. Link: <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/geographical-distribution-2019-ncov-cases>
- France Z Brown, Saskia Brechenmacher and thomas Carothers. *How Will the Coronavirus Reshape Democracy and Governance Globally?* 2020. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Link: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/06/how-will-coronavirus-reshape-democracy-and-governance-globally-pub-81470>
- Graham-Harrison E., *Coronavirus: how Asian countries acted while the west dithered*, The Guardian. 2020.9.27
Link: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/21/coronavirus-asia-acted-west-ditheredhong-kong-taiwan-europe>
- James Stoller K., *Reflections on leadership in the time of COVID-19*. Education Institute, Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, OH, USA, 2020Link: https://acmedsci.ac.uk/admin_assets/fileman/Uploads/COVID%20Support/leader_2020_000244.full.pdf.
- Katherine Barbieri, *COVID-19 impact: How the pandemic is affecting politics. A political scientist's take on partisan politics in the U.S. and a turn toward authoritarianism in Hungary*. Communications and Public Affairs, 803-777-8161. 2020
Link: https://www.sc.edu/uofsc/posts/2020/04/covid_impact_on_politics_barbieri.php#.XzKZ3ygzy2z
- Keith Grint, *Leadership, Management and Command in the time of the Coronavirus*. SAGE Publications. Leadership 0(0) – I-6.
Link: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340880139_Leadership_Management_and_Command_in_the_time_of_the_Coronavirus
- Korn Ferry Perspective, *Leadership in an outbreak*. 2020
Link: <https://www.kornferry.com/insights/articles/perspective-leadership-in-an-outbreak>

- Kurt M. Campbell and Rush Doshi, *The Coronavirus Could Reshape Global Order: China Is Maneuvering for International Leadership as the United States Falters*. Foreign Affairs website. 2020 Link: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-03-18/coronavirus-could-reshape-global-order>
- Lawrence Hamilton, *What sets good and bad leaders apart in the coronavirus era*. The conservation UK. Link: <https://theconversation.com/what-sets-good-and-bad-leaders-apart-in-the-coronavirus-era-140013>
- Paul Keaveny, *What sets good and bad leaders apart in the coronavirus era*. The Conservation website. 2020Link: <https://theconversation.com/what-sets-good-and-bad-leaders-apart-in-the-coronavirus-era-140013>
- Sarah Cook, *The World Sees a Public Health Crisis. Beijing Sees a Political Threat*. The Diplomat. 2020Link: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/the-world-sees-a-public-health-crisis-beijing-sees-a-political-threat/>
- Selam Gebrekidan, *For Autocrats, and Others, Coronavirus Is a Chance to Grab Even More Power*. The New York Times. 2020 Link: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/30/world/europe/coronavirus-governments-power.html>
- Solmaz Filiz Karabag, *An Unprecedented Global Crisis! The Global, Regional, National, Political, Economic and Commercial Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic*. Journal of Applied Economics and Business Research JAEBR, 10(1): 1-6 (2020). Link: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340337249_An_Unprecedented_Global_Crisis_The_Global_Regional_National_Political_Economic_and_Commercial_Impact_of_the_Coronavirus_Pandemic
- Supriya Garikipati and Uma Kambhampati, *Women leaders are better at fighting the pandemic*. Article. Voxeu website. Link: <https://voxeu.org/article/women-leaders-are-better-fighting-pandemic>

V. THE IMPACT ON THE HEALTH SYSTEM

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON HEALTH SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Radu Arghir

Although in most cases there was plenty of time to prepare for the pandemic, as the threat became apparent in the first months of 2020, most of the national health systems still managed to get overwhelmed by the disease. The disease itself presented quite a challenge, as little was known about the way it spread and how it affected the human body, however in the end the problem seemed to reside less with this challenge, and more with a lack of leadership and planning.

The challenge

New diseases or new strains of existing viruses pop up constantly. Furthermore, old, well-known pathogens can still cause unexpected outbreaks. Dealing with a known threat is easier, but is by no means easy. We will explore that later in this paper. So how are the real big threats to global health identified?

This debate is still going on, but for a pathogen to be a real threat it must be resistant to environmental factors (otherwise it might end up locked in certain regions), it must spread fast and be moderately deadly, or at least have a long incubation period. Pathogens that are too deadly kill their host before they get to spread the disease and the ones that are not deadly offer scientists and doctors plenty of time to deal with it before it can cause any harm.

A new strain of a known pathogen can become a problem, but it first needs to spread. That was the case with the Spanish Flu

which, due to the war, was initially ignored. This gave it plenty of time and opportunities to spread. The consequences were horrid. It really shook the world and caused mass devastation within communities.

At that time medicine was not as advanced as today, but flu (as a disease) and means to control flu outbreaks were well known back then too. As we will see, even today circumstances can play a major role in an outbreak.

SARS-CoV-2

Even at a glance, it is quite obvious that the new coronavirus strain SARS-CoV-2 ticks a lot of boxes in the list above¹. It might not have been that obvious in the beginning, but now we know the virus can spread like wildfire in large crowds and, while most of the cases are mild, all infected people can potentially spread the virus.

Asymptomatic cases are the most problematic, as they are almost impossible to identify and isolate. Contact tracing and pure luck (random testing) are the only way to confirm those instances. That being said, much like the Spanish Flu, it also benefitted from favorable circumstances, especially in the early days of the pandemic. We will come back to those later. The main issue now is the nature of the threat.

Because it could so easily spread undetected and crowds acted as catalysts (including potentially crowded spaces such as schools, hospitals, or markets), it had the potential to start epidemics all over the world and overwhelm medical facilities². Also, it could potentially take out entire hospitals by infecting most of the staff.

¹ Liise-Anne Pirofski, Arturo Casadevall, *Pathogenesis of COVID-19 from the Perspective of the Damage-Response Framework*, mBio, July/August 2020, Volume 11, Issue 4, available at <https://mbio.asm.org/content/11/4/e01175-20>

² European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, *Transmission of COVID-19*, June 30, 2020, available at <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/covid-19/latest-evidence/transmission>

Add to this the lack of knowledge regarding the virus, the lack of effective treatment and information regarding its transmission vectors, and the threat becomes obvious. Lacking better options many governments opted for a lockdown to prevent the spread of the virus.

Most lockdowns were successful, but they are only a delay tactic. In certain regions worst-case scenarios did take place, for example in northern Italy³, hospitals were overwhelmed and in many instances hospitals were shut down due to outbreaks among personnel but no national health system was overwhelmed, although many faced a lot pressure due to lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other equipment.

Over time, a better understanding of the disease and the virus causing it did allow for more effective protocols to be put in place, and, in some countries, the virus was somewhat contained. The problem is, in other countries it is still spreading very fast and there is no local solution.

As long as there is no vaccine or effective treatment, outbreaks can still occur anywhere in the world given that there still are “reservoirs” for the disease in certain countries (areas where many are infected). This is a test for the world as a whole, not just for individual countries. This is the state of affairs at the moment when this paper is written, the pandemic is somewhat contained, but things can still take a turn for the worse.

Precedence and preparation

Airborne disease due have a tendency the fastest among all diseases and it is not like the threat is not well known. The flu causes occasional epidemics and so do measles. This should not have been a complete surprise, and yet it seemed like one.

³ Chico Harlan and Stefano Pitrelli, *As coronavirus cases grow, hospitals in northern Italy are running out of beds*, The Washington Post, March 12, 2020, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/italy-coronavirus-patients-lombardy-hospitals/2020/03/12/36041dc6-63ce-11ea-8a8e-5c5336b32760_story.html

On top of that, it was foreshadowed by other potential epidemics that were contained before they could spread globally. Response mechanisms should have been in place, but they failed in this particular case. We will go into further details about why when we will cover the timeline of the pandemic, but first, we will go over the previous pandemic threats.

While all major outbreaks of airborne respiratory disease can be considered precedents, we will focus only on viruses related to SARS-CoV-2 and one that happened right before the Covind-19 and could have helped prevent the Covind-19 pandemic.

SARS (2002-2003)⁴

In 2002 a new virus from the Coronaviridae family emerged and it was almost immediately identified as a threat (2003). The virus, named SARS-CoV, is closely related to the preset SARS-CoV-2 and the disease it caused, SARS, shared many similarities with COVID-19.

However it was easier to detect (caused symptoms more often) and in reached peak infectivity around two weeks after entering a new host, giving health officials a lot more time to trace infections. On the other hand, it was also at least twice as deadly, with a case fatality around 10%, well above the current pandemic's 3,5% world average.

Around 8,098 people were infected in 26 countries, and that 774 died⁵ (according to US CDC, data varies a little depending on sources). The epidemic reached its peak in late March, early April 2003. Similar health measures were put in place compared to COVID-19⁶. The disease was contained by July 2003, with the last cases reported in June.

⁴ WHO, *SARS*, available at <https://www.who.int/ith/diseases/sars/en/>

⁵ Gail Dutton, *Compare Update: 2003 SARS Pandemic Versus 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic*, BioSpace, September 7, 2020, available at <https://www.biospace.com/article/comparison-2003-sars-pandemic-vs-2020-covid-19-pandemic/>

⁶ Lee Shiu Hung, *The SARS epidemic in Hong Kong: what lessons have we learned?*, *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, volume 96, August 2003, pp. 374-378, available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC539564/#!po=4.16667>

SARS was very much a rehearsal for the current pandemic and back everything worked better. To be fair, there were a few differences. The fact that SARS-CoV was more deadly meant it was detected faster. Also, it was detected before the winter holidays, so travel warnings were issued, but no travel restrictions were ever enforced. SARS-CoV was also spread less by asymptomatic cases and virus shedding was the highest after the onset of symptoms, thus quarantine was more effective.

However, the biggest difference by far was that national and international cooperated. China reported the first cases to WHO, and the affected countries coordinated their efforts to contain the virus. This did not happen in 2020. No effective vaccine was found before the virus was contained and support for finding one dropped after the threat was eliminated. However work done for the SARS and, later, MERS vaccines likely helped with the development of the SARS-CoV-2 vaccines currently being tested⁷.

MERS (2012-2020)⁸

A second deadly strain of coronavirus emerged in 2012, this time in Saudi Arabia. It was becoming obvious that more coronavirus strains were capable of performing zoonotic shifts. MERS-CoV, the virus causing MERS was even deadlier than SARS-CoV, killing around a third of the infected people. It is believed camels played the role of “bridge” between other animal species and humans in the transmission of the disease⁹.

This is quite relevant, as camels played no known role in the spread of SARS. It meant the virus could adapt and infect new species of animals, and, if those species lived in close proximity to humans, or shared physiological characteristics with humans

⁷ Eriko Padron-Regalado, *Vaccines for SARS-CoV-2: Lessons from Other Coronavirus Strains*, Infectious Diseases and Therapy, volume 9, June 2020, pp. 255–274, available at <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40121-020-00300-x>

⁸ WHO, *Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) – Saudi Arabia*, available at <https://www.who.int/csr/don/03-october-2018-mers-saudi-arabia/en/>

⁹ European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, *Factsheet about Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV)*, available at <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/middle-east-respiratory-syndrome-coronavirus/factsheet>

that could be exploited by it, it could easily “jump” to humans. It was not about a particular animal or species, many domestic animals had the potential to cause outbreaks of coronavirus related diseases.

This should have been cause for alarm in the scientific community, and focus its attention on the threat of coronavirus outbreaks, but another event would soon draw attention in another direction (Ebola).

Initially, MERS caused panic in affected regions and measures similar to the ones during SARS outbreaks were put in place. The outbreak reached its peak in early 2014 and it was never contained. However, the number of cases dropped significantly over time.

A total of 2519 cases were reported until January 2020, resulting in 866 deaths. COVID-19 restrictions likely helped curb the spread of MERS even more, but it is yet unclear. Despite the initial panic, the low number of cases (highest was around 140 per month in Saudi Arabia) and the fact it did not spread fast (the number of cases did not grow exponentially), everything returned to normal in a very fast¹⁰. No treatment or vaccine was identified for MERS and interest in finding one dropped as the number of reported cases decreased.

Just like before WHO and affected nations coordinated their efforts to contain the virus, though this time they were less successful. Still, it was enough to prevent another major outbreak. The virus still is on a watch list and new cases are to be reported to WHO immediately.

Ebola (2014-2016)¹¹

As attention was shifting away from MERS, a new pandemic drew almost all international attention. In March 2014 the biggest

¹⁰ Assad Abboud, *Panic over MERS virus fades in Saudi*, Medical Xpress, June 20, 2013, available at <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-06-panic-mers-virus-saudi.html>

¹¹ WHO, *Ebola outbreak 2014-2016*, available at <https://www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/en/>

Ebola outbreak to this day was detected in Guinea. The first cases were confirmed then, though it is clear that the outbreak started earlier¹².

It spread fast across counties in central and western Africa. It affected mostly Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea (source of the outbreak). The highest number of infections was reported in October 2014. By the time the outbreak was declared to be over, in June 2016, around 28 650 were reported and around 11 320 people died (the exact number varies a little depending on the source)¹³.

WHO considers these numbers were likely underestimated as during the height of the epidemic data collection was unreliable. Still, studies suggest those numbers were not hugely underestimated¹⁴. The virus was significantly less likely to spread in crowded places compared to airborne diseases so the risk of “surprise” outbreaks was very small.

The virus also reached some European countries and the US, but the number of cases was very low. As the Ebola virus is not airborne, containment was easier, but travel restrictions were put in place nonetheless. Other measures included raising awareness, hygiene practices (like washing hands) and contact tracing.

Starting with August 2014 a coordinated international response was put in place that focused initially on preventing the collapse of the healthcare systems in the most affected countries and, later, on the containment of the disease¹⁵. The international

¹² WHO, *Origins of the 2014 Ebola epidemic*, January 2015, available at <https://www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/one-year-report/virus-origin/en/>

¹³ BBC, *Ebola: Mapping the outbreak*, January 14, 2016, available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-28755033>

¹⁴ Donald G. McNeil Jr., *Fewer Ebola Cases Go Unreported Than Thought*, Study Finds, The New York Times, December 16, 2014, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/16/science/fewer-ebola-cases-go-unreported-than-thought-study-finds-.html>

¹⁵ WHO, *Ebola outbreak 2014 – present: How the outbreak and WHO’s response unfolded*, January 2016, available at <https://www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/response/phases/en/>

efforts were successful in containing the virus. Following the outbreak research on the Ebolavirus genus was stepped up and the first vaccine was successfully tested and approved in 2019¹⁶, while others are being currently tested¹⁷. There is even a chance Ebola will be eradicated in the coming years.

While the SARS and MERS were closer to the COVID-19 pandemic and should have caused concern regarding the threat posed by the Coronaviridae family of viruses, it is the Ebola outbreak that really rang the alarm bells regarding the threat of a global pandemic. The prospect of the worldwide Ebola outbreak scarred officials and plans were made to enhance response to future pandemics/threats.

The threat of a new pandemic became a topic mentioned in the speeches of world leaders¹⁸ and some actions were taken to improve future response, although more could have been done and this course of action did not last long anyway.

Response

The world seemed to be ready for a new pandemic in 2016 but that changed fast. The lack of the threat between 2016 and 2020 meant many of the plans devised after 2014 were never implemented and, even worse, resources were diverted away from pandemic prevention and control until 2020. The international agenda would focus on other topics and, by 2020, most world leaders would act surprised when faced with the threat of COVID-19.

¹⁶ US FDA, *First FDA-approved vaccine for the prevention of Ebola virus disease, marking a critical milestone in public health preparedness and response*, December 19, 2019, available at <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/first-fda-approved-vaccine-prevention-ebola-virus-disease-marking-critical-milestone-public-health>

¹⁷ Wikipedia, list of Ebola vaccines, available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebola_vaccine

¹⁸ Barack Obama speech at the US National Institutes of Health, December 02, 2014, available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/12/02/remarks-president-research-potential-ebola-vaccines>

An increasingly hostile world stage led to less cooperation between major state actors especially the US, China and the EU. To make things worse some world leaders denied the threat or the existence of the virus, and the role of the WHO became a point of contention among some world leaders. A coordinated international response became all but impossible.

Initial response:

The virus was identified in December 2019, when it could possibly be contained, but the Chinese authorities, where it was first discovered were slow to act. It took a while for claims of a new virus to be checked and authorities failed to recognize the threat until late January¹⁹. Even worse, national authorities refused to cooperate with WHO, which blindly reported Chinese findings (later proven wrong), resulting in subsequent damage to its credibility²⁰.

When the scale of the problem became clear China reacted promptly, building additional temporary hospitals in the most affected areas and enforced an extremely drastic quarantine. People were pretty much forced to stay in their homes all the time²¹.

However, the drastic measures worked, in the sense that the outbreak was contained. Beijing also limited exports of items that were useful in the fight against the pandemic (PPE, ventilators, medication, etc.), causing shortages in other countries that were relying on Chinese factories. This was a big issue because of the international production was located in China. It was a reality check for many developed countries that had to get by with national stocks, which were not always enough.

¹⁹ Amy Qin and Vivian Wang, *Wuhan, Center of Coronavirus Outbreak, Is Being Cut Off by Chinese Authorities*, The New York Times, January 22, 2020, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/22/world/asia/china-coronavirus-travel.html>

²⁰ Original tweet found here: <https://twitter.com/who/status/1217043229427761152?lang=en>

²¹ BBC, *Coronavirus Wuhan diary: Living alone in a city gone quiet*, January 30, 2020, available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-51276656>

First massive outbreaks outside of China

Despite China acting decisively, by the time it acted it was too late to prevent a worldwide pandemic. The virus had escaped the country and was spreading in at least three areas, central Europe (Northern Italy, southern France, and Southern Germany), the United States and Australia. This is when the problems this virus can cause became apparent and further data was collected.

In Wuhan, China and Lombardia, Italy²² (as well as Emilia Romana and Piemonte to a lesser extent) hospitals were completely overwhelmed by the influx of new patients. ICU beds were running out and long shifts were taking a heavy toll on the hospital staff. In Italy, ventilators ran out and doctors had to decide who is selected to get access.

This difficult decision was later made lighter when it became known that ventilators don't help much. In fact, they were associated with an increased mortality rate, which meant doctors were avoiding them as much as possible²³ (although even later data seemed to confirm ventilators do help).

However, all this was not known in the first months of 2020 and the high number of people on ventilators and lack of knowledge regarding the pathogenesis of COVID-19 meant the case fatality rate was really high. In Italy it reached as high as 15% and, as of the writing of this, is still close to that number²⁴.

Although in all the chaos I would imagine some mild cases were overlooked, meaning the case fatality is not that high. To make things worse PPE was scarce in the EU. Medical personnel

²² Lorenzo Tondo, *Italian hospitals short of beds as coronavirus death toll jumps*, The Guardian, March 9, 2020, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/09/italian-hospitals-short-beds-coronavirus-death-toll-jumps>

²³ Jon Hamilston, *Ventilators Are No Panacea For Critically Ill COVID-19 Patients*, NPR, April 2, 2020, available at <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/04/02/826105278/ventilators-are-no-panacea-for-critically-ill-covid-19-patients>

²⁴ Worldometers, *Outcome of Cases (Recovery or Death) in Italy*, available at <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/italy/>

was also at risk of catching the disease, but it never became a major issue, as security protocols put in place to prevent the spread of the disease in hospitals seemed to work most of the time.

Still, in the most affected area resources, both human and material, were pushed to the limit and there was no real outside help. In the initial panic, most states closed their border and seized all PPE, even supplies currently in transit towards a destination. Medical personal were facing the gloomy prospect of having to improvise PPE and hope for the best.

This was not true only for the EU, the same issues would later plague other countries too, including developed ones, like the US or Russia. In the US state governors had to fight each other for resources as demand was high and supply limited. It took a while before local manufacturers managed to adapt and step in to help.

Adapting to the crisis

In Europe things got better. With a bit of a delay, solidarity started to kick in and countries started helping each other. Despite a rough start, supply lines were restored and in most countries and the epidemic was contained. Doctors were sent to help in Italy and regional supply centers, that serve multiple countries, were established to prevent or at least alleviate future shortages²⁵.

As treatments were found, mostly for the very ill (people with a severe manifestation of the disease), the demand for medical ventilators decreased and even a surplus was created in some countries²⁶. PPE is still in high demand, but overall, the situation was under control.

The risk of massive shortages was averted. The same thing happened slower at a global level, where the production of PPE

²⁵ Romanian IGSU, *O altă misiune umanitară derulată în sprijinul țărilor care se confruntă cu noul tip de coronavirus*, May 21, 2020, available at <https://www.igsu.ro/Media/Local/1106>

²⁶ Michael Biesecker, *HHS canceling ventilator contracts, says stockpile is full*, AP, September 2, 2020, available at <https://apnews.com/2f697994ea3e53eb966c58106fd96461>

was increased massively. There are still occasional shortages, but they are no longer widespread. Also, experience was exchanged, both domestically and internationally, and medical trials started yielding results²⁷. Less affected countries, or countries that got the virus under control, sent aid to others facing the brunt of the pandemic.

Field or improvised hospitals were built and more resources were allocated to fighting the disease. In the US the National Guard was called to help in certain states and hospital ships were deployed along its coasts²⁸. In fact, the army helped in many countries with lockdown enforcement and the rapid deployment of field hospitals and transport of resources to affected areas, highlighting a role for it during times of peace.

NATO also airlifted supplies for member countries²⁹ and could help with the supply of vaccines. In Brazil, where the president denied the existence of the disease until he got infected too, even street gangs stepped in to compensate for the lack of government actions³⁰.

The pseudo-second wave

Still, as some countries were starting to adapt to the crisis, others were just beginning to feel it. In some countries like India,

²⁷ Low-cost dexamethasone reduces death by up to one third in hospitalised patients with severe respiratory complications of COVID-19, available at https://www.recoverytrial.net/files/recovery_dexamethasone_statement_160620_v2final.pdf

²⁸ NCSL, National Guard Assists Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, April 28, 2020, available at <https://www.ncsl.org/research/military-and-veterans-affairs/national-guard-activation-in-every-state-assisting-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic.aspx>

²⁹ NATO, *NSPA continues to support Allied nations through key COVID-19 relief acquisition and transport: New deliveries for Italy, France, Belgium, Spain, Romania and Greece*, May 11, 2020, available at <https://www.nspa.nato.int/news/2020/nspa-continues-to-support-allied-nations-through-key-covid19-relief-acquisition-and-transport-new-deliveries-for-italy-france-belgium-spain-romania-and-greece>

³⁰ Caio Barretto Briso, Tom Phillips, *Brazil gangs impose strict curfews to slow coronavirus spread*, The Guardian, March 25, 2020, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/25/brazil-rio-gangs-coronavirus>

Romania, Hungary and Israel³¹, despite an initial successful response that prevented the spread of the disease. Due to a lack of measures during the lockdown, after it ended, things got worse very fast. As of the writing of this (September 2020), India is on the fast track to becoming one of the worst-hit countries³², along with the US and Brazil. Things are still better than in March, as there is a better understanding of the disease and more PPE production worldwide, but massive outbreaks are still possible.

It also did not help that the US cut funds to WHO as some sort of punishment for the fact it initially used data coming from official Chinese sources (later proven to be wrong)³³. It is not that WHO has no flaws, but cutting funding in the middle of a pandemic, instead of trying to fix the problems, is a really uninspired move.

On the other hand, there is a chance that this decision may not be a result of the pandemic (that was just a pretext) and may be part of a hidden agenda of the Trump administration. It did cut funds for medical assistance in 2017 for no apparent reason and it might not consider healthcare a priority³⁴. Regardless of the reason, the impact could be huge and weaken international response to a future pandemic.

³¹ Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman, Gil Hoffman, *Israeli gov't approves: Three-week lockdown beginning Friday*, The Jerusalem Post, September 13, 2020, available at <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/coronavirus-2651-new-cases-on-saturday-death-toll-1103-642074>

³² Rhythmia Kaul, *India's Covid deaths inch closer to 80k as country reports around 1k new daily deaths for 3 weeks*, Hindustan Times, September 14, 2020, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/around-1k-new-daily-deaths-for-3-weeks-india-s-covid-death-number-inching-closer-to-80k/story-ivXXD1puFXtmhIDuOI2Q7J.html>

³³ Matthew Choi, Sarah Wheaton, *Trump: U.S. funding freeze to WHO could be permanent*, Politico, May 19, 2020, available at <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/19/trump-world-health-organization-funding-267590>

³⁴ Sarah Wildman, *Trump's budget eliminates US funding for global family planning and famine relief*, Vox, May 24, 2017, available at <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/5/24/15681216/trump-budget-cuts-funding-global-family-planning-famine-relief>

Much like it was the case with Ebola, fighting a disease, especially one as viral as Covid-19, requires a coordinated international effort. If it spreads unchecked in a single country, it can easily reach all over the world (basically this is how it began, it started in China). COVID-19 also proved that even the biggest and strongest countries are quite vulnerable to such a treat.

Of all permanent members of the UN Security Council, the most powerful countries in the world, only France handled the disease well (so far, as the number of cases is on the rise), although the UK seems to be pulling itself together after a rough initial response. The next big test will be vaccine distribution, coming probably next year. The entire pandemic and how it was handled so far, and how it will be handled, is a major test for humanity as a whole.

Impact & Trends

The pandemic was met with a wide range of reactions worldwide, and, while it is very hard to reach conclusions while the pandemic is still ongoing and some of its most important effects may not be apparent at the moment, there are a few trends and issues that were very common and stood out. Even if some of the issues will not be solved and some of the trends will not last long, every subsequent pandemic will bring them back into the spotlight even faster.

Technology and remote assistance

This is more a general trend, but a lot of things went digital during this pandemic many daily activities went online. From physical exercise, to school and work, all was done digitally to avoid human contact and the spread of the disease. The tools for this were present long ago, but rarely used, the pandemic forced this evolution. This was also true in the case of healthcare.

Online consultations existed long before the pandemic but were quite rare. The pandemic, and the need to reduce the

contact between doctors and patients, made this practice much more mainstream. There was also an emphasis on more efficient medical assistance.

Non-essential tests and services were cut this prioritize important cases. This, while it did delay some important but not essential medical consultations, with potentially harmful results for patients³⁵, had the advantage of eliminating unnecessary ones, paving the way for more efficient services³⁶.

The streamlining of healthcare assistance in non-serious or non-urgent cases could save a lot of resources and time for both doctors and patients. It can circumvent long waiting lists and discourage unnecessary procedures prescribed just to increase medical bills. Digitalization and streamlining are especially important during the crisis as some patients face restricted access to healthcare services due to the epidemic.

This was very much a forced evolution, very few wanted it, and it may take a while before it is implemented fully, however it is unlikely this trend will stop. This is likely to become the future of healthcare.

Stake oil

That being said more online and long-distance medical assistance can also open the way for more fraud. During this pandemic, arguably the first truly global pandemic in modern history, it became really obvious than before how financial interests can sabotage scientific research.

Since pretty much the entire world was affected any cure or medication that can help alleviate COVID-19 symptoms or

³⁵ WHO, *COVID-19 significantly impacts health services for noncommunicable diseases*, June 1, 2020, available at <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/01-06-2020-covid-19-significantly-impacts-health-services-for-noncommunicable-diseases>

³⁶ Ray Moynihan, Minna Johansson, Alies Maybee, Eddy Lang, *Covid-19: an opportunity to reduce unnecessary healthcare*, BMJ, July 14, 2020, available at <https://www.bmj.com/content/370/bmj.m2752.full>

prevent its spread could end up making a lot of sales. It was no wonder many unverified medications, backed up by questionable research papers popped up soon after the crisis began. Even among big drug companies, the competition was fierce to show their products work.

Some doctors asked for the right to prescribe such unproven treatments to their patients³⁷. Best case scenario, this leads to patients buying placebo medication, worse case, can lead to overdoses or self-harm. Furthermore all kinds of false medical advice and “natural panacea” circulated over the internet, especially social media.

As of the writing of this paper, the only medications proven to work were anti-inflators (corticosteroids) for patients in critical conditions (in the advanced stages of the disease, where lung inflammation was an issue)³⁸. No anti-viral or immunomodulatory drugs had any significant effect in the early stages of the disease (thus preventing the evolution of the disease).

All this pressure can lead to the use of unproven, potentially harmful medication, and undermine the scientific process required to find an actual cure. All research done in this area must remain neutral and only proven drugs should be promoted, especially by doctors.

Profiteering will always be part of crises, and the higher the stakes the more people will try to profit, it is just a sad fact of

³⁷ George C. Fareed, *Open Letter to Dr. Anthony Fauci Regarding the Use of Hydroxychloroquine for Treating COVID-19*, August 14, 2020, available at <https://www.globalresearch.ca/open-letter-dr-anthony-fauci-regarding-use-hydroxychloroquine-treating-covid-19/5721065>

³⁸ Anca Dumitrescu, *Studiu: Tratarea cu steroizi a bolnavilor de Covid-19 aflați în stare critică reduce riscul de deces cu 20%; OMS și-a revizuit recomandarea față de acest tratament*, News.ro, September 3, 2020, available at <https://www.news.ro/economic/studiu-tratarea-cu-steroidi-a-bolnavilor-de-covid-19-aflati-in-stare-critica-reduce-riscul-de-deces-cu-20-oms-si-a-revizuit-recomandarea-fata-de-acest-tratament-1922401303002020090719469155>

life, but in this case, it can seriously interfere with finding a proper cure. Debunking such claims requires time and effort sometimes standardized trials that could be used to test medication actually showing promise.

Pressure on medical personnel

It comes as a surprise to nobody that healthcare workers are essential workers and a health crisis can seriously damage every other aspect of a civilization (economy, culture, etc.) yet still in most countries this sector was neglected and was not prepared for the coming crisis. This despite the multiple warning signs mentioned above.

Emergency stockpiles were not kept at maximum capacity³⁹ and hospitals were understaffed or poorly managed. Even among the most developed countries, very few can claim they were ready for the crisis (for example South Korea).

Some did better than others at managing the crisis, but most panicked at the beginning, not being sure if the supplies they had were enough. This put a lot of stress on healthcare workers who felt like they were left to fend for themselves and improvise. Some even quit their job in fear, making things worse for their colleagues.

Proper management and communication, as well as proper resource allocation, can make a crisis feel a lot less like a crisis, and more of a challenge, in a constructive way. There are (unfortunately only) a few countries that actually contained the virus early on and managed to keep things together, so it is doable, it just takes commitment and consistency, at all levels, from individual doctors to health ministries.

³⁹ Bo Erickson, *Face mask shortage in stockpile becomes political issue in election year*, CBS News, March 30, 2020, available at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/coronavirus-face-mask-shortage-in-stockpile-becomes-political-issue-in-election-year/>

That being said this level of responsibility yields better results when more countries adhere to it. Even the most prepared country can get overwhelmed if all its neighbors or trade partners are overwhelmed. The constant flow of sick people will eventually overrun the most prepared systems.

By contrast, a country can be protected from disease simply by the fact that its neighbors or trade partners were prepared. It can, of course, especially if it too is prepared, aid them in their fight with the pathogen (sent supplies or personnel, offer lab assistance, etc.)

This crisis highlighted how rare proper management is. However, the impact of this is still uncertain. This will depend on the response to the highlighted issue. On one hand, reforms were promised in many countries when the crisis will be over, which could be a good thing, but on the other, this is likely not the first time such promises were made.

If things fail to improve trust in the healthcare system will decrease for doctors and patients alike, increasing the chance of it breaking down during the next crisis, whenever that may be. The stress and “you are on your own” feeling can cause doctors to quit (or just not do their best) and patience to avoid seeking medical help (or ignore medical advice).

Both behaviors will make the crisis worse. Restoring trust levels will make future crises much more manageable as the population and healthcare workers will find it easier to coordinate.

Irrational responses and the international blame game

Beyond national efforts, there is an entire web of international organizations built around the UN that is supposed to coordinate global health. And it had successful endeavors. The recent Polio

vaccination in Africa⁴⁰ or the containment of the Ebola 2016 were such examples (although even then WHO was accused of being a bit too slow). Yet it failed spectacularly in the case of COVID-19.

Part of the problem was the evasive nature of the disease (hard to detect). Another part was the unwillingness of some countries to cooperate. But that is not the whole story. Funding for WHO varies and in this instance, it played a key role. WHO could not criticize the initial Beijing response out of fear of losing one of its biggest donors.

To make things worse, USA later froze funding to the organization making it more dependent on China. The organization became a political battleground and the time when it really should have stayed neutral. This is not only the case with WHO.

Conflicts between states are nothing new or special, but the fact that these conflicts undermine international institutions vital for achieving progress as a species is bad news. Any conflict between China and the US, or any other countries needs to stay out of WHO (and other international organizations, for that matter). This allowed some countries to point the finger at WHO despite it having access to limited information, and therefore not being able to provide accurate assessments.

Either way, the lack of global guidance can significantly hurt the ability of countries to cooperate. The eradication of a disease or the development of a vaccine sometimes requires international cooperation (its distribution too once it is ready), especially when talking about a virus that spread to almost every country in the world.

⁴⁰ WHO, *Polio eradication is a true African success story, made possible by devoted leaders, countries, communities, civil society, and parents*, March 27, 2018, available at <https://www.afro.who.int/news/polio-eradication-true-african-success-story-made-possible-devoted-leaders-countries>

Also, international guidelines can compensate for the lack of local leadership, especially in poorly developed countries where the healthcare system may not be capable of building its own protocols from scratch. It can also help with logistics, especially if the military gets involved (WHO can identify where assets like hospital ships are most needed). But we are getting into too many details.

The main idea is that international cooperation in the field of healthcare is very important, especially during difficult times, and making the role of WHO a point of contention is very counterproductive. It is true it could have done a better job in handling the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as other threats, as it lacked critical information, especially early on.

Still, these shortcomings need to be addressed, issues need to be fixed and the system needs to be strengthened, not abandoned. As it was clearly shown this year, no country can fight a global or regional pandemic alone and individual countries have a hard time identifying potential potentially dangerous pathogens early on.

While keeping the international health organizations alive and efficient may not have a big impact on individual healthcare systems, especially in developed countries, it will affect the overall health of the human population as a whole (seen as the average of all counties). This is also an important indicator.

Conclusion

The first thing that needs to be said is that the pandemic is still ongoing. The so-called second wave is in many cases just the continuation of the first wave as it was “stretched” due to safety measures and awareness. The initial spread was slowed down, but as the number of infections increased, the second time at a slower pace, once it reached a high enough number it returned to the previous exponential growth. Thus is impossible to estimate the full scale of the impact or even what countries will be most affected (though there are some obvious candidates).

Still, regardless of scale, the issues highlighted by the pandemic are glaringly obvious and the outcome will depend on the response of public and private administrations. Fixing those issues will offer great potential for progress and may mean that the outcome of the pandemic and its impact on healthcare is a positive one, especially in the long run. Ignoring them can seriously undermine public trust and confidence of health workers, which will make the next pandemic even worse, therefore creating a vicious circle. It is also possible that there will be progress in some countries, regress in others, and, globally, on average, things will stay the same.

Either way, evaluations are important the lessons learned need to be made publicly available. Decision-makers may ignore them to a large extent now (like it happened after the Ebola outbreak) but they may find them useful in different contexts in the future and maybe decide to start some reforms aimed at fixing those issues.

Bibliography:

- Amy Qin and Vivian Wang, *Wuhan, Center of Coronavirus Outbreak, Is Being Cut Off by Chinese Authorities*, The New York Times, January 22, 2020, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/22/world/asia/china-coronavirus-travel.html>
- Anca Dumitrescu, *Studiu: Tratarea cu steroizi a bolnavilor de Covid-19 aflați în stare critică reduce riscul de deces cu 20%; OMS și-a revizuit recomandarea față de acest tratament*, News.ro, September 3, 2020, available at <https://www.news.ro/economic/studiu-tratarea-cu-steroidi-a-bolnavilor-de-covid-19-aflati-in-stare-critica-reduce-riscul-de-deces-cu-20-oms-si-a-revizuit-recomandarea-fata-de-acest-tratament-1922401303002020090719469155>
- Assad Abboud, *Panic over MERS virus fades in Saudi*, Medical Xpress, June 20, 2013, available at <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-06-panic-mers-virus-saudi.html>
- Barack Obama speech at the US National Institutes of Health, December 02, 2014, available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/12/02/remarks-president-research-potential-ebola-vaccines>
- BBC, *Coronavirus Wuhan diary: Living alone in a city gone quiet*, January 30, 2020, available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-51276656>
- BBC, *Ebola: Mapping the outbreak*, January 14, 2016, available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-28755033>

- Bo Erickson, *Face mask shortage in stockpile becomes political issue in election year*, CBS News, March 30, 2020, available at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/coronavirus-face-mask-shortage-in-stockpile-becomes-political-issue-in-election-year/>
- Caio Barretto Briso, Tom Phillips, *Brazil gangs impose strict curfews to slow coronavirus spread*, The Guardian, March 25, 2020, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/25/brazil-rio-gangs-coronavirus>
- Chico Harlan and Stefano Pitrelli, *As coronavirus cases grow, hospitals in northern Italy are running out of beds*, The Washington Post, March 12, 2020, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/italy-coronavirus-patients-lombardy-hospitals/2020/03/12/36041dc6-63ce-11ea-8a8e-5c5336b32760_story.html
- Donald G. McNeil Jr., *Fewer Ebola Cases Go Unreported Than Thought, Study Finds*, The New York Times, December 16, 2014, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/16/science/fewer-ebola-cases-go-unreported-than-thought-study-finds-.html>
- Eriko Padron-Regalado, *Vaccines for SARS-CoV-2: Lessons from Other Coronavirus Strains*, Infectious Diseases and Therapy, volume 9, June 2020, pp. 255–274, available at <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40121-020-00300-x>
- European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, *Factsheet about Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV)*, available at <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/middle-east-respiratory-syndrome-coronavirus/factsheet>
- European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, *Transmission of COVID-19*, June 30, 2020, available at <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/covid-19/latest-evidence/transmission>
- Gail Dutton, *Compare Update: 2003 SARS Pandemic Versus 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic*, BioSpace, September 7, 2020, available at <https://www.biospace.com/article/comparison-2003-sars-pandemic-vs-2020-covid-19-pandemic/>
- George C. Fareed, *Open Letter to Dr. Anthony Fauci Regarding the Use of Hydroxychloroquine for Treating COVID-19*, August 14, 2020, available at <https://www.globalresearch.ca/open-letter-dr-anthony-fauci-regarding-use-hydroxychloroquine-treating-covid-19/5721065>
- Jon Hamilton, *Ventilators Are No Panacea For Critically Ill COVID-19 Patients*, NPR, April 2, 2020, available at <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/04/02/826105278/ventilators-are-no-panacea-for-critically-ill-covid-19-patients>
- Lee Shiu Hung, *The SARS epidemic in Hong Kong: what lessons have we learned?*, Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, volume 96, August 2003, pp. 374–378, available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC539564/#!po=4.16667>

- Liise-Anne Pirofski, Arturo Casadevall, *Pathogenesis of COVID-19 from the Perspective of the Damage-Response Framework*, mBio, July/August 2020, Volume 11, Issue 4, available at <https://mbio.asm.org/content/11/4/e01175-20>
- Lorenzo Tondo, *Italian hospitals short of beds as coronavirus death toll jumps*, The Guardian, March 9, 2020, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/09/italian-hospitals-short-beds-coronavirus-death-toll-jumps>
- Low-cost dexamethasone reduces death by up to one third in hospitalised patients with severe respiratory complications of COVID-19, available at https://www.recoverytrial.net/files/recovery_dexamethasone_statement_160620_v2final.pdf
- Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman, Gil Hoffman, *Israeli gov't approves: Three-week lockdown beginning Friday*, The Jerusalem Post, September 13, 2020, available at <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/coronavirus-2651-new-cases-on-saturday-death-toll-1103-642074>
- Matthew Choi, Sarah Wheaton, *Trump: U.S. funding freeze to WHO could be permanent*, Politico, May 19, 2020, available at <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/19/trump-world-health-organization-funding-267590>
- Michael Biesecker, *HHS canceling ventilator contracts, says stockpile is full*, AP, September 2, 2020, available at <https://apnews.com/2f697994ea3e53eb966c58106fd96461>
- NATO, *NSPA continues to support Allied nations through key COVID-19 relief acquisition and transport: New deliveries for Italy, France, Belgium, Spain, Romania and Greece*, May 11, 2020, available at <https://www.nspa.nato.int/news/2020/nspa-continues-to-support-allied-nations-through-key-covid19-relief-acquisition-and-transport-new-deliveries-for-italy-france-belgium-spain-romania-and-greece>
- NCSL, *National Guard Assists Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*, April 28, 2020, available at <https://www.ncsl.org/research/military-and-veterans-affairs/national-guard-activation-in-every-state-assisting-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic.aspx>
- Original tweet found here: <https://twitter.com/who/status/1217043229427761152?lang=en>
- Ray Moynihan, Minna Johansson, Alies Maybee, Eddy Lang, *Covid-19: an opportunity to reduce unnecessary healthcare*, BMJ, July 14, 2020, available at <https://www.bmj.com/content/370/bmj.m2752.full>
- Rhythmia Kaul, *India's Covid deaths inch closer to 80k as country reports around 1k new daily deaths for 3 weeks*, Hindustan Times, September 14, 2020, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/around-1k-new-daily-deaths-for-3-weeks-india-s-covid-death-number-inching-closer-to-80k/story-ivXXD1puFXtmhIDuOI2Q7J.html>

- Romanian IGSU, *O altă misiune umanitară derulată în sprijinul țărilor care se confruntă cu noul tip de coronavirus*, May 21, 2020, available at <https://www.igsu.ro/Media/Local/1106>
- Sarah Wildman, *Trump's budget eliminates US funding for global family planning and famine relief*, Vox, May 24, 2017, available at <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/5/24/15681216/trump-budget-cuts-funding-global-family-planning-famine-relief>
- US FDA, *First FDA-approved vaccine for the prevention of Ebola virus disease, marking a critical milestone in public health preparedness and response*, December 19, 2019, available at <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/first-fda-approved-vaccine-prevention-ebola-virus-disease-marking-critical-milestone-public-health>
- WHO, *COVID-19 significantly impacts health services for noncommunicable diseases*, June 1, 2020, available at <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/01-06-2020-covid-19-significantly-impacts-health-services-for-noncommunicable-diseases>
- WHO, *Ebola outbreak 2014 – present: How the outbreak and WHO's response unfolded*, January 2016, available at <https://www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/response/phases/en/>
- WHO, *Ebola outbreak 2014-2016*, available at <https://www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/en/>
- WHO, *Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) – Saudi Arabia*, available at <https://www.who.int/csr/don/03-october-2018-mers-saudi-arabia/en/>
- WHO, *Origins of the 2014 Ebola epidemic*, January 2015, available at <https://www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/one-year-report/virus-origin/en/>
- WHO, *Polio eradication is a true African success story, made possible by devoted leaders, countries, communities, civil society, and parents*, March 27, 2018, available at <https://www.afro.who.int/news/polio-eradication-true-african-success-story-made-possible-devoted-leaders-countries>
- WHO, *SARS*, available at <https://www.who.int/ith/diseases/sars/en/>
- Wikipedia, list of Ebola vaccines, available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebola_vaccine
- Worldometers, *Outcome of Cases (Recovery or Death) in Italy*, available at <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/italy/>

VI. THE IMPACT ON ECONOMY

GLOBAL ECONOMIC TURMOIL IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC

Narciz Bălăsoiu

Nasim Taleb shared in his bestseller “The Black Swan“ that if a scientist had proposed to secure all commercial planes cockpits before September 11, 2001, everyone would have considered him insane. After the terrorist attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Center, this solution was imposed as a fully rational one. Moreover, today such a measure becomes the norm, while the reluctance of those who do not join is absurd¹.

But how do you prepare for the unforeseen, when most of society still lives in the paradigm “it will not happen to me“? An extraordinary analysis published by The New York Times shows, based on the tracking of the signal from mobile phones, how the virus from the Chinese province of Wuhan circulated in all corners of the world, being spread by tourists who celebrated the Chinese New Year². The World Health Organization has been talking for several years about the imminent danger of a global pandemic. But no one considered such a scenario plausible enough in order to shape the decision-makers’ agenda.

By mid-February (2020), the Italians, Spaniards, British or Germans had seen the ravages of Sars-Cov-2 among the Chinese population. However, neither the authorities of those states nor

¹ Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, Random House Publishing, 2007.

² Zhong Raymond, *China’s Virus Apps May Outlast the Outbreak, Stirring Privacy Fears*, The New York Times Magazine, May 26 2020.

the population believed that such scenarios could take place in Europe. On March 11, there were more than 2,200 confirmed cases in Spain, while approximately 3,000 Atletico Madrid fans³ travelled unscathed to Liverpool to support their team in a Champions League match. In the United Kingdom, there were almost 800 confirmed cases at the time of that match.

Why is the COVID-19 pandemic a “black swan”? Because it has transformed our lives dramatically almost overnight. As some sociologists, followers of the qualitative school, highlighted, our lives have changed “from Tuesday to Wednesday”. More explicitly, the vast majority of us went to the office as on a normal day, so that the next day we could work from home at best, without knowing when we would return to work. Actually, hoping we will still have a place to return to.

The renowned publication “The Economist” opened the summer 2020 edition with a suggestive headline on the front page: “Free money. When government spending knows no limits”⁴. The cover is intended to be suggestive for the profound and systemic changes that we are witnessing in the world economy in the midst of the pandemic. Just as Keynesianism paved the way for Milton Friedman’s austere monetarism in 1970, and central banks gained independence and a stronger role in defining and keeping national economies under control in 1990, so the coronavirus episode marks a new paradigm.

This new paradigm is characterized by government loans, money often pumped artificially into the market and interventions in the capital markets, while keeping an eye on the low inflation. Each era of the global economy is marked by a new challenge. After 1930, the ultimate task of governments was to lift the world out of the Great Depression. After the 1970s and early 1980s, the terrible challenge was to stop the so-called “stagflation”

³ Conn David, I thought it was appalling’: anger over Atlético fans attending Anfield, *The Guardian International Edition*, 22 March 2020.

⁴ Free money: When government spending knows no limits, *The Economist – Single Issue Magazine*, July 25th 2020.

phenomenon (high unemployment and inflation rates maintained at this level for a long time).

Much of the resilience of the world's economies has its origins in those years when markets also had to deal with austere government policies. However, the resilience of economies and austerity policies failed the test of the economic shock of 2008. The advice of economists and international financial-banking institutions for politicians of this era was to spend as much as they can to save the economy.

In times of total lockdown, in which large sectors producing less or more added value in the economy were closed, governments threw money into the market to largely cushion the shock caused by the extremely deep economic contraction. And in a relatively short time they succeeded. Although still only partially functional, businesses such as tourism, hospitality, the large manufacturing industry or the aviation sector are still breathing, even though coma state is still called breathing.

However, the shock wave continues to extend like the waves produced by a stone thrown into the water. Economies are far from satisfactory for the globalized economy of 2020. The completely different lifestyle of the new post-pandemic normal will make economies and businesses adapt. And when unemployment and inflation can no longer be kept under control with money borrowed by governments, when the economic recovery, in either U or W form, reaches the bottom of these sinusoids, the resilience of economies will be put to the test.

What are governments doing to prevent that moment? Implement economic recovery programs consisting of tons of money injected into the market, while generating unprecedented amount of loans. The IMF predicts that the world's rich countries will borrow 17% of their total GDP this year to fund \$ 4.2 trillion in spending and tax exemptions in order to keep the economic fire burning⁵.

⁵ Gaspar Vitor, Fiscal Monitor Press Briefing, IMF Report, April 2020.

The world's largest economies have adopted stimulus packages with exorbitant amounts even for the level of March 2020...not to mention September. In March, the US Congress adopted the largest financial aid package in history: \$ 2 trillion to be injected into the US economy. The measures include aid distributed directly to Americans, loans to small businesses and large companies, such as those in the aviation sector, and more financial resources for hospitals.

On the other side of the ocean, the European Union unveiled its post-Covid economic recovery plan in July 2020. The European Council approved, at the end of 5 days of negotiations, the EU Multiannual Financial Framework for the period 2021-2027, with its most important component "Next Generation EU", better known as the Economic Recovery Plan.

The "keystone" of the whole agreement is given by the new element of the Union's policies: the European Commission is going to borrow heavily on international markets (750 billion euros) and then distribute them to states that need to receive economic incentives. The allocations will be mostly in the form of grants (EUR 390 billion) and the rest (EUR 360 billion) in the form of loans.

Officially, the money of the boost fund will have attached conditions for granting, such as respect for EU values, in particular respect for the rule of law, and compliance with the recommendations of the European Semester. Theoretically it is created the possibility of blocking funds if the states violate these principles. Practically, however, blocking the funds will be very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

More important, the Union will also recover the money borrowed from the Member States. National contributions to the EU Budget increase to 1.4% of GNI and, depending on the size of additional own resources, can increase to a maximum of 1.46% of GNI. In addition, there is already talking of imposing new taxes on plastic, carbon emissions or GAFA companies.

China has also announced that it will pump billions of yuan to keep the national economy under control, especially by investing in infrastructure and consumption. China has experienced the first contraction of the economy in more than 40 years. This has not happened since Mao's time. In the first quarter, the decrease was 6.8%. The blow of the coronavirus epidemic was severe, given that last year China reported an increase of 6.4% in the first quarter, at a time when it was in full economic war with the US.

What does a preliminary view over global economy reveals?

The latest forecast from the International Monetary Fund indicates a projection of global economic growth of -4.9% in 2020, with 1.9 percentage points below the April 2020 forecast when all economies were under lock and key. Even after the partial resumption of economic activities, the pandemic had an even more negative impact on economic activities in the first half of 2020, and the recovery is expected to be slower than at the beginning.

Several respected analysts suggest an unprecedented economic crisis: between the first half of 2019 and the second half of 2020, real GDP in several countries contracted by more than 5 per cent, putting a large number of jobs at risk. If we talk about the European Union, no less than 59 million jobs are in danger of disappearing. In percentage terms, this means 26% of the EU27 and UK workforce.

As we have already seen, governments have responded to this crisis with a fiscal stimulus of about 10% on average for each country's GDP. A common theme of government responses was a combination of implicit and explicit tax deferrals. Tax deferral policies have been addressed to both individuals and especially companies, mainly in the category of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Specifically, in Australia, taxpayers can request that the payment of taxes due to the state budget be postponed for up to

four months without accruing interest or penalties. Also, Dutch corporate taxpayers will be able to deduct their estimated 2020 taxable losses in 2019, creating a so-called “crown reserve”.⁶

Few governments have thought of granting, in addition to exemptions, tax incentives for companies that pay their taxes on time, thus providing liquidity to the state budget. One consequence of these policies is that tax authorities have little revenue and increasing tax debt. For example, there are OECD member states where tax debts have increased by more than 70% in the last three months. In others, tax deferrals alone amounted to more than \$ 25 billion between March and June 2020.

The IMF anticipates global economic growth of 5.4% in 2021. Overall, global GDP in 2021 would be 6.5% lower than in the pre-Covid projections of January 2020. The effect is even greater in households with low incomes, thus projecting an increase in global inequity and absolute global poverty.

Although the indicators for the first half of 2020 were expected to be improved by the partial reopening of savings in May, the figures show only a worsening of the collapse, reflecting the spread of the pandemic and the intensification of measures to stop and isolate the virus. Economic activity reached a minimum in April 2020, when the Procurement Managers’ Indices (PMI) reached an all-time low of 26.2.⁷

The PMI or Purchasing Managers’ Index is an indicator that reflects the economic health of the production and services sectors, as well as the confidence of managers working in the supply departments of companies. The index analyses five major areas of study: new orders, the level of current inventory, the level of production, deliveries from suppliers and the evolution of jobs.

⁶ British Columbia Financial And Economic Review, 80th Edition, Sep 17 2020, (Source Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources and BC Oil and Gas Commission).

⁷ Williamson Chris, Eurozone PMI at all-time low as economy locks down to fight COVID-19, HIS Markit Report, May 6th 2020.

Unemployment rates have also reached historic levels. In March and April alone, it is estimated that about 160 million jobs have been lost in non-EU G20 countries. Cheaply paid labour has been disproportionately affected across emerging markets (especially in India), but also in advanced economies (especially in the US).

What does all this data show us? That the pandemic has negatively affected global economic growth more than humanity has experienced in the last century. There are estimates that the global economic growth will slow to between 3 and 6% in 2020, with a partial recovery in 2021, if there is no severe second wave of infections.

The economic outcome of the current pandemic increases the risk of an economic recession with levels of unemployment not experienced since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The cost of human lives lost in the pandemic will permanently affect economic growth already catalysed by the costs of rising poverty, disrupted careers and growing social turmoil.

Global trade could contract by almost 18%, depending on the depth of the global economic recession, placing an even greater burden on the shoulders of emerging economies dependent on the development of global trade. The total impact of the pandemic will not be known until we know its peak.

The image of the global economy remains an uncertainty of proportions, as the pandemic continues to progress, with the number of daily cases of infection growing thus asking for new measures to curb and stop the virus. The number of active cases globally has increased at an average rate of 1% per day in the last month.

High rates of new active cases are concentrated among emerging market economies, while the increase in the number of cases in the US has accelerated. New outbreaks have been reported in some Asian states that appear to be managing the epidemic. Overall, efforts to curb the spread of the virus have been successful in many states, but uncertainty has increased over the economic outcome of the pandemic.

But if the April forecast is not at all similar to the June forecast, how much uncertainty is there about the future of the global economy? Uncertainty is of cardinal importance for the the economic outcome along with other key assumptions influenced by the pandemic.

In economies with declining infection rates, the difficult economic recovery shows that acute social distancing in the first half of 2020 has affected supply potential, leaving larger “scars” following the lockdown, which lasted longer than expected. Nor can be ignored the negative impact on labour productivity as a result of the hygiene and health safety measures and practices implemented.

For states that are still struggling to control infection rates, a further lockdown will implicitly put additional pressure on economic activity. Therefore, although the basic assumptions of the first half of 2020 should not change in the second half, alternative outcomes could be recorded depending on the evolution of the pandemic.

And unfortunately, the financial markets seem to have understood this and are reacting chaotically. The New York Stock Exchange registered sharp declines on September 3 at the opening of the trading session: the S&P 500 decreased by 3.4%, and the Nasdaq by almost 5%.⁸ Investors are selling shares of technology (the stars of 2020) to mark from profits.

The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits fell to 881,000, down from 1 million in the previous week. Meanwhile, the S&P 500 and Nasdaq are trading lower as the rally of tech companies loses strength. Shares of Apple Inc., Adobe Inc., Nvidia Corp. and Netflix, which rose more than 70 percent this year, fell between 1.4 percent and 2.3 percent in premarket trading. The American stock market continued its crisis the next day.

⁸ Joe Rennison, Harry Dempsey, US shares slide 3.5% as tech stocks go into sharp reverse, Financial Times, September 3 2020.

In fact, world stock markets fell like in a domino game and are currently on track to show the weakest evolution in the last months, while gains in bonds and the dollar were modest. Even so, there are experts who say that stock markets are actually going through some correction intervals that should have existed a long time ago, and the big tech companies are leading the declines.

While massive stock market sales are causing panic on Wall Street and bringing back a possible hi-tech bubble, we believe that the advance in the technology sector is still unprecedented, and the COVID pandemic is accelerating it by up to 2 years in some cases.

The good news for Europeans is that in the last quarter, the euro appreciated in nominal terms by more than 2% compared to mid-May, reaching the highest level in the last two at the end of June. This appreciation of the currency was determined in particular by the advance perceived by the euro against the most important currencies of the economic system such as the US dollar, the Japanese yen and the Chinese yuan.

The yield on bonds of the strongest and most sovereign economies in the Eurozone remained largely negative. The yield on 10-year German bonds (the benchmark by which most spreads in the European Union are calculated), ranged between -0.6% and -0.3% last semester.

At the same time, the sovereign bond margin in most euro area member states has narrowed to 2019 levels. These indicators also show investor confidence in the market due to the measures taken by the European Central Bank since March. It remains to be seen whether investor confidence will remain at the same level after the ECB starts financing projects under the European Economic Recovery Plan.

What is foreshadowing?

For 2020, the forecasts must be really bleak. A contraction in the global economy of 6% seems optimistic at the moment. Only

the Eurozone economy is expected to contract by almost 9%, more than had been anticipated in the spring. As the shock attenuates, a partial recovery in 2020 followed by a major impact in 2021 is expected to bring the Eurozone up to around 6% next year. However, this means an incomplete recovery because the GDP at the end of 2021 will be 2% lower than before the crisis and 4.5% below the level forecast in the winter of 2019.⁹

Let us not forget that before the outbreak of the pandemic, the global economy was struggling to recover from the impact of many challenges, such as rising trade protectionism, trade disputes between major economies, especially China and the US, falling commodity and energy prices, economic uncertainties in Europe (especially in the light of the Britain's withdrawal from the European Union.)

Individually, policymakers and technocrats have found a solution to each problem. However, taken collectively, all these measures have weakened the world economy and greatly reduced the flexibility of national leaders, especially those in developed economies.

If the level of economic effects of the crisis is said to be more eloquent, new responses to the challenges of the pandemic will have an even longer impact on how businesses organize their workforce, global supply chains and how governments respond to the pandemic. The rapid spread of the virus has brought uncertainty to growth and forecasts, even in the short term. And this will not change too soon.

All major international institutions (IMF, OECD and World Bank) have adjusted their forecasts for this year, reflecting the rapidly deteriorating state of the global economy and marking a clear decline in growth rates. Most likely, the trend will continue in 2021. If we were to take risks, we could say that among the big economies, the Chinese one is the only one that has chances

⁹ Spring 2020 Economic Forecast: A deep and uneven recession, an uncertain recovery, European Commission Press Release, 6 May 2020.

to recover to pre-pandemic levels next year. The most affected will certainly be the United States, and the least affected economies will be the developing ones.

In June 2020, the World Trade Organization estimated a decline in international trade volume to 18.5% with a slow return in 2021. Also, the pandemic has called into question the efficiency and reliability of global supply chains, highlighting some of their serious disruptions.

Many states and companies are questioning the relocation of supply chains in Asia and especially in China, but analyses show that this is not a sustainable long-term trend. Even so, it is estimated that between 16 and 26% of global goods exports, valued at \$ 2.9 trillion to \$ 4.6 trillion, could be relocated to other countries if large companies restructure their supply networks.

Last but not least, one has to take a look at the status and role of central banks in the equation of post-pandemic recovery. After the outbreak of the COVID-19, central banks did nothing but resume their role in the period 1930-1980, when they were mere instruments at the disposal of governments. In some cases (for example the US and the Euro area), central banks have even replaced governments, which have proved unable to act firmly and quickly, thus becoming the de facto fiscal authority.

In other cases, such as the United Kingdom, the central bank granted the state a significant amount of unsecured loans, which allowed the government to circumvent the budgetary constraints imposed by parliament. Restoring the independence of central banks after the pandemic and maintaining this independence in the long run, in order to enable them to act for the stability of the monetary system and the separation of powers from a monetary and fiscal point of view, requires great caution.

Prompt intervention is expected

In this unpredictable context, all countries, including those that appear to be on the verge of infection, must ensure that their

health systems have adequate resources. The international community must remain committed to supporting national initiatives, including through financial assistance to states with limited health care capacity.

At the same time, the effort must be sustained to find a vaccine and then to distribute it widely. The WHO director said he hoped the pandemic would be resolved in less than two years, but that the effects could span decades. In order to be resolved as soon as possible, a large-scale vaccine must be available.¹⁰ And this costs lots of money.

Where measures to close the economy are needed, economic policies must continue to ensure that household incomes are met according to noticeable and well-targeted measures. At the same time, there is need to support the companies, even large ones, in order to attenuate the consequences that restrictions impose on their activity. As the economy gradually reopens, support and policies must be stimulated to increase demand, and ease or even stimulate the reallocation of resources to sectors that will restart significantly lower after the pandemic.

Regardless of the evolution and outcome, economists and bona fide entrepreneurs know that radical-interventionist measures can rather lead to adverse effects, such as shortages in certain markets, whether we are talking about medicines or food. That is why the economy must not be contrasted with the laws of supply and demand, even in a state of emergency, especially when entrepreneurs show solidarity efforts.

Even hit from all sides and contracted, the global economy, adjusted with stimulating public policies, will help us get through the health crisis, recover our state budgets and move on to the new normal. However, we must be careful that the market economy does not degenerate into opportunism and moral hazard. That is why there is a need for transparency, informed decisions and

¹⁰ Coronavirus pandemic could be over within two years – WHO head, BBC News Online, 22 August 2020.

clear rules for everyone, whether we are referring to support schemes, technical unemployment or access to government loans.

It is important to understand that any stage of systemic challenges requires systemic flexibility, which is essentially the attribute of a market entrepreneurial environment. The more flexibility an economy has, the easier it will be to meet the challenges.

The current crisis is becoming more and more a test of stress, endurance and vision for any business environment, beyond government support solutions. Multilateral cooperation remains essential on several fronts. Liquidity assistance is needed for states facing health crises and external financing gaps. This can be done by debt relief, but also by financing through a global “safety net”.

Leaving aside the pandemic, policymakers need to work together to resolve trade and technological tensions that have been high over the past two years. These tensions also tend to jeopardize a possible recovery from the Covid-19 crisis. Moreover, taking into account the historical minimum of greenhouse gases emitted during the lockdown, politicians should implement their assumed climate targets and work towards a fair carbon tax or equivalent compensation schemes.

It is the duty of the global community to act now to avoid a recurrence of a spring-like catastrophe, by securing global stocks of essential supplies and protective equipment, financing and supporting public health systems, and implementing effective ways to support those in need. If necessary, this will be accomplished with the corresponding corollary, precisely the reduction of global inequity and poverty.

Life has priority...the economy will recover later

In terms of economic consequences, the COVID 19 pandemic has the impact of a large scale war. Depending on the duration of the “blockade”, global GDP may lose between 5% (a “closure”

of only 5 weeks, followed by a slow “reopening” of 8-10 weeks, as in the case of China) and 10% (a “closure” of 15 weeks, followed by a slow “reopening” until the end of the year, as foreshadowed in the Western Hemisphere). In nominal terms, that means between \$ 4.5 trillion and \$ 9 trillion, at a nominal global GDP of \$ 90 trillion. Italy, the third largest economy in the EU, can be knocked down, and Spain (the fourth largest economy in the Union) is heading for the same scenario.

The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic is a shock to the global economy, probably of an unprecedented magnitude since the Great Depression of the 1920s and 1930s.¹¹ Some describe it in terms of hurricane that hit Asia, America, Europe and the rest of the world almost simultaneously. On the principle of “concentric waves”, the hurricane will continue to hit the economy for months and maybe even years to come.

For now, it has hit the entire global supply chain hard, demonstrating how dependent multinationals are on supply in the Asian market and how little they know about the regional and global supply chain. Moreover, it proved to be how little they controlled the supply and suppliers when they could afford to pump liquidity into the market.

It then hit all those who do not work during this period, whether they are “technically unemployed” or do not know if they will have a job to return to. And it will hit harder when these people ask for money, not to resume their former concupiscent way of life, but for subsistence. The health and social exclusion measures that governments take will be paid for with major economic costs later.

From the economic perspective, the current sanitary crisis also involves a substantial dose of irrationality. Reputable experts from several fields claim that it is very possible that the social

¹¹ Gita Gopinath, The Great Lockdown: Worst Economic Downturn Since the Great Depression, IMFBlog – Insights and Analysis on Economics and Finance, April 14 2020.

reaction to the new coronavirus is totally disproportionate, even irrational “as in the case of an elephant attacked by a cat“ trying to avoid the cat, the elephant may fall into the abyss and die ... “.

David Katz, one of America’s best-known doctors and a professor at Yale University, published an article in the New York Times on March 20, when there were 11,000 deaths caused by coronavirus globally, entitled “It’s the fight against Coronavirus worse than the disease itself?”¹². Professor Katz expressed his deep concerns that the social, economic and public health consequences of this almost total halt of the normal life – schools and businesses closed, public meetings banned – will be lasting and catastrophic, possibly more serious than the direct impact of the virus.

Global stock markets will recover over time, but many businesses will never do so again. Unemployment, impoverishment and despair, which will most likely result, might become more troubling than the public health issues.

Under these conditions, the task of those who are responsible for shaping public policies at this time, which must protect people, but at the same time the economy, is becoming increasingly difficult. Three crucial factors accentuate the difficulty of this task.

The first is uncertainty. Macroeconomic policies operate in any case under substantial uncertainty even when global markets are operating at optimal parameters. Even in a normal situation, the records of movements in the financial-banking markets are difficult to establish and fluctuate over time. In this context, the transformations are almost impossible to predict. Moreover, the effects do not seem to be fully known to any specialist.

The second element is time. Change in global economic activity is greater and steeper than during other crises. In the case of the usual economic crises, the events unfold quickly, but are

¹² Katz L. David, Is Our Fight Against Coronavirus Worse Than the Disease?, The New York Times Magazine, March 20 2020.

temporary, a few weeks at most. The effects then prolong quite slowly due to economic and fiscal contingency policies. Today, as global media agencies bring new news about the effects of the coronavirus pandemic almost every hour, the effects have the impact of a growing snowball.

The third element is capacity. In any financial crisis so far, public servants and the rest of the private sector employees came to work, had lunch at restaurants, and went to concerts or sporting events. This is not happening in the context of the current crisis. Moreover, people who are responsible for outlining these public policies may be influenced by the fact that they, or people close to them, may be affected or even die from coronavirus infection. Likewise, after this crisis, many of those who have to implement public policies will be directly or indirectly affected by the disease.

Taking this vast array of vectors into account, we can see a pattern in which the authorities are currently acting. **The simplest political calculation shows that it is better to do more than you should, than to do too little.** Against an extremely strong emotional background, politicians are judged primarily for inaction. That is why it is imperative to convey the right messages for the population.

Then try to replicate the use of existing mechanisms as much as possible. There have been moments of crisis on a small scale, and successful models now can be extrapolated to some extent. At the same time, governments are working with specialists to invent new programs and social policies adapted to the crisis. We see this in the medical sector and in the economic sector, but also in the field of national defence.

In these times when social solidarity is more necessary than ever, governments try to work closely with the private sector and often succeed. Beyond the sponsorships of the business environment that meet the needs of the state, the rapid reaction of the authorities and the measures taken at a time when the world economy is at rest have been based on ideas from the business

environment. It is true that the bill has not been long in coming, with a number of companies demanding indulgence in long-pursued public policies.

Treacherous osmosis between risk and opportunity

A perverse effect that must be considered and controlled extremely well during this crisis is what specialists call the “Big Brother Laws“. It took two months of crisis for liberal states to start flirting with the “Chinese model“ of electronic surveillance. In the context of the plenary anxiety and emotion caused by the pandemic, the governments are introducing digital surveillance measures that a few months ago would have generated huge scandals. Or use the state of emergency to suspend online accounts, in the fight against “fake news“ and alarmism.

Especially since the “fake-news“ phenomenon is not one to be overlooked during this period. A document prepared by the European External Action Service shows that a significant disinformation campaign is underway by Russian state media and pro-Kremlin news providers about COVID-19. The overall goal of the Kremlin’s misinformation is to exacerbate the health crisis in Western countries, in line with the Kremlin’s broader strategy of trying to undermine the cohesion of European societies.

The World Health Organization is talking about an “infodemia“ related to coronavirus. Not only is the virus spreading around the world, but so is a growing amount of information. However, much information is pure misinformation and is used as a means of exerting political influence.

Therefore, perhaps the most important thing at the moment is for the response of national governments and politicians to be dynamic and persistent. The damage is uncertain and uncontrollable at the moment. The extent of the effects of the global pandemic and their intensity are unknown at this time. So is its duration.

It is imperative that the political response at this time shows firmness and confidence. We have witnessed many political

blunders lately, but it is equally true that until the polls the blunders are lost on the road, and the final impression catalyses the votes.

Unfortunately, the football saying that a coach has the value of the last result is often applied in politics. The public policies adopted at the moment must be adaptable and able to extend in duration and geography. The task of those responsible at this time is to put out the fire, but in a fire fighting approach the excessively strong jet can destroy the material base they were called to save.

Bibliography:

- Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, Random House Publishing, 2007.
- Zhong Raymond, *China's Virus Apps May Outlast the Outbreak*, Stirring Privacy Fears, *The New York Times Magazine*, May 26 2020.
- Conn David, *I thought it was appalling': anger over Atlético fans attending Anfield*, *The Guardian International Edition*, 22 March 2020.
- Free money: When government spending knows no limits, *The Economist – Single Issue Magazine*, July 25th 2020.
- Gaspar Vitor, *Fiscal Monitor Press Briefing*, IMF Report, April 2020.
- British Columbia Financial And Economic Review, 80th Edition, Sep 17 2020, (Source Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources and BC Oil and Gas Commission).
- Williamson Chris, *Eurozone PMI at all-time low as economy locks down to fight COVID-19*, HIS Markit Report, May 6th 2020.
- Joe Rennison, Harry Dempsey, *US shares slide 3.5% as tech stocks go into sharp reverse*, *Financial Times*, Spetmeber 3 2020.
- Spring 2020 Economic Forecast: A deep and uneven recession, an uncertain recovery, *European Commission Press Release*, 6 May 2020.
- Coronavirus pandemic could be over within two years – WHO head, *BBC News Online*, 22 August 2020.
- Gita Gopinath, *The Great Lockdown: Worst Economic Downturn Since the Great Depression*, *IMFBlog – Insights and Analysis on Economics and Finance*, April 14 2020.
- Katz L. David, *Is Our Fight Against Coronavirus Worse Than the Disease?*, *The New York Times Magazine*, March 20 2020.

VII. THE IMPACT ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND GLOBAL SECURITY

1. NOVEL CORONAVIRUS IMPACT ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS. CAN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CHANGE THE WORLD ORDER?

Adriana Sauliuc

World order before the SARS CoV-2 pandemic

The term world order refers to the distribution of power between the relevant states, namely the world powers at a given time. But to comprehend how power is distributed internationally, and therefore the essence of the world order and how it influences international relations, understanding how things evolve at the international level is extremely important. And on this dimension, history offers us a series of events/evolutions which have led, over time, to changes or resettlements of the world order, all events with significant impact on the international relations of the times to which we refer.

A relevant example of such an important event, which could influence developments at the international level is Woodrow Wilson 14 Points Speech, based on Wilson's vision called for Liberalism to be the basis of the post-World War I Order, calling for, amongst other points, a General Association of Nations and adoption of free trade policies, both of which would create greater interdependence between states¹.

¹ Mark Siraut, *Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points and the Liberal World Order*, The McGill International Review, 18 January 2018, <https://www.mironline.ca/liberal-world-order-myths/>.

Another relevant moment in history is the fall of the Iron Curtain, at the end of the Cold War when Mikhail Gorbachev and George H. W. Bush tried to define the nature of the post-Cold War era. Then, in 1991, the Gulf War was considered the first test of the so-called “new world order,” because, according to President Bush, this first war after the end of the Cold War was about “more than one small country; it is a big idea; a new world order,” with “new ways of working with other nations... peaceful settlement of disputes, solidarity against aggression, reduced and controlled arsenals and just treatment of all peoples”².

Subsequently, formulas such as G2, G7 / 8, G20 came to offer perspectives on how power is distributed among strong states at the international level, each highlighting the perspectives and interests of the constituent states.

Discussions about the emergence of a new world order have occurred recurrently over time, especially in the context of events and evolutions that demanded major changes in the system of international relations. Such a discussion took place in May 2019, during the annual conference of the Council of Councils in Washington, where forty-three delegates from twenty-three countries representing twenty-five think tanks discussed the future of world order, with the following conclusions:

1. *The U.S.-led order is spent*, an assertion based on the fact that, if since the end of World War II, the United States has pursued its global interests by constructing and maintaining international economic institutions, security alliances, and liberal political norms, the United States under President Donald J. Trump is rejecting and undermining its superpower status through its disinterest in global commitments and politics;

2. *The world order is cracking and there is no clear way forward*: it does not reflect the new distribution of global power, because China and Russia and other countries do not see the structure of the order as legitimate, and they will continue to contest it; globalization is exacerbating economic inequality and financial

² Joseph S. Nye Jr., *What New World Order?*, Foreign Affairs, spring 1992, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1992-03-01/what-new-world-order>.

imbalances and transformative technologies are disrupting labor markets and political systems;

3. *Middle powers need to take more global responsibility and buttress the world order*; especially now, when the US takes a step back;

4. *A failure of political leadership is darkening the world's future*: today's problems are linked to the current quality of global leadership. The absence of strong, principled, and effective leaders willing to do the right thing regardless of short-term political calculations is palpable³.

And if the decline of the prevalence of the United States of America under the presidency of Donald Trump, with all the international and regional consequences, seemed in the last two years to be the most troublesome evolution at the international level, at least for the proponents of the liberal world order, the year 2019 ended in the worst way possible, creating the premises for what the beginning of 2020 later confirmed: the outbreak of the SARS CoV-2 pandemic.

A perfect storm - the pandemic that shook the world

COVID-19 – the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus, arose in China. The outbreak of this new human pathogen, lately named Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS CoV-2) was notified in Wuhan (China), and in the first months, there have been uncertainties on almost any area: infection transmission route, virus origin and persistence in the environment, diagnostic tests, therapeutic approach, high-risk subjects, lethality, and containment policies⁴.

³ ****The World Order is Dead. Long Live the World Order*, Council on Foreign Relations, 25 June 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/world-order-dead-long-live-world-order>.

⁴ Cecilia Acuti Martellucci, Maria Elena Flacco, Rosaria Cappadona, Francesca Bravi, Lorenzo Mantovani, Lamberto Manzoli, "SARS-CoV-2 pandemic: An overview", in *Advances in Biological Regulation*, 77 (2020) 100736, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212492620300476>.

Then, on 11 March 2020, the coronavirus outbreak has been labeled a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), a word that comes from the Greek word “pandemos,” which means everybody: “pan” means everyone and “demos” population. This means that a pandemic, according to the World Health Organization, represents the “worldwide spread” of a new disease⁵, in the present case, of the coronavirus disease.

In a deeply globalized world, the emergence of this new type of coronavirus – SARS CoV-2, immediately produced worldwide effects, by August 2020, more than 22.4 million cases of COVID-19 being reported in more than 188 countries, while of the 22.4 million people infected, more than 787.000 people died, and more than 14.3 people recovered and are considered healed⁶. But we are talking about a highly contagious virus, so these numbers are rapidly changing, while the upward trend of the infection with the new coronavirus indicates an increase in illness and death in the following period.

Although a pandemic is mainly a healthcare problem, the coronavirus pandemic produced negative effects also in several other areas: political, financial, economic, biological, demographic and social. The reason is that the consequences of the pandemic we are going through, in a period marked by deep globalization, transcend the medical domain, being more than a health problem because of the unprecedented social-economic crises resulted from the immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This happens because, as UN Secretary-General *António Guterres* warned recently, the world is facing today the most challenging crisis since World War II, a statement based on the concern that the COVID-19 pandemic is threatening people in every country while the recession predicted by specialists is

⁵ Ken Miguel, *Here's a look at some of history's worst pandemics that have killed millions*, abc7news, 28 February 2020, <https://abc7news.com/pandemic-epidemic-coronavirus-definition-what-is/5974174/>.

⁶ *** *COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU)*, <https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>.

expected to be catastrophic, “that probably has no parallel in the recent past.” This catastrophic effect of the pandemic is inevitably linked to the combination of the disease and its economic impact, which is expected to contribute to “enhanced instability, enhanced unrest, and enhanced conflict”⁷, with all the consequences that such developments can have especially in the countries deeply affected by the pandemic. Meaning stressing every one of the countries it touches, in the current pessimistic scenario, almost every country in the world, because it has the potential to create devastating social, economic and political effects that will leave deep and longstanding scars. This because, every day, people are losing jobs and income, with no way of knowing when normality will return⁸.

The picture is even gloomier as the forecasts become more pessimistic: humanity is currently going through the first stage of this pandemic, while, because of the human behavior, which is playing a major role in the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic⁹, a second wave seems bound to happen. The inevitability of a second wave of the pandemic cannot be analyzed without taking into consideration the current social realities: the world has passed the shock produced by the immediate effects of the onset of the pandemic, which was amplified by the large number of deaths recorded in countries like the US and Italy, and the images which, in the first months of this year, months which also coincide with the onset of the pandemic worldwide, depicted the level of the catastrophe: hospitals and doctors overwhelmed by the large number of people infected with the SARS CoV-2 virus, coffins of the dead stored in churches, dead bodies loaded into refrigerated trucks outside New York hospitals¹⁰ and so on.

⁷ Edith M. Lederer, *UN chief says COVID-19 is worst crisis since World War II*, ABC NEWS, 31 March 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/chief-covid-19-worst-crisis-world-war-ii-69905340>.

⁸ ****COVID-19 pandemic. Humanity needs leadership and solidarity to defeat the coronavirus*, United Nations Development Programme, <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/coronavirus.html>.

⁹ Lisa Lockerd Maragakis, *First and Second Waves of Coronavirus*, Johns Hopkins Medicine, 14 August 2020, <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/first-and-second-waves-of-coronavirus>.

¹⁰ Ryan Fahey, *Dead bodies are loaded into refrigerated trucks outside New York hospitals after 98 people died in seven HOURS – bringing city’s death toll to 790 and cases*

Unfortunately, over a short period of time, people have shifted from concern about such developments to frustration caused by the limitations imposed by the authorities to reduce the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. Also, there is a huge pressure put by economic agents on the authorities in countries where restrictive measures have been implemented, with the request to relax these measures.

Some countries, dreadful by the negative economic effects caused by the pandemic, have fallen into the trap of relaxing the restriction imposed, a decision which led to a significant increase in the number of people infected, while people's behavior contributed in a negative way to the increase in the number of diseases.

People's desire to travel, their willingness to spend time with their family and friends, congregating in crowded spaces, organizing, again, parties, going out in malls and restaurants, put the authorities and doctors in front of an inevitable fact: the second wave of the pandemic. Because, the more people break the rules of conduct and restrictions introduced to curb the pandemic, the greater the risk of such a second wave is, a wave predicted by the virologists months ago¹¹.

How the SARS CoV-2 pandemic has influenced International Relations. The big four on the international stage in the COVID-19 Era - the regional and international impact of their actions

International relations have always been complex and complicated, being extremely sensitive to developments on the international stage, from wars to humanitarian crises, from the decline of the power of some states, to the emergence of others as world powers or superpowers. Moreover, the deepening of

to 36,221 - as Mayor de Blasio warns people may be fined \$500 for not staying home, Daily Mail Online, 30 March 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8167283/Horrifying-moment-dead-bodies-loaded-refrigerated-truck-forklift.html>.

¹¹ Gudrun Heise, Coronavirus pandemic: Is the second wave already here?, DW News, 4 August 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-second-wave/a-54429614>.

globalization which has made the world an interconnected space led to an amplification of the effects of regional phenomena and processes, manifested globally, so in the last few decades, some regional crises could expand their effects almost worldwide, such examples being the civil wars from the MENA region, some of them still active, and the crises they generated, with negative effects on other regions, especially in the western areas. Another relevant example of a regional issue that became an international problem is the SARS CoV-2 pandemic, the spread of the virus internationally being impossible to prevent in our globalized world.

China's soft power and the limits of its Mask Diplomacy

With the onset of the pandemic, China is trying to manage the effects of a dangerous conjuncture: Beijing is accused of being responsible for triggering it, while the Chinese state is trying to take full advantage of global developments during the pandemic. Initially, after the novel coronavirus began to spread worldwide, but before the consequences of such an evolution become extremely problematic and the World Health Organization to declare the Covid-19 pandemic, China revealed a new strategy in pursuing its global goals: the Mask Diplomacy.

China's attempt to boost its image as a responsible global leader became timely in early March after the epicenter of the outbreak has rapidly and conspicuously shifted from China to Europe. At that time, when the Europeans were overwhelmed by the consequences of the storm they had to face, China offered aid to the European partners: millions of masks were sent to the Czech Republic, medical supplies arrived in Serbia and Italy, while Jack Ma, the richest man in China, promised that two million of masks will be distributed across some European countries, including Spain, Italy, Belgium, and France¹².

In March 2020, China's initiative "to save the world" started with a sustained campaign which targeted especially Europe, so

¹² Brian Wong, *China's Mask Diplomacy*, The Diplomat, 25 March 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/chinas-mask-diplomacy/>.

planeloads of Chinese medical supplies, doctors and quarantine specialists have begun landing in European capitals on an almost daily basis. Initially, the support from the Chinese was received with enthusiasm by the Europeans: the most affected at that moment countries, Italy and Spain, have openly welcomed China's help. Germany was more restrained and described the Chinese help for the European country as "reciprocity" for the relief assistance Europe provided to China when the coronavirus swept the Wuhan province earlier in the year, infecting and killing tens of thousands of people¹³.

Serbia is one of the European countries where China's Mask Diplomacy identified fertile ground, as Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić statements show: "without China's help, it would be hard for us to preserve our healthcare system, which was of essential importance." Also, Serbia's President Aleksandar Vučić, dissatisfied with the early EU limitation in helping the non-EU countries, called the European solidarity a "fairytale" and appealed to President Xi Jinping, whom he called his Chinese "friend" and "brother," for any help China could provide, including medical personnel¹⁴. Considering that we are talking about Serbia, a country that has expressed its intention to join the EU, such statements from its head of state were perceived as a slap in the face in Brussels.

But soon enough, the Chinese fairytale turned into a nightmare for Beijing. This because, after China provided in March research and supplied medical equipment to more than 50 countries, meaning nearly four billion masks, 16,000 ventilators, 37.5 million pieces of protective clothing, and 2.84 million coronavirus testing kits, the Europeans, who initially accepted Beijing's support in the fight against the coronavirus, realized that the equipment received from China is useless.

¹³ Martin Arostegui, *Chinese Virus Aid to Europe Raises Long-Term Concerns*, VOA, 23 March 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/science-health/coronavirus-outbreak/chinese-virus-aid-europe-raises-long-term-concerns>.

¹⁴ Milan Seghier, *The Coronavirus Pandemic Lets China Score a Win in Serbia*, Transatlantic Take, 23 March 2020, <https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/Seghier%20-%20serbia%20china%20coronavirus.pdf>.

So, Spain withdrew 58.000 coronavirus testing kits purchased from a Chinese company on March 27, after it was revealed they had a mere 30-percent detection rate¹⁵. Then, the Netherlands has recalled tens of thousands of masks imported from China and distributed to hospitals because masks did not meet their standards when they were inspected. Turkey's Health Minister raised similar issues, saying rapid testing kit samples from a Chinese company did not meet the country's effectiveness standards¹⁶.

Also, the Slovak authorities announced that 1.2 million Chinese antibody tests are inaccurate and unable to detect Covid-19 in its early stages, so they should "just be thrown straight into the Danube," according to Prime Minister Igor Matovic¹⁷.

Subsequent, China's situation has become even gloomy, because Beijing was put in a very bad position because its attempt to cast itself as a global health leader has not been received worldwide recognition as planned by the Chinese state, so the Chinese authorities sought displays of gratitude in exchange for the medical supplies. China's desire to obtain this recognition determined Beijing to act less diplomatically, asking foreign governments to publicly thank China in exchange for crucial medical supplies¹⁸.

Later, China's endeavor to become a global health leader received an even bigger blow. After Donald Trump accused in April the WHO of being too focused on China and issuing bad advice during the new coronavirus outbreak, and "for some

¹⁵ Usaid Siddiqui, *Why China's support to coronavirus-hit Europe stirs controversy*, Al Jazeera, 6 April 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/china-support-coronavirus-hit-europe-stirs-controversy-200404160742616.html>.

¹⁶ *** *Netherlands recalls defective masks imported from China*, Al Jazeera, 29 March 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/netherlands-recalls-defective-masks-imported-china-200329141715106.html>.

¹⁷ Andrea Dudik, Radoslav Tomek and Bloomberg, *Europe turned to China for coronavirus testing help. Why some are now regretting it*, Fortune, 1 April 2020, <https://fortune.com/2020/04/01/europe-china-coronavirus-testing-help-regret/>.

¹⁸ Kirk Lancaster, Michael Rubin, *Assessing the Early Response to Beijing's Pandemic Diplomacy*, Council on Foreign Relations, 30 April 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/assessing-early-response-beijings-pandemic-diplomacy>.

reason, funded largely by the United States” the WHO was seen “very China centric”¹⁹, as Trump put it, and a “puppet of China”²⁰, President Donald Trump has lashed out at Beijing over the COVID-19 pandemic, blaming China for its role in the spread of the novel coronavirus.

“The world is now suffering as a result of the malfeasance of the Chinese government. Countless lives have been taken, and profound economic hardship has been inflicted all around the globe”²¹, said Donald Trump in a speech in the Rose Garden on 29 May, this being the beginning of a campaign against China, considered responsible by Trump for the pandemic the world is facing. Also, for an even greater impact of his words, Donald Trump made a habit of naming the novel coronavirus the “Chinese virus,” explaining, when he was accused of racism, in a simplistic way: “it’s not racist at all. No, it’s not at all. It’s from China. That’s why. It comes from China. I want to be accurate”²².

But even if the presence of the virus was first confirmed in the Chinese province of Wuhan, China is dissatisfied regarding Trump’s accusations, rejecting its responsibility for the Coronavirus pandemic. Also, China accused Donald Trump of conducting a smear campaign against Beijing and the United States for shirking its international obligations²³, while Chinese virologist

¹⁹ Doina Chiacu, Lisa Lambert and Steve Holland, *Trump says ‘China-centric’ WHO ‘really blew it’ on coronavirus*, Reuters, 7 April 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-who/trump-says-who-is-china-centric-really-blew-it-on-coronavirus-idUSKBN21P2E1>

²⁰ *** *Coronavirus: Trump accuses WHO of being a ‘puppet of China’*, BBC News, 19 May 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-52679329>.

²¹ *** *Blaming China for Pandemic, Trump Says U.S. Will Leave the W.H.O.*, New York Times, 29 May 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/29/health/virus-who.html>.

²² Jérôme Viala-Gaudefroy, Dana Lindaman, *Donald Trump’s ‘Chinese virus’: the politics of naming*, The Conversation, 21 April 2020, <https://theconversation.com/donald-trumps-chinese-virus-the-politics-of-naming-136796>

²³ *** *China Rejects Blame for Coronavirus Pandemic*, VOA News, 19 May 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/china-rejects-blame-coronavirus-pandemic>.

Shi Zhengli from the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV), considers that Donald Trump “owes us an apology,” because his claim “jeopardizes and affects our academic work and personal lives”²⁴.

Russia - the savior hidden behind Kremlin's malicious intentions

But China is not the only country which tries to take advantage of the pandemic, Russia's goal to reveal its powerful at least at the regional level, even if the situation caused by the spread of the novel coronavirus was very complicated for the Russian state due to the large number of infections, being at the base of Moscow's initiatives. Moreover, unlike China, Russia has opted for a more sentimental version of its pseudo philanthropic initiative, using the slogan “*From Russia With Love*.”

On 22 March, at Vladimir Putin's request, the Russian Army began flying medical help to Italy. Sputnik posted on Twitter a few images with the following text: “*From Russia with love. With these stickers on the sides, Russia's two military planes with experts and equipment takes off from Chkalovsky airfield and is heading to #Italy to assist in combating the #coronavirus pandemic. Photos courtesy of the Defense Ministry*”²⁵.

Indeed, Russia sent on March 15 military planes with medical equipment, planes which were branded with the slogan “*From Russia With Love*.” In Italy, Russia's support was very well received: official thanks were sent by the Italian Minister Lorenzo Guerini, to his counterpart, Sergei Shoigu. Also, famous singers, like Pupo Ghinazzi and Al Bano expressed their gratitude for Russia's help²⁶. The first one posted on Facebook a video in which he

²⁴ *** *Trump owes us an apology: Chinese virologist*, Global Times, 25 July 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1195602.shtml>.

²⁵ *** ‘*From Russia with Love*’: Putin sends aid to Italy to fight virus, Euractiv, 23 March 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/from-russia-with-love-putin-sends-aid-to-italy-to-fight-virus/>.

²⁶ Matthew Luxmoore, *Coronavirus Aid Coming ‘From Russia With Love’ — Or An Agenda?*, Radio Free Europe, 1 April 2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/coronavirus-aid-coming-from-russia-with-love-or-agenda-/30523737.html>

performs a well-known Soviet song²⁷ and signed off saying: “I love you Russia. Thank you!”. In the second case, a Russian news agency announced that Al Bano said that Italy would never forget Russia’s help²⁸.

But a few days later after the news that Russia is Italy’s great “savior,” some Italian officials declared, on condition of anonymity, for the newspaper La Stampa, that as much as 80% of the material received from Russia was useless: “eighty percent of Russian supplies are useless or of little use to Italy. In short, this is little more than a pretext,” an official told the newspaper.

So, like in China’s case, the beautiful story by which Russia was supposed to change the European opinions regarding its intentions, given that the image of the Russian state has been severely affected in recent years by Russia’s belligerent actions, faded with the awareness that beyond Moscow’s intention to catch everyone’s eye by helping Italy, Kremlin’s intentions are less altruistic and rather pragmatic. More precisely, the materials and support delivered to Italy were more a public-relation stunt, meant to take advantage of the difficult situation in which the Italian state was at that moment, to the detriment, of course, of the EU. In other words, Russia intended to tap into Italian EU skepticism and anger at an initially slow EU response²⁹.

Also, in the case of the support sent to the US, which arrived in New York under the same slogan – “*From Russia With Love*,” Moscow has been criticized because according to the information provided by the Russian media, the costs for the Russian supplies were covered by the Russian state. At least that’s how it could be understood from the Russian media because the Russian TV channels call the cargo “aid” and make no reference to payment.

²⁷ Pupo Ghinazzi, Facebook account, 27 March 2020, https://web.facebook.com/watch/?v=1334864173388396&_rdc=1&_rdr.

²⁸ Matthew Luxmoore, *Op. cit.*

²⁹ Isabel Togoh, *From Russia With Love? Putin’s Medical Supplies Gift To Coronavirus-Hit Italy Raises Questions*, Forbes, 26 March 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/isabeltogoh/2020/03/26/from-russia-with-love-putins-medical-supplies-gift-to-coronavirus-hit-italy-raises-questions/>.

In this context, Washington considered necessary to inform that the US had paid for the Russian supplies, as US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, tweeted on the 2nd of April, encouraging, at the same time “to work together to defeat #COVID19.”³⁰

All these elements indicate that the support offered by the Russians to the countries strongly affected by the new coronavirus is not an altruistic initiative, but one meant to bring strategic advantages to Russia.

So, in Italy’s case, there were speculations that Moscow’s decision to send medical supplies was part of a broader propaganda campaign of burnishing Russia’s image abroad and existing ties with particular states.” Also, the decision to send aid to Italy was likely taken to capitalize on the pro-Russia sentiment of the right-wing Lega Party which could perform well at the next Italian election³¹.

In the case of the support offered to the United States of America, the fact that Moscow did not initially mention that this was not offered for free can be interpreted as Russia’s attempt to create for itself the image of a strong state, which can act regionally but also internationally, even when the country which is in need does not have the best relations with Moscow, in this case, the US.

EU’s challenges in overcoming the crisis. From bureaucracy to disinformation, the cohesion test

If in the case of China or Russia the onset of the pandemic aroused the desire to (re)affirm themselves, especially as both the Chinese and the Russian state are not in the most favorable situation in terms of how they are perceived at the international level, the EU, whose members have been severely affected by recent developments, had to find resources to deal with this

³⁰ *** *Coronavirus: What does ‘from Russia with love’ really mean?*, BBC News, 3 April 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52137908>.

³¹ Holly Ellyatt, *From Russia with love? Why the Kremlin’s coronavirus aid to the West is controversial*, CNBC, 7 April 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/07/why-the-kremlins-coronavirus-aid-to-the-west-is-controversial.html>.

pandemic, but also to combat the negative effects of the actions of less well-internationalized countries.

Regarding the first issue, the stake is even higher as inside the European Union some voices constantly criticize Brussels for its policies and actions, so in the current complicated context and especially after BREXIT, the EU cannot afford to lose its attractiveness in front of its members. The problem is even more complicated in the context of the intention of some international actors to take advantage of a possible lack of EU coherence both internally and in relation to countries aspiring to become full members. And here we have two conclusive examples: one is Italy and the other is Serbia.

In the first case, after the onset of the most severe crisis since the Second World War caused by SARS CoV-2, the Italians' perception that they had been abandoned became increasingly dangerous, especially in the context in which the European colossus registered a delay in the fight against the pandemic. Moreover, the situation seemed to worsen in the conditions in which there was a rising feeling among even its pro-European elite that the country is being abandoned by its neighbors, so the Italian faith in the EU has been damaged and many in Rome felt that in the absence of some bold action taken by northern European countries, they risk Italy turning its back on the European project forever³².

The other case, the one of Serbia, reveals a situation in which China is preferred to the detriment of the EU, Brussels being considered by Belgrade incapable of managing such a major crisis. Moreover, the President of Serbia, a country which has already opened 18 chapters in its accession negotiations with Brussels, used this crisis as an opportunity to denigrate the EU, and has exploited the EU's internal divisions to insult the bloc and legitimize his policies, as well as his courtship of authoritarian partners³³.

³² <https://www.ft.com/content/f21cf708-759e-11ea-ad98-044200cb277f>.

³³ https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_serbias_coronavirus_diplomacy_unm asked.

Indeed, the pandemic paralyzed the largest economy in the world, while Brussels's political stuttering could grow dangerously the Euroscepticism inside the EU if it were ineffective and without solidarity with its members severely affected by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Verily, for the EU this pandemic represents a major challenge and Mauro Ferrari's, the President of the European Research Council (ERC), resignation, on 7 April 2020, a decision taken by the European official as a result of his frustration and disappointment regarding EU's response to the pandemic, reveals the limitations encountered by the European Union in the last months in taking bold decisions.

This comes because, even if Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission President, asked for his advice and used professor Ferrari's expertise in drafting some "substantial directives" to a plan he developed, this initiative was blocked by an "internal political thunderstorm" and "disintegrated upon impact" when it ran into EU bureaucracy³⁴, as Mauro Ferrari argued at that time.

However, despite these initial limitations, the EU managed to overcome this situation, so two days later, on 9 April 2020, Finance Ministers from the Eurozone countries agreed on a package worth more than half a trillion Euro to help companies, workers and health care systems mitigate the economic consequences of the coronavirus outbreak. This support from the EU is available only for the duration of the COVID-19 outbreak and expires immediately after that³⁵.

The financial initiative followed the one in the medical field, decided on 19 March 2020, to create a strategic **rescEU stockpile** of medical equipment such as ventilators and protective masks to help the EU countries in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic³⁶.

³⁴ Miles Johnson, Sam Fleming, Guy Chazan, *Coronavirus: Is Europe losing Italy?*, Financial Times, 6 April 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/04/08/coronavirus-in-europe-eu-science-chief-quits-slamming-response-to-pandemic>.

³⁵ *** *Eurogroup Strikes Half-Trillion Euro Deal to Help Members Cope with COVID-19*, VOA News, 10 April 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/science-health/coronavirus-outbreak/eurogroup-strikes-half-trillion-euro-deal-help-members-cope>.

³⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_476.

Then, on 2nd June, for a more prompt reaction of the EU in case of a serious cross-border emergency, the European Commission proposed to give the EU an efficient tool, so rescEU, which is part of the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism, will be funded with 2 billion Euros during 2021-2027³⁷.

Another financial help was announced on the 21st of July, when after a marathon summit which lasted four days, and after more than 90 hours of negotiations, a deal on a huge post-coronavirus recovery package was approved. It involves €750bn (£677bn; \$859bn) in grants and loans to counter the impact of the pandemic in the 27-member bloc. In addition to the financial effects that this major aid will provide to the EU member states, it will have a major impact in terms of resilience in an extremely complicated period for the European Union, the organization being, at the beginning of the pandemic, in a position to manage a series of severe criticisms regarding its inability to react to this challenge especially inside its borders.

But beyond the grievances of some Member States regarding the EU's failure to take effective action in the fight against the pandemic, the European colossus has shown that it can adapt, even if not as fast as desired at the level of its members.

Also, in the case of the European Union and its capacity to overcome the crisis caused by the novel coronavirus, Brussels is facing threats from outside the EU and unrelated to the health field in which the crisis broke out. We are talking about the actions of the Russian Federation which involve disinformation and dissemination of fake news in order to gain some strategic advantages to the detriment of Brussels, the target of these actions being the EU members which can be influenced in a Eurosceptic direction by amplifying their dissatisfaction with the way the EU manages the crises triggered by the pandemic.

³⁷ COVID-19: Commission creates first ever rescEU stockpile of medical equipment, European Commission, 19 March 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/eu-budget-recovery-2-billion-reinforce-resceu-direct-crisis-response-tools>.

In March 2020, Reuters published the news regarding a “significant disinformation campaign” against the West to worsen the impact of the coronavirus, generate panic and sow distrust, campaign deployed by the Russian media, the source of this information being a European Union document seen by the above-mentioned news agency. The nine-page internal document, dated 16 March 2020, claims, according to Reuters, that “a significant disinformation campaign by Russian state media and pro-Kremlin outlets regarding COVID-19 is ongoing.”

For this purpose, fake news was published online in English, Spanish, Italian, German and French, using contradictory, confusing and malicious reports to make it harder for the EU to communicate its response to the pandemic, accusations which were denied by Moscow, categorizing them as being unfounded and void of common sense. The same document reveals that the EU database has recorded almost 80 cases of disinformation about coronavirus since Jan. 22³⁸. According to the report, the disinformation about the novel coronavirus is spread by the “Russian state-linked false personas and accounts” that have previously posted on subjects including Syria and the French³⁹.

The denial of such actions by Moscow cannot reverse the EU concerns in this domain, not when the stakes are so high: such actions aim to create instability inside the UE, to discredit this organization and to make it look like a failed project. An intention in particular related to Moscow’s desire to reduce the attractiveness of the European Union, especially for the countries which Kremlin has not lost permanently from its sphere of influence but which have shown their intentions to approach the EU as members in a more or less distant future.

³⁸ Robin Emmott, *Russia deploying coronavirus disinformation to sow panic in West, EU document says*, Reuters, 18 March 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-disinformation/russia-deploying-coronavirus-disinformation-to-sow-panic-in-west-eu-document-says-idUSKBN21518F>.

³⁹ Michael Peel, Sam Fleming, *EU warns of pro-Kremlin disinformation campaign on coronavirus*, Financial Times, 17 March 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/d65736da-684e-11ea-800d-da70cff6e4d3>.

Also, Russia's intentions are linked to its desire to strengthen the legitimacy of the authoritarian Russian state, thus enhancing its position in the international arena⁴⁰ by presenting itself as a savior of the countries in great need during the pandemic, especially Western countries, such as the EU member states or the United States of America.

The pandemic reaffirms US preference of domestic policies to the detriment of its international profile

Like other countries, the United States was unable to block the entry of the new coronavirus into its territory, on the contrary, the extremely large number of infections revealing the fact that the US is one of the most affected countries by the SARS CoV-2 pandemic. A situation which highlights poor management of the issues caused by the novel coronavirus, especially given that we are talking about a highly developed country, with a well-organized and equipped health system.

In this context, there is an unanswered question: where did the US go wrong? Why did the American giant, a country which over the past few decades has shown that is eager and able to get involved internationally, both in military and non-military matters, except for the Trump Administration, has failed lamentably in protecting its citizens?

A question for which it is too early to offer a pragmatic answer, but which will continue to be a challenge for the authorities and experts. This because, the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic shook the United States to its foundations, demonstrating that, in the face of such a challenge, even the most powerful state in the world is vulnerable.

Also, the presence at the White House of a temperamental leader like Donald Trump contributed negatively to the management of

⁴⁰ Juulia Baer-Bader, *EU Response to Disinformation from Russia on COVID-19: Three Lessons*, German Council on Foreign Relations, No. 18, June 2020, <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/eu-response-disinformation-russia-covid-19>, p. 1.

the crisis caused by the pandemic, the President of the United States being known for his trenchant way of dealing with the most problematic developments. Furthermore, the pandemic which the humanity is currently going through, offered supplementary arguments to the American leader regarding the US disengaged position at the international level, after recent years have been marked by Washington's decisions to withdraw the United States from international co-operation formulas, a policy based on Trump's slogan "Make America great again!"

So, if for those who do not agree with the disengagement of the American state from the world stage, Trump's pre-pandemic policy was unpopular, the period we live in is even more complicated because it offers additional reasons for continuing the direction taken by the US under Trump.

In terms of the reaction of the US, considered the most powerful country in the world, to the pandemic and its consequences, the way the US authorities handled the first phase of the health crisis it was harshly criticized inside the country. And the article published by The Atlantic in June 2020 under a gloomy title – *We Are Living in a Failed State*, and author's conclusion, even gloomier, regarding the fact that "the coronavirus didn't break America. It revealed what was already broken," reveal the major dissatisfaction of a large part of the American people concerning the way things are going in the US during the pandemic.

Furthermore, the first two months were a total mess, Donald Trump contributing to the state of chaos: he announced that the disease caused by the novel coronavirus is no worse than the seasonal flu; he accused that media coverage of the virus is part of a political conspiracy to destroy his presidency⁴¹; he looked for a scapegoat and even found two – China and the WHO, and then, when he couldn't deny the pandemic any more, he prizes his coronavirus response and announced that the Trump Administration

⁴¹ McKay Coppins, *Trump's Dangerously Effective Coronavirus Propaganda*, The Atlantic, 11 March 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/03/trump-coronavirus-threat/607825/>.

management of the coronavirus outbreak in the United States is “maybe our best work”⁴² and miracles cures.

Externally, if China and the Russian Federation stand out for their intentions to be global players in the pandemic, by helping countries with difficult situations and not for altruistic reasons, the United States preferred the same role played during the Trump Administration – of a country that prefers the convenience of its borders even if we are talking about the superpower which in previous decades has made its presence felt anywhere in the world has identified strategic interests.

But things have changed so deep with Donald Trump at the White House that even the severe pandemic that humanity is facing is unable to produce major changes in the foreign policy of the United States. Thus, if the other major players on the world stage positioned themselves promptly to exploit in the most advantageous way possible the recent developments, the US preferred to closed itself inside its borders and make his presence felt through statements and accusations against China and Russia and not through external actions that bring to fore Washington’s capability to act anywhere in the world.

So, after the US accused the WHO of covering China, considered guilty of the pandemic, the next targets were China and Russia, both together and separately. And here we are talking about the initial accusations against Beijing for the pandemic outbreak’s responsibility, and then about the accuses against the two countries for what the US called cooperation to spread false narratives over the coronavirus pandemic, with Beijing increasingly adopting techniques used by Moscow, as Lea Gabrielle, the Special Envoy, and *Coordinator of the Global Engagement Center* at the U.S. Department of State, declared in May⁴³.

⁴² Quint Forgey, ‘Maybe our best work’: Trump praises his coronavirus response, Politico, 6 June 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/maybe-our-best-work-donald-trump-praises-us-coronavirus-pandemic-response/>.

⁴³ *** US accuses China, Russia of coordinating on virus conspiracies, France 24, 8 May 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200508-us-accuses-china-russia-of-coordinating-on-virus-conspiracie>.

Then, in July 2020, the US accused China of hacking coronavirus researches, with the help of two alleged Chinese hackers – Li Xiaoyu and Dong Jiazhi, considered responsible for the stealing of “terabytes” of data globally. An allegation vehemently rejected by Beijing. China accused the US of slander and declared that “the Chinese government is a staunch defender of cybersecurity, and has always opposed and cracked down on cyberattacks and cybercrime in all forms”⁴⁴.

Regarding the Russian state, the US made also some particular accusations in recent months. For example, in July 2020, some American intelligence officials accused Moscow of trying to steal virus vaccine data but said the Russians were aiming to steal the research data to develop their own vaccine more quickly, not to sabotage other countries’ efforts⁴⁵. Then, in August this year, the US Department of State report entitled *GEC Special Report: Pillars of Russia’s Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem*⁴⁶ accused Russia of conducting a sophisticated disinformation and propaganda campaign that uses a variety of approaches including Kremlin-aligned news sites to promote their agenda⁴⁷.

According to the report, Russia’s current disinformation and propaganda operations create a media multiplier effect, which can, at times, create disinformation storms with potentially dangerous effects for those Russia perceives as adversaries at the international, national, and local level. Regarding these realities, the US is

⁴⁴ *** *US accuses China of hacking coronavirus researchers, others*, Al Jazeera, 22 July 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/07/accuses-china-hacking-coronavirus-researchers-200721161320927.html>.

⁴⁵ Julian E. Barnes, *Russia Is Trying to Steal Virus Vaccine Data, Western Nations Say*, The New York Times, 16 July 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/16/us/politics/vaccine-hacking-russia.html>.

⁴⁶ *GEC Special Report: August 2020 Pillars of Russia’s Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem*, The U.S. Department of State, Global Engagement Center, August 2020, https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/USSTATEBPA/2020/08/05/file_attachments/1512230/Pillars%20of%20Russias%20Disinformation%20and%20Propaganda%20Ecosystem_08-04-20%20%281%29.pdf.

⁴⁷ Jennifer Hansler, *US accuses Russia of conducting sophisticated disinformation and propaganda campaign*, CNN, 5 August 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/08/05/politics/state-department-russian-disinformation-report/index.html>.

accusing Moscow of using the SARS CoV-2 global pandemic as a hook to push longstanding disinformation and propaganda narratives⁴⁸.

How international relations are expected to change during and after the pandemic

Given the realities of the moment, we are tempted to answer the question: *will the pandemic change the world order and will influence international relations?* with a firm “yes.” Such an interpretation is based on the generally valid opinion that the pandemic will not pass without leaving deep trails, which will be found in all aspects of human life.

But a positive answer to this question opens a Pandora’s Box, given the complications caused by the new coronavirus and the long-term effects of its spread worldwide. Also, it puts a lot of pressure on those who try to answer this question which can be restricted to a simple one: *what will tomorrow’s world look like?* And here there are few aspects to take into consideration.

1. The resurrection of Realism and its limits during the pandemic

Some realist scholars of international relations see the coronavirus pandemic as an event, which can validate this school of thought. So, in a deeply globalized world, in which states are no longer seen as the sole actors in International Relations, while their importance was diminished in time by the emergence of non-state actors, the pandemic reveals the limitations and options of the Realism paradigm. Regarding its **limitations**, there are a few aspects to be mention:

– this theory does not take into consideration potential pandemics, being focused on anarchy, power and the self-interest of the states;

⁴⁸ GEC Special Report: August 2020 *Pillars of Russia’s Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem*, p. 5.

– this theory tend to downplay the differences between the countries, but some scholars suggest that rigid dictatorships are more vulnerable to famines, epidemics, and other disasters, largely because they tend to suppress information and top officials may not recognize the gravity of the situation until it is too late to prevent it. At the further end, in a democracy, because of the information flow, the country can identify an emerging problem and prepare its population to face it;

– an approach based on Realism can reduce the countries' interest in international cooperation, since they can consider it fragile, or they worry that cooperation can offer more benefits for the other states or it can imply a disproportionate share of the costs. Or in this pandemic, there is a need to cooperate even it may not be easy.

On the other hand, some experts perceive the pandemic as an **opportunity**:

– it brings back the importance of the countries, reminding us, in a brutal manner that states are still the main actors in global politics⁴⁹. In other words, the response to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic demonstrated the primacy of sovereign states, the rationale for great-power competition, and obstacles to international cooperation⁵⁰;

– in an anarchic and competitive world, states tend to look with cautious eyes at other countries' situation and have a big incentive to imitate success. For example, military innovations are rapidly adopted by other states because of their acute need to reduce their vulnerabilities. Such a reality is positively interpreted

⁴⁹ Stephen M. Walt, *The Realist's Guide to the Coronavirus Outbreak*, Foreign Policy, 9 March 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/09/coronavirus-economy-globalization-virus-icu-realism/>.

⁵⁰ Seth A. Johnston, *The Pandemic and the Limits of Realism*, Foreign Policy, 24 June 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/24/coronavirus-pandemic-realism-limit-international-relations-theory/>.

by Realism, suggesting that as some states develop more effective responses to the coronavirus, others will quickly follow suit⁵¹.

2. The pandemic is changing the international system into a fragile one

Even if it is still too early to sift through the effects of the pandemic, there are few aspects which are certain. One is the fact that this crisis exposed the fragility of the international system, while other developments will amplify the effects of changes that occurred with the appearance of the pandemic. So, the crisis is accelerating some changes in international relations because nations, some of them, paralyzed by the pandemic, respond by stepping away from each other rather than taking steps to tackle the crisis together⁵².

Other change which will contribute to some kind of reshaping of the international relations and in a positive sense:

- the need to secure essential resourced and supply chains can deteriorate the relations between the countries;

- the globalization will be deeply affected by some restrictive measures taken during the pandemic: border closures, travel restrictions to/from affected countries; the deportation of foreign workers, suspension of visas, banning international travel from certain countries, the economic problems, all consequences of the pandemic which will reduce the exchanges and trade of any kind internationally⁵³.

⁵¹ Stephen M. Walt, *Op. cit.*

⁵² *** *COVID 2025: How the pandemic is changing our world*, UChicago News, University of Chicago, Office of Communications, 16 July 2020, <https://news.uchicago.edu/story/covid-2025-how-pandemic-changing-our-world>.

⁵³ Sebastian Kevany, Deon Canyon-Daniel K. Inouye, Michael Baker, Robert Ostergard, *The Nexus Between The Covid-19 Pandemic, International Relations, and International Security*, Security Nexus Perspectives, May 2020, https://apcss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/N2400-Kevany-et-al-International-Nexus-May-2020_MM.pdf, pp. 6-7.

3. Developments in the pandemic may lead to changes in the position of some big players: China and Russia may become more assertive, while the US may take a step back

In a problematic period for Beijing, harshly criticized for the responsibility of triggering the crisis, the Chinese state may perceive this period as an opportunity to impose itself internationally, especially in the context of the growing disengagement of the United States, a situation which does not exclude an increase in China's assertiveness. The situation is somewhat similar in the case of the Russian Federation, which criticized for the bellicose actions undertaken in recent years, is trying to make a comeback on the international stage, taking advantage of the vacuum left by the US. Whether we're talking about Beijing or Moscow, an increased presence at the international level, in a period marked by the absence of the American state from the world stage, will destabilize the world as we know it today.

Moreover, if Donald Trump will win a second term, the US disengagement will continue in the coming years, while China and Russia will have more space to expand their influence internationally.

4. International Relations will remain the same after the SARS CoV-2 pandemic

In a report elaborated by the editors of International Organization, the most important journal in International Relations, entitled: *"The Song Remains the Same: International Relations After Covid -19,"* the authors tried to offer a pragmatic answer to the question on everyone's lips: is the current pandemic an inflection point? The conclusion of those who were invited to express their opinion is that the answer is "no," with the following explanation: pandemics have undeniably had this effect in the past but how the novel coronavirus has affected the distribution of power and interest in its first six months suggests that COVID-19 will not have transformative effects on world politics. Because a

profound ex-post shift in hegemonic ideas is absent 2020 is unlikely to be an inflection point⁵⁴.

5. A long crisis caused by the pandemic can stretch the international order to its breaking point

In the absence of a vaccine or an effective treatment against the novel coronavirus, the prolongation of the pandemic can stretch the international order to its breaking point. As well, even after a vaccine is available, life will not go back to normal, because a nervous world will suffer permanent changes.

So, a long crisis caused by the pandemic can have negative consequences with a tremendous impact: severe economic recession or depression; the collapse of health systems even in developed countries; the novel coronavirus could end globalization as we know it before the pandemic if this will prolong. Without any doubt, a long pandemic will affect all of the world's power and regions even if unevenly, while a real risk is that its prolongation will eviscerate international cooperation and leave behind an anarchic world in which everybody is against everybody⁵⁵.

Conclusions

With or without major changes that can turn upside down the world as we know it before the pandemic, no area and domain will remain unaffected. It is also the case for international relations, which are extremely sensitive to changes on the world stage especially when it comes to the profound transformation of the realities before the pandemic.

⁵⁴ Daniel W. Drezner, *The Song Remains the Same: International Relations After COVID-19*, Cambridge University Press, 19 August 2020, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-organization/article/song-remains-the-same-international-relations-after-covid19/C0FAED193AEBF0B09C5ECA551D174525/core-reader>.

⁵⁵ Thomas Wright, *Stretching the International Order to Its Breaking Point*, The Atlantic, 4 April 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/04/pandemic-lasts-18-months-will-change-geopolitics-good/609445/>.

So, whether we are talking about changes in the basis of international relations, which will make tomorrow's world no longer look like today's, or some reversible ones once the pandemic passes, international relations will remain under the sign of change. This is because the novel coronavirus transformed the way states perceive themselves and others, both in terms of domestic and foreign policy. The pandemic will also reaffirm or contradict some trends, but more time is needed to validate the theory that will apply to international relations.

Bibliography:

- Mark Siraut, *Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points and the Liberal World Order*, The McGill International Review, 18 January 2018, <https://www.mironline.ca/liberal-world-order-myths/>.
- Joseph S. Nye Jr., *What New World Order?*, Foreign Affairs, spring 1992, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1992-03-01/what-new-world-order>.
- ****The World Order is Dead. Long Live the World Order*, Council on Foreign Relations, 25 June 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/world-order-dead-long-live-world-order>.
- Cecilia Acuti Martellucci, Maria Elena Flacco, Rosaria Cappadona, Francesca Bravi, Lorenzo Mantovani, Lamberto Manzoli, "SARS-CoV-2 pandemic: An overview", in *Advances in Biological Regulation*, 77 (2020) 100736, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212492620300476>.
- Ken Miguel, *Here's a look at some of history's worst pandemics that have killed millions*, abc7news, 28 February 2020, <https://abc7news.com/pandemic-epidemic-coronavirus-definition-what-is/5974174/>.
- ****COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU)*, <https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>.
- Edith M. Lederer, *UN chief says COVID-19 is worst crisis since World War II*, ABC NEWS, 31 March 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/chief-covid-19-worst-crisis-world-war-ii-69905340>.
- ****COVID-19 pandemic. Humanity needs leadership and solidarity to defeat the coronavirus*, United Nations Development Programme, <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/coronavirus.html>.
- Lisa Lockerd Maragakis, *First and Second Waves of Coronavirus*, Johns Hopkins Medicine, 14 August 2020, <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/>

health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/first-and-second-waves-of-coronavirus.

Ryan Fahey, *Dead bodies are loaded into refrigerated trucks outside New York hospitals after 98 people died in seven HOURS – bringing city's death toll to 790 and cases to 36,221 – as Mayor de Blasio warns people may be fined \$500 for not staying home*, Daily Mail Online, 30 March 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8167283/Horrifying-moment-dead-bodies-loaded-refrigerated-truck-forklift.html>.

Gudrun Heise, *Coronavirus pandemic: Is the second wave already here?*, DW News, 4 August 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-second-wave/a-54429614>.

Brian Wong, *China's Mask Diplomacy*, The Diplomat, 25 March 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/chinas-mask-diplomacy/>.

Martin Arostegui, *Chinese Virus Aid to Europe Raises Long-Term Concerns*, VOA, 23 March 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/science-health/coronavirus-outbreak/chinese-virus-aid-europe-raises-long-term-concerns>.

Milan Seghier, *The Coronavirus Pandemic Lets China Score a Win in Serbia*, Transatlantic Take, 23 March 2020, <https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/Seghier%20-%20%20serbia%20china%20coronavirus.pdf>.

Usaid Siddiqui, *Why China's support to coronavirus-hit Europe stirs controversy*, Al Jazeera, 6 April 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/china-support-coronavirus-hit-europe-stirs-controversy-200404160742616.html>.

*** *Netherlands recalls defective masks imported from China*, Al Jazeera, 29 March 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/netherlands-recalls-defective-masks-imported-china-200329141715106.html>.

Andrea Dudik, Radoslav Tomek and Bloomberg, *Europe turned to China for coronavirus testing help. Why some are now regretting it*, Fortune, 1 April 2020, <https://fortune.com/2020/04/01/europe-china-coronavirus-testing-help-regret/>.

Kirk Lancaster, Michael Rubin, *Assessing the Early Response to Beijing's Pandemic Diplomacy*, Council on Foreign Relations, 30 April 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/assessing-early-response-beijings-pandemic-diplomacy>.

Doina Chiacu, Lisa Lambert and Steve Holland, *Trump says 'China-centric' WHO 'really blew it' on coronavirus*, Reuters, 7 April 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-who/trump-says-who-is-china-centric-really-blew-it-on-coronavirus-idUSKBN21P2E1>

*** *Coronavirus: Trump accuses WHO of being a 'puppet of China'*, BBC News, 19 May 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-52679329>.

*** *Blaming China for Pandemic, Trump Says U.S. Will Leave the W.H.O.*, New York Times, 29 May 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/29/health/virus-who.html>.

Jérôme Viala-Gaudefroy, Dana Lindaman, *Donald Trump's 'Chinese virus': the politics of naming*, The Conversation, 21 April 2020, <https://theconversation.com/donald-trumps-chinese-virus-the-politics-of-naming-136796>

*** *China Rejects Blame for Coronavirus Pandemic*, VOA News, 19 May 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/china-rejects-blame-coronavirus-pandemic>.

*** *Trump owes us an apology: Chinese virologist*, Global Times, 25 July 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1195602.shtml>.

*** *'From Russia with Love': Putin sends aid to Italy to fight virus*, Euractiv, 23 March 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/from-russia-with-love-putin-sends-aid-to-italy-to-fight-virus/>.

Matthew Luxmoore, *Coronavirus Aid Coming 'From Russia with Love' — or an Agenda?*, Radio Free Europe, 1 April 2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/coronavirus-aid-coming-from-russia-with-love-or-agenda-/30523737.html>.

Pupo Ghinazzi, Facebook account, 27 March 2020, https://web.facebook.com/wat.ch/?v=1334864173388396&_rdc=1&_rdt.

Isabel Togoh, *From Russia with Love? Putin's Medical Supplies Gift To Coronavirus-Hit Italy Raises Questions*, Forbes, 26 March 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/isabeltogoh/2020/03/26/from-russia-with-love-putins-medical-supplies-gift-to-coronavirus-hit-italy-raises-questions/>.

*** *Coronavirus: What does 'from Russia with love' really mean?*, BBC News, 3 April 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52137908>.

Holly Ellyatt, *From Russia with love? Why the Kremlin's coronavirus aid to the West is controversial*, CNBC, 7 April 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/07/why-the-kremlins-coronavirus-aid-to-the-west-is-controversial.html>.

<https://www.ft.com/content/f21cf708-759e-11ea-ad98-044200cb277f>.

https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_serbias_coronavirus_diplomacy_un_masked.

Miles Johnson, Sam Fleming, Guy Chazan, *Coronavirus: Is Europe losing Italy?*, Financial Times, 6 April 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/04/08/coronavirus-in-europe-eu-science-chief-quits-slamming-response-to-pandemic>.

*** *Eurogroup Strikes Half-Trillion Euro Deal to Help Members Cope with COVID-19*, VOA News, 10 April 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/science-health/coronavirus-outbreak/eurogroup-strikes-half-trillion-euro-deal-help-members-cope>.

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_476.

COVID-19: Commission creates first ever rescEU stockpile of medical equipment, European Commission, 19 March 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/eu-budget-recovery-2-billion-reinforce-resceu-direct-crisis-response-tools>.

- Robin Emmott, *Russia deploying coronavirus disinformation to sow panic in West, EU document says*, Reuters, 18 March 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-disinformation/russia-deploying-coronavirus-disinformation-to-sow-panic-in-west-eu-document-says-idUSKBN21518F>.
- Michael Peel, Sam Fleming, *EU warns of pro-Kremlin disinformation campaign on coronavirus*, Financial Times, 17 March 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/d65736da-684e-11ea-800d-da70cff6e4d3>.
- Juulia Baer-Bader, *EU Response to Disinformation from Russia on COVID-19: Three Lessons*, German Council on Foreign Relations, No. 18, June 2020, <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/eu-response-disinformation-russia-covid-19>.
- McKay Coppins, *Trump's Dangerously Effective Coronavirus Propaganda*, The Atlantic, 11 March 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/03/trump-coronavirus-threat/607825/>.
- Quint Forgey, *'Maybe our best work': Trump praises his coronavirus response*, Politico, 6 June 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/maybe-our-best-work-donald-trump-praises-us-coronavirus-pandemic-response/>.
- *** *US accuses China, Russia of coordinating on virus conspiracies*, France 24, 8 May 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200508-us-accuses-china-russia-of-coordinating-on-virus-conspiracie>.
- *** *US accuses China of hacking coronavirus researchers, others*, Al Jazeera, 22 July 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/07/accuses-china-hacking-coronavirus-researchers-200721161320927.html>.
- Julian E. Barnes, *Russia Is Trying to Steal Virus Vaccine Data, Western Nations Say*, The New York Times, 16 July 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/16/us/politics/vaccine-hacking-russia.html>.
- GEC Special Report: August 2020 Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem*, The U.S. Department of State, Global Engagement Center, August 2020, https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/USSTATEBPA/2020/08/05/file_attachments/1512230/Pillars%20of%20Russias%20Disinformation%20and%20Propaganda%20Ecosystem_08-04-20%20%281%29.pdf.
- Jennifer Hansler, *US accuses Russia of conducting sophisticated disinformation and propaganda campaign*, CNN, 5 August 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/08/05/politics/state-department-russian-disinformation-report/index.html>.
- Stephen M. Walt, *The Realist's Guide to the Coronavirus Outbreak*, Foreign Policy, 9 March 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/09/coronavirus-economy-globalization-virus-icu-realism/>.
- Seth A. Johnston, *The Pandemic and the Limits of Realism*, Foreign Policy, 24 June 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/24/coronavirus-pandemic-realism-limited-international-relations-theory/>.

- *** *COVID 2025: How the pandemic is changing our world*, UChicago News, University of Chicago, Office of Communications, 16 July 2020, <https://news.uchicago.edu/story/covid-2025-how-pandemic-changing-our-world>.
- Sebastian Kevany, Deon Canyon-Daniel K. Inouye, Michael Baker, Robert Ostergard, *The Nexus Between The Covid-19 Pandemic, International Relations, and International Security*, Security Nexus Perspectives, May 2020, https://apcss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/N2400-Kevany-et-al-International-Nexus-May-2020_MM.pdf.
- Daniel W. Drezner, *The Song Remains the Same: International Relations After COVID-19*, Cambridge University Press, 19 August 2020, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-organization/article/song-remains-the-same-international-relations-after-covid19/C0FAED193AEBF0B09C5ECA551D174525/core-reader>.
- Thomas Wright, *Stretching the International Order to Its Breaking Point*, The Atlantic, 4 April 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/04/pandemic-lasts-18-months-will-change-geopolitics-good/609445/>.

2. THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC SHAPES A NEW WORLD ORDER

Burcea Iohana-Georgia

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has posed a great impact on the dynamics of the international arena, changing completely the face of the global relations. Described by numerous leaders as the biggest crisis of the 21st century, COVID-19 has challenged normality in all aspects of everyday life, whether we talk about businesses, economy, society, the health care systems, or politics.

The outbreak has brought to light different instances of state's behavior and a widespread tendency towards unilateralism, by sheltering the national interest at the expense of the relations between states. Border closings represented one of the first hurdles in the relations between states, additionally posing great pressure on the transport sector, trade and free movement.

The process has been also applied in areas such as the internal borders of the EU, jeopardizing the core characteristics of the Schengen area, as most of these decisions were taken unilaterally and not discussed at the EU level. The newly unilateral approach on behalf of certain nations raised concerns regarding the emergence of a process of deglobalization, which would weaken the interconnectivity between state actors in the international arena.

Unilateral behavior has been also reflected in the sanitary sector. The sanitary crisis posed many challenges to the medical systems, and it also fueled a rush for medical equipment and

sanitary products. States such as the US were focused on acquiring as much equipment and medicines as possible, while other states showed solidarity with those in need. However, among them, there have been also states which took advantage to improve their image.

Disinformation campaigns, fake news and conspiracy theories have been fueling the anti-government sentiment and determining a low level of trust in the states' institutions, some of these campaigns being promoted by other states themselves. These attitudes have created great fissures between nations and changed how the states interact.

The coronavirus pandemic has been regarded as the third shock of the 21st century, after the 9/11 attacks and the financial crisis in 2008¹. The health crisis had a great impact on the future of international relations and might see a change of hierarchy, depending on each state's capacity to manage the crisis, and the decisions regarding a proper response for the pandemic.

This Chapter aims to look at the impact that the coronavirus is having on international relations, by analyzing the main highlights up until the 31st of July. The paper will be focused on the internal issues that the European Union had to face in this context, and how the pandemic has been affecting its cohesion. Further, I shall discuss the case of China, from being accused of covering up the pandemic to employing a strategy that would turn things in its advantage.

The US refusing to act as a leader shall also be discussed throughout this paper and the effects that this decision has on its status at the international level. Finally, Russia will be discussed, focusing on the disinformation campaigns, and the lack of trust. The final section of this paper shall be dedicated to the perspectives on how the international arena shall further look like, and which are the main changes that occur.

¹ Andres Ortega, *The deglobalisation virus*. European Council on Foreign Relations, March 18, 2020. https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_deglocalisation_virus

The impetus to write this paper was determined by the need to understand how the coronavirus pandemic has challenged the dynamics of the international system. By analyzing the behavior of the four powers, we can get a glimpse of this matter.

The European Union's cohesion test

The year 2020 is particularly challenging for the European block, due to the on-going Brexit negotiations, which haven't registered much progress yet, and due to the continuous difficulties provoked by the coronavirus pandemic. There are yet an important number of uncertainties surrounding the issue, and unknown elements regarding the virus and possible scenarios, as so far, studies and research revealed meager information about the virus.

Finding a common ground on a coronavirus response and on a financial package that would rescue the EU's economy proved to be especially difficult, in a context in which the frictions between Northern and Southern states became prominent.

Despite the internal borders which began to open in June, the number of coronavirus cases on the EU's territory is steadily rising, as well as the number of casualties, with some states being more affected than others. Additionally, the economic situation across the world is announcing an economic crisis, as most of the states are likely to fall into recession during this year.²

Hence, the EU had to address both the sanitary crisis and the economy, by implementing policies targeting the public health care systems and other vulnerable sectors, and finding sustainable measures for mitigating the effects of the outbreak and for recovering the economy.

Since the emergence of the first cases of COVID-19 in the EU, the member states had different approaches for tackling the

² "The Global Economic Outlook During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Changed World," World Bank, accessed August 03, 2020. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/06/08/the-global-economic-outlook-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-a-changed-world>

situation, whether we talk about restrictions, healthcare, or economy. Thus, I identify three elements that created separations between the member states: (1) different responses to prevent an increase in the number of infections, (2) economy, and lastly, (3) the creation of the travel bubbles, which emphasized a greater concentration towards the regional level.

From the beginning, Brussels has called for a common response for the pandemic, insisting on having regular meetings with the leaders of the member states, in order to have updates on the internal situation, and find the most appropriate solution for all the 27 states.³ However, each state chose to apply their own set of measures, underlining a lack of coordination, which further reflected in the uneven ratio of infections across the Union, and a slow response⁴.

The imposed measures and the response for the pandemic were one of the first instances in which the EU states had distinct views. Most of the states decided to partially close their borders and suspend flights, with some of them going for a full lockdown to prevent the spread of the virus.

On the other hand, the Netherlands and Sweden chose to impose many flexible measures, aiming to achieve herd immunity, and relying mostly on the citizens' self-consciousness.⁵ Hence, there were significant disproportionalities in the number of infections across the Union.

³ "Coronavirus response." European Commission, accessed August 03, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response_en

⁴ Jarrin, Mario Torres. 2020. *Covid-19 and the European Union: A crisis of values*. In *The World Before and After Covid-19*, edited by Gian Luca Gardini, European Institute of International Studies.

⁵ Anna Holligan, "Coronavirus: Why Dutch lockdown may be a high-risk strategy," *BBC*, April 5, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52135814> ; Melissa Wiley, "Sweden's coronavirus death rate is nearly 6 times that of neighboring Norway and Finland," *Business Insider*, April 29, 2020. <https://www.businessinsider.com/photos-norway-sweden-different-coronavirus-responses-fatality-rates-2020-4> ; Hilary Brueck, "Sweden's gamble on coronavirus herd immunity couldn't work in the US — and it may not work in Sweden," *Business Insider*, May 02, 2020. <https://www.businessinsider.com/sweden-coronavirus-strategy-explained-culture-of-trust-and-obedience-2020-4>

While the Netherlands' approach has been to a certain extent accepted by the other states, Sweden was harshly criticized, mostly due to the high number of deaths among the elderly, and its failure to protect those living in care homes.

However, Italy was the first most affected country in Europe, having a rapid escalation of the number of infections in just a few weeks. The situation in Italy enhanced the beginning of internal frictions across the Union, with the Government from Rome repeatedly accusing the EU of not responding fast enough to Italy's call for help, in the first weeks of the coronavirus spread in Europe.⁶ Spain, Portugal, France and Germany were further very affected by the pandemic, while until the end of June, Eastern Europe had by far a better picture, with a lesser number of deaths and infections.

The coronavirus hitting the Southern part of the EU harder than the North-Western part, triggered a whole range of frictions between the two parts of Europe. The Southern states asking the EU for issuing *coronabonds*, in order for their economies to recover at a faster pace, in the context in which these states were more affected than the others, fuelled a strong opposition from the Frugal Four, who were not willing to guarantee for the South⁷. This situation brought to light the same old-narrative describing the Northerners as hard-working, just people bearing the costs of a lazy and corrupt South.

The negotiations for a proper economic package that would rescue the European economy and the opposition of the Frugals underscored the tendency towards a unilateral behavior, which was shaped by the pandemic. The first discussions regarding the possibility of offering a combination of grants and loans to the member states raised concerns regarding the unity at the EU

⁶ Daniel Boffey, "Italy criticises EU for being slow to help over coronavirus epidemic," *The Guardian*, March 11, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/11/italy-criticises-eu-being-slow-help-coronavirus-epidemic>

⁷ Keith Johnson, "Fighting Pandemic, Europe Divides Again Along North and South Lines," *Foreign Policy*, March 20, 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/30/coronavirus-pandemic-europe-north-south-eurobond/>

level, and the future of the Union, as the Frugals vehemently refused such a proposal.

However, the EU leaders eventually reached an agreement, pinpointing that the EU member states will do well by cooperating and working together, rather than individually. A major game-changer in reaching an agreement was undoubtedly Germany's switch of position and it accepting a form of mutualization of debts.

The Franco-German proposal represents a landmark for the EU project and the future of the Union, and it is a clear depiction of the power that this dual-engine can employ at the EU level⁸.

Germany was one of the main opponents of shared debt. However, Angela Merkel realized that refusing to help the South will fuel the anti-German and anti-EU sentiments in these countries. Angela Merkel's decision remains a milestone in the history of the EU and it shall remain as a reminder of the EU's unity. Despite the many ordeals that the Union has faced, it has already made steps towards greater integration, culminating with the historical agreement between the 27 leaders regarding the economic recovery, which combines a share of both loans and grants.

Finding common ground for the economic recovery of the EU and the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 was quintessential for shutting down Eurosceptics and populist, which have lately gained more popularity among electorates. The crisis that the Schengen area had to face in the earlier days of the outbreak already fueled their ambitions, with Eurosceptics taking advantage of the situation for their discourse.

The situation throughout the territory of the EU showed a greater emphasis on the sub-regional level, rather than on the whole European territory. The example is also representative at a larger scale, as during the outbreak the measures were focused on the regional level. In what the EU is concerned this change can be best observed in the pattern of border closings.

⁸ Anatole Kaletsky, "Franco-German proposal can be Europe's Hamiltonian moment," *The Business Time*, May 26, 2020. <https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/opinion/franco-german-proposal-can-be-europes-hamiltonian-moment>

In the first months of the pandemic, the Western part and the Southern part of the EU were leading in terms of the number of COVID-19 cases, which lead to many states closing their border with the states in these parts. Additionally, when the states decided to gradually reopen their borders, aiming to easily return to normality, we saw the creation of regional bubbles of free movement, such as in the case of the Baltic States. Countries were more prone to firstly reopen the borders with their neighbors.

China: mask diplomacy or masked intentions?

China has been multiple times accused of trying to cover up the proportions of the coronavirus pandemic, as the first cases of coronavirus emerged in China. The actual number of infected persons, as well as the period when the first cases were registered still remains under a veil of secrecy.

Hence, many states have been pointing out to the Chinese authorities for failing to provide the necessary information for them to have time to prepare a strategy to limit the escalation of the pandemic. The medical equipment sector was one of the most vulnerable, as most of the states didn't own large supplies that could cover the necessities of a pandemic.

Certainly, the harshest rhetoric came from the US, who accused China of deliberately releasing the virus, in order to sabotage the US and gain more power.⁹ In response, the Chinese officials had the same narrative but targeted against the US. Each tried to take advantage of the situation and put each other in a bad light by fueling a sentiment of mistrust, and by suggesting that either one or another was the source of the virus.

The Sino-American tensions increased significantly during this period, and the narratives of both parties became sharper than before. However, despite Trump's discourse, China conducted its

⁹ "Remarks by President Trump on Actions Against China," White House, accessed August 03, 2020. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-actions-china/>

strategy properly and sharply decreased the number of infections, had the data provided by the Chinese officials been accurate. The crisis was managed efficiently, as the restriction measures and total lock-downs were strictly respected.

Additionally, momentum was created for China to further advance its interests in other regions and to construct an image of solidarity and fraternity, by employing the “mask diplomacy”.¹⁰ The *mask diplomacy* is the way through which China shows its support towards other states by offering medical equipment, mostly masks which were produced in China, financial aid and sending medical staff, thus creating an image of a global leader, in a time in which, the US seems to be reluctant to assume this role.

This strategy reflects China’s power projection in Europe, and not only, and the pursuit to consolidate its image as a trustworthy and responsible partner among certain European states.¹¹ Thus, China’s approach may be a perfect strategy when applied in times of despair, with demoralized people, and in the case of Europe, on states which are becoming increasingly Eurosceptic, such as the case of Italy in the early weeks of the coronavirus pandemic in Europe.

China’s *divide et impera* artifice worked to a certain extent in Europe, as the sentiments towards it are quite mixed. France and Germany are the main contestants, while Hungary, for instance, has close ties with Beijing and is currently working with Huawei for its 5G network.¹²

China is getting involved in numerous regions of the world, commonly by using its economic leverage and investing in different

¹⁰ Joan Alvarez, “Public diplomacy, soft power and the narratives of COVID-19 in the initial phase of the pandemic,” in *The World Before and After Covid-19*, edited by Gian Luca Gardini, (European Institute of International Studies) p. 12, https://www.iee.iweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Full_book_FINAL_EN2.0-UNIDO.pdf

¹¹ Brian Wong, “China’s Mask Diplomacy,” *The Diplomat*, March 25, 2020. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/chinas-mask-diplomacy/>

¹² Ryan Gosling, “Pompeo Visit: US’s anti-China recruitment drive targets willing central Europeans,” *Balkan Insight*, August 11, 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/08/11/pompeo-visit-uss-anti-china-recruitment-drive-targets-willing-central-europeans/>

sectors, such as transport interconnectivity or the extraction of natural resources. It is yet debatable whether the current context has opened up a new set of opportunities for projecting its power in new areas.

However, in a time in which the US confiscated the medical equipment which was to be sent to France and Germany, China's aid is surely significant for the international community and is sending a strong message of responsibility. Undoubtedly, the attempt to cover-up the gravity of the situation in the Hubei province, as well as the vast campaigns of disinformation coming from Beijing in an attempt to discredit the Western world, cannot be put aside¹³.

Along with the issues regarding trade, violations of human rights and disinformation campaigns, the coronavirus crisis represents just another brick in the wall of mistrust that surrounded China.

It has been widely argued that we are witnessing a power transition from West to East, as China's economic power and influence are continuously rising¹⁴. It is yet to be debated whether or not the outbreak has aided China in this sense, in the context in which the US is much more affected by the pandemic than China.

What we know for sure is that China has adapted its strategy to the current international system, which was designed by the Western world, as a place for cooperation, multilateralism and interconnectivity. China's continuous attempts to act as a global leader through its mask diplomacy, underline its capacity of adapting even to values that are uncommon for its ideology.¹⁵

¹³ Mark Scott, Laura Kayali, Laurens Cerulus, "European Commission accuses China of peddling disinformation," *Politico*, June 11, 2020. <https://www.politico.eu/article/european-commission-disinformation-china-coronavirus/>

¹⁴ Daniela Schwarzer, "Europe, the End of the West and Global Power Shifts," *Global Policy*, Volume 8, Issue S4 (2017): Pages 18-26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12437>

¹⁵ Catia Miriam Costa, "China after the pandemics," in *The World Before and After Covid-19*, edited by Gian Luca Gardini, European Institute of International Studies (2020) p. 84 https://www.ieeiweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Full_book_FINAL_EN2.0-UNIDO.pdf

At the same time, the US has an approach that leads more to isolationism, rather than multilateralism, being reluctant to act as a global leader during the pandemic, in spite of its well-known status. The velocity of the Chinese foreign policy underlines the readiness to take the lead.

China's soft power approach is of use not only for its foreign policy but also at the national level. China providing medical equipment is meant to underline the dependence that certain states have on China, and thus highlight the power of the state and also the efficiency of the leadership¹⁶. By employing this strategy, the state shows its superiority above its opponents. Hence, the image of the Chinese Communist Party is strengthened, and the support of the Chinese is increasing.

The US: hesitant to lead

The US' strategy for combating the coronavirus was highly inconsistent and slow, which left significant damage for both the society and the economy, in terms of a large number of infections, casualties, immense pressure on the health care system and high rates of unemployment. Donald Trump's narrative and discourses repeatedly disregarded reality, by reassuring the citizens that the US is managing the crisis better than any other state, in the context of the US rapidly becoming the most affected state in the world. Trump's rhetoric has been revolving around the origin of the virus, finding China responsible for the current situation¹⁷.

However, in his turn, Donald Trump failed to listen to the US intelligence services, who have been warning since January about the actual scale of the epidemic in Wuhan.¹⁸ The bad

¹⁶ Sven Biscop, "Coronavirus and Power: The Impact on International Politics," *Security Policy Brief*, March 2020, No. 126. <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2020/03/SPB126-sven-corona-260320.pdf?type=pdf>

¹⁷ "Remarks by President Trump on Actions Against China," White House, accessed August 03, 2020. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-actions-china/>

¹⁸ Caroline Kelly, "Washington Post: US intelligence warned Trump in January and February as he dismissed coronavirus threat," *CNN Politics*, March 21, 2020. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/20/politics/us-intelligence-reports-trump-coronavirus/index.html>

management is also owed to not listening to the health care specialists and denying the severity of the crisis. The President tried to distract the electorate from his own mistakes and miscalculations.

Additionally, he wanted to give his opponents and partners the impression that the crisis is handled well. The overall approach is a reflection of Trump's four-year term, which has been marked by unpredictability and unaccountability.

The US did not rush in to take the lead, neither had it engaged in cooperating with its partners in order to find common measures and solutions to slow-down the pandemic. More specifically, Trump was more preoccupied to accuse China for releasing the virus and for covering-up the epidemic for many months. Further, its accusations targeted the WHO for collaborating with the Chinese and for covering them.

The situations escalated up to the point in which Trump decided to withdraw the US from WHO.¹⁹ The decision is representing a continuation of Trump's administration unilateral way of conducting foreign policy. Moreover, Trump decided to suspend the US funding for the WHO, which is by far one of its most controversial decisions during this outbreak.

Trump's meager approach to tackle the COVID-19 issue, raises questions regarding its status at the international level, and its capacity to act as a hegemon. Claiming to have efficiently managed the situation at home, China seems ready to take up this role. The growing economic power that the Chinese enjoy and the strategy of advancing their interests in different regions through financial leverage, make China a dangerous opponent for the US.

The result of the 2020 presidential elections is likely to dictate the US's status in the system. A change of leadership might represent a chance to reclaim its role as a hegemon, and to reshape its image. A presidential term without Donald Trump would restore the plummeted relations between the US and its partners.

¹⁹ "Coronavirus: Trump accuses WHO of being a 'puppet of China'," *BBC*, May 19, 2020, accessed August 03, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-52679329>

However, the damage is of considerable proportions, and for the US to be able to go back to its pre-2016 status, it has to put in a lot of effort. Hence, the US must engage in cooperative mechanisms for the post-COVID-19 recovery, which includes setting up policies for the economic sector, as well as finding a proper vaccine or medicine to combat the virus.²⁰ In other words, the US should go back to its old self.

Russia: economic hardship, disinformation and lack of leadership

Disinformation campaigns and fake news aimed to destabilize societies and to decrease the credibility of governments and authorities were two of the main consequences of the sanitary crisis. As these practices are already characteristic for Russia, we are seeing a high number of disinformation campaigns coming from Russia, aiming to either discredit the US, the EU, or China, or to paint the Russian Federation in better colors.²¹

The early days of the COVID-19 were marked by a strong reluctance from Kremlin to embrace any restrictive measures to protect its citizens. Instead, Moscow focused its resources on promoting external disinformation campaigns or creating its own. Some of these were targeting other actors, while others aimed to convince that the coronavirus did not exist.

Since the beginning, Moscow has been in a rush to delegitimize the Western governments mostly, but also China. Russia's approach was mostly focused on instrumentalizing the pandemic in order to weaken the credibility of other states, usually by accusing either the US or China of spreading the virus.

²⁰ Andreas Falke, "The Covid-19 crisis and the United States," in *The World Before and After Covid-19*, edited by Gian Luca Gardini, European Institute of International Studies. https://www.ieeiweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Full_book_FINAL_EN2.0-UNIDO.pdf

²¹ "GEC Special Report: Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem." U.S. Department of State, Global Engagement Center, 2020 https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/USSTATEBPA/2020/08/05/file_attachments/1512230/Pillars%20of%20Russias%20Disinformation%20and%20Propaganda%20Ecosystem_08-04-20%20%281%29.pdf

Additionally, Russia tried to use the same strategy as China but had far less success. Russia sent medical aid to Italy using a military aircraft and then went on to brag about all the help that Russia has offered to the Italians. However, the help that Russia offered was not of great help, and it was more of an attempt to put Russia in a good light.

The same kind of rhetoric was also applied in the case of Estonia, when the Kremlin's propaganda newspapers wrote that Russia helped Estonia with the transportation of medical equipment from China. However, the flight was managed by the Estonian retailer, Hansapost, and only the airplane was Russian.²²

The late response to the sanitary crisis led to a massive increase in the number of infections and fatalities, and Russia managed to become one of the most affected countries by COVID. The regime in Russia, along with Putin's leadership created the false impression that if Russia is hit by a crisis like that, the response will be fast and strict. Russia's crisis management contradicted the idea that authoritarian regimes and security are linked, as the state failed to provide an efficient strategy²³.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Russia's economy is severe, especially as we are facing a shrinking global demand for energy, which is reflected in a significant drop in the oil price for a long time. The economic fallout, along with the feeble response to the crisis, is diminishing Putin's popularity at home.

Putin has taken a step back when it comes to the coronavirus pandemic, leaving the others to manage the situation. His involvement was nearly non-existent, which marked the first instance where he is not handling an internal crisis personally.

²² "Kremlin propaganda presents masks' delivery to Estonia as Russian humanitarian aid." *Baltic Times*, April 4, 2020, accessed August 03, 2020. https://www.baltictimes.com/kremlin_propaganda_presents_masks_delivery_to_estonia_as_russian_humanitarian_aid/

²³ Alexander Baunov, "The Contest for the Post-pandemic World," in *Steady State: Russian Foreign Policy After Coronavirus*, Edited by Dmitri Trenin, Eugene Rumer, Andrew S. Weiss, Carnegie Moscow Center. <https://carnegie.ru/2020/07/08/steady-state-russian-foreign-policy-after-coronavirus-pub-81890>

The management of the COVID-19 pandemic is particular due to the crisis response that has been employed. Putin's attitude raised questions about his future as the leader of Russia, and also about the decreasing number of his supporters. Kadri Liik²⁴ put forward an explanation for Putin's behavior.

Hence, he found the roots of his attitude in the fact that the coronavirus crisis doesn't represent the type of crisis that Putin is used to managing. Liik²⁵ argues that Putin is interested in managing military conflicts and political crisis, and any type of situation which involves an opponent. Thus, he argues that these preferred contexts are interlinked with the Soviet ideals that fuelled Putin's mandate from the beginning.

Whereas, the case of the coronavirus poses a distinct instance, in which he prefers to take a step back, and let the others handle the situation. However, the diminished support of the electorate is still not sufficient to mark the end of Putin's leadership. The result of the referendum held at the end of June for changing the Constitution, in order to extend the presidential terms is an uncontested proof that Putin is still enjoying popular support.

While in terms of domestic politics, there will not be much change brought by the outbreak, in terms of foreign policy it will be different. As the future of the economy is yet blurry and Russia is already the poorest from the three Great Powers, it is likely that the economy will be severely affected, thus leading Russia to lose its position in the international arena.

Perspectives

During the first weeks of the pandemic, when China was still the most affected country in the world, many of the other international actors have confronted with medical supplies shortages,

²⁴ Kadri Liik, "Coronavirus: Not Putin's kind of crisis," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, May 13, 2020. https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_coronavirus_not_putins_kind_of_crisis

²⁵ Kadri Liik, *op. cit.*

mostly in terms of masks and sanitizers. As China was severely hit, so were the production and transportation of goods and the global supply chains.²⁶

With industrial production being halted and global trade has been impacted. Being one of the main hubs for electronics, pharmaceuticals, and automobiles, the Hubei province was particularly affected. The lock-down imposed by the Chinese government on the province had a major impact on many international companies, causing disruptions in the global supply chains.²⁷

Due to the restrictive measures imposed, many of the factories, which were located in China, belonging to these companies had to be closed, causing acute repercussions. Additionally, as the level of unemployment has been increasing at the global level, a lack of demand for goods is observable.²⁸

The issue reveals the wide dependence on the materials produced in China and opened up the discussion regarding the diversification of supply chains to reduce the dependence on China's manufacturing and to make companies more resilient in the case of a crisis of these proportions.

The effects of the pandemic on the global supply chains can be regarded as one of the first instances of deglobalization. Hence, the regionalization of the supply chains, by creating regional supply chains is needed to reduce the risks for companies.²⁹ Thus, in the case of another shock, the production will not be disrupted in such a manner as during this period.

²⁶ Sara Hsu, "Effect of Coronavirus on China's Supply Chains," *China-US Focus*, May 14, 2020. <https://www.chinausfocus.com/finance-economy/effect-of-coronavirus-on-chinas-supply-chains>

²⁷ Alan Beattie, "Will coronavirus pandemic finally kill off global supply chains?," *Financial Times*, May 28, 2020. <https://www.ft.com/content/4ee0817a-809f-11ea-b0fb-13524ae1056b>

²⁸ Alan Beattie, *op. cit.*

²⁹ Chloe Taylor, *Coronavirus will reverse globalization and create regional supply chains, economists predict*. CNBC, May 13, 2020. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/13/coronavirus-will-undo-globalization-make-supply-chains-regional-eiu.html>; Andres Ortega, *op. cit.*

The relocation of supply chains involves certain losses for China, as the exports represented 18,42% of its GDP in 2019.³⁰ The question is to what extent will China be affected by this regionalization, and whether or not this would represent its downfall as the second-largest economy in the world. To answer these questions, certain elements ought to be taken into consideration when discussing this matter.

Firstly, one should consider the costs that a process of relocation implies. In a time when companies have been dramatically hit by the pandemic, at the moment, there will not be a large number rushing to relocate their activity. Moreover, in spite of the costs, there will not be any immediate benefit, as a crisis of these proportions rarely emerges.³¹

Secondly, a relocation will have consequences on the prices of the goods, not only because the process is costly, but also because the materials and the labor force might be more expensive than they are in China.

These two considerations are not meant to show that there will not be any regionalization of supply chains, but rather that the process shall be gradual, and thus, the ramifications for China will be more conspicuous in the long-term. Undoubtedly, a reorganization of the global supply chains is needed and shall happen. Thus, we will see a new interest in other markets, such as Southeast Asia or Latin America.³²

Governments and state industries also have to reduce their dependency on China. Bruno Le Maire, the French Finance Minister,

³⁰ "China: Exports, percent of GDP," *The Global Economy*, accessed August 10, 2020. <https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/china/exports/>

³¹ Yasmeen Serhan, Kathy Gilsinan. "Can the West Actually Ditch China?," *The Atlantic*, April 24, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/04/us-britain-dependence-china-trade/610615/>

³² John McGuinness, "Major Global Supply Chains Reorg Underway, Accelerated Further by COVID-19," *Backer McKenzie*, August 18, 2020. <https://www.bakermckenzie.com/en/newsroom/2020/08/reimagining-supply-chains>

declared that Europe should lower its dependence on China.³³ However, it is rather hard to completely distance from China, as the West is relying on it for medical equipment, such as masks, ventilators and pharmaceuticals, which are highly needed at the moment.

Due to the shortages in sanitary equipment, many European states began their own production, but not at the same pace as the factories in China would have. Moreover, it was particularly difficult to engage in this process for those states that didn't produce these types of material at all before the pandemic. Hence, when the situation in China got improved, the equipment sent by the Chinese was received with open arms. Even the US went through the same bargain, despite being engaged in a trade war with China.

The discussion regarding the global supply chains and the dependence on China is relevant for the distribution of power on the globe. China's economic power is reflecting on its status as a global superpower, as the extent to which it shall be impacted by the pandemic dictates its trajectory in global affairs.

Even with all the challenges, China is still a powerful state, with great economic potential. The investments of Chinese state-owned companies in different regions, such as the Arctic, and the benefits brought by these investments are a guarantee of China's status at the global level.

The increasing power of China represents the end of the unipolar international system. The US's power is challenged by the Chinese and the competition between the two great powers underlines the change of polarity. The coronavirus pandemic has accelerated this trend and has shaped two different approaches for the two powers.

The US distanced itself and rejected the idea of acting as a leader of the world through the pandemic, while China used its

³³ Andres Ortega, *op. cit.*

soft power skills to act as a leader. There are still uncertainties whether the new polarity will be bipolar, with the US and China as the two super-powers, or multipolar, with several powers competing with each other, among which China and the US. Hence, we can speak about a dual bipolarity, with the US and the EU representing one pole and China and Russia representing the opponent³⁴.

Russia's economy has been weakened even before the pandemic, but at the moment the situation is more severe. Thus, there are high chances that we see a change of approach in terms of foreign relations coming from Russia, to improve its situation. Russia might seek to normalize its relations with the EU, hoping that the EU will lift some of the imposed economic sanctions. However, Kremlin's enduring propaganda will isolate Russia, and the Union will be circumspect of any attempt for normalization.

The ongoing trade war between the US and China and the escalation of the frictions between them conveys that Russia will no longer be the US's main adversary, which gives Moscow place for maneuver and the chance to pick sides, or to occasionally change them, depending on its interest.³⁵

The transatlantic relation is granted, as well as the Sino-American row. Russia's position is not, and thus Kremlin's positioning will determine the balance of power in the system. A rapprochement between Russia and the US is slightly unlikely, but we might witness singular cases in which Russia might choose to cooperate with the US.

However, when it comes to China the situation is different because despite several occasions when the relation between the

³⁴ Jesus R Argumosa Pila, "Covid-19, geopolitics and the new balance of power," in *The World Before and After Covid-19*, edited by Gian Luca Gardini, European Institute of International Studies. https://www.ieeiweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Full_book_FINAL_EN2.0-UNIDO.pdf

³⁵ Nansheng Yuan, "Reflections on China-US relations after the COVID-19 pandemic," *China International Strategy Review* 2, 14-23 (2020) <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42533-020-00049-5>

two was tense, China and Russia enjoy key areas of cooperation, mainly in the energy and economy sectors.³⁶ The cooperation between China and Russia in the Arctic for the development of the Northern Sea Route, as well as the cooperation for the construction of a new natural gas pipeline, represents a cornerstone for the inter-state relations.

Additionally, it can be said that China and Russia are on the same page when it comes to the regime and even their approach. Both have an authoritarian regime and both of them have similar approaches in terms of foreign relations, such as the creation of disinformation campaigns and involvement in the internal affairs of other actors.

Stronger Sino-Russian cooperation will benefit Russia economically, and China strategically due to Russia's position and the access that it gives to the High North. Hence, the coronavirus outbreak will not change the structure of the Sino-Russian relation, but it will allow Russia to choose. It remains open to debate how Russia might want to exploit this chance and whether or not it will shortly change sides.

The European Union has proven that cohesion and unity are the key values that keep the 27 member states together. In spite of the many tests that the EU faced throughout the last years, the EU model still endures. However, the EU has still a lot of work to do, as the pandemic is far from being over.

The sanitary crisis can be used as an opportunity for the EU member states to rethink their strategies and to build-up their resilience. A greater emphasis on the regional or national level is required, for the EU to reduce its dependence on China and other actors.

In terms of foreign relations, the trans-Atlantic relationship has been significantly touched by the Donald Trump administration,

³⁶ Andrey Kortunov, "How the Pandemic Will Change EU-Russian Relations," *Carnegie Moscow Center*, July 08, 2020. <https://carnegie.ru/2020/07/08/how-pandemic-will-change-eu-russian-relations-pub-81894>

in the sense that since 2016 the relations have plummeted. The pandemic has revealed egoistic tendencies and unilateralism coming from the US, which raised questions about the future of trans-Atlantic relations.

The answer lays in the result of the presidential elections, which indicated two different scenarios. In the case of Trump winning the elections, the relationship between the EU and the US will decline even more severely.

During his mandate at the White House, Trump was often critical of the EU and did not refrain from condemning the biggest European powers, France and Germany, which indicated that he was rather seeking the disintegration of the EU, rather than strengthening the US-EU relations. At this point, even the EU leaders are becoming skeptical for any improvement to happen as long as Donald Trump is still in office, and the pandemic has enhanced this sentiment.³⁷

On the other side, Joe Biden winning the election would represent a chance for reviving the trans-Atlantic relationship and for strengthening the relations with both Germany and France. The US's foreign policy would be focused again on international cooperation and multilateralism, and the US would rejoin the agreements and the organizations from which it was withdrawn by President Trump.³⁸

Conclusion

The coronavirus pandemic had a massive impact on the international system, state-actors, international relations and the balance of power. Undoubtedly, the pandemic brought challenges

³⁷ David M. Herzenhorn, "Trump's Europe strategy: Nothing," *Politico*, June 4, 2020. <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-eu-strategy-nothing-g7-summit-angela-merkel/>

³⁸ Alex Soros, "A Biden victory could reset transatlantic relations," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, July 6, 2020. https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_a_biden_victory_could_reset_transatlantic_relations

for each state and will continue to affect them for some time, considering the deep global recession in which we are right now.

Throughout the paper, I have analyzed how the EU, China, the US and Russia behaved during the first months of the crisis, as well as the future of their relations. The way in which these powers will interact will determine the distribution of power in the international arena. There are yet many uncertainties, however, it seems like the future holds a departure from unipolarity and a transition towards bipolarity or multipolarity.

By making this analysis I have also identified certain trends that will further characterize the international system, among which regionalization, deglobalization and a greater emphasis on the national level. The long periods of lock-downs, border closings and many disruptions in global supply chains determined a greater focus on the national level. Additionally, the severity of this crisis has put an accent on the national interest and unilateralism, trends that will continue as long as the pandemic will still be present in our lives, leading to a new world order from many perspectives.

Bibliography:

- Alvarez, Joan. 2020. "Public diplomacy, soft power and the narratives of COVID-19 in the initial phase of the pandemic." In *The World Before and After Covid-19*, edited by Gian Luca Gardini, European Institute of International Studies https://www.ieeiweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Full_book_FINAL_EN2.0-UNIDO.pdf
- Argumosa Pila, Jesus R. 2020. "Covid-19, geopolitics and the new balance of power." In *The World Before and After Covid-19*, edited by Gian Luca Gardini, European Institute of International Studies. https://www.ieeiweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Full_book_FINAL_EN2.0-UNIDO.pdf
- Baunov, Alexander. 2020. "The Contest for the Post-pandemic World." In *Steady State: Russian Foreign Policy After Coronavirus*, Edited by Dmitri Trenin, Eugene Rumer, Andrew S. Weiss, Carnegie Moscow Center. <https://carnegie.ru/2020/07/08/steady-state-russian-foreign-policy-after-coronavirus-pub-81890>

- Baltic Times, 2020. "Kremlin propaganda presents masks' delivery to Estonia as Russian humanitarian aid." *Baltic Times*, April 4, 2020. Accessed August 03, 2020. https://www.baltictimes.com/kremlin_propaganda_presents_masks_delivery_to_estonia_as_russian_humanitarian_aid/
- Beattie, Alan. 2020. "Will coronavirus pandemic finally kill off global supply chains?" *Financial Times*, May 28, 2020. <https://www.ft.com/content/4ee0817a-809f-11ea-b0fb-13524ae1056b>
- BBC.com. 2020. "Coronavirus: Trump accuses WHO of being a 'puppet of China'." *BBC*, May 19, 2020, Accessed August 03, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-52679329>
- Biscop, Sven. 2020. "Coronavirus and Power: The Impact on International Politics." *Security Policy Brief*, March 2020, No. 126. <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2020/03/SPB126-sven-corona-260320.pdf?type=pdf>
- Boffey, Daniel. 2020. "Italy criticises EU for being slow to help over coronavirus epidemic." *The Guardian*, March 11, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/11/italy-criticises-eu-being-slow-help-coronavirus-epidemic>
- Brueck, Hilary. 2020. "Sweden's gamble on coronavirus herd immunity couldn't work in the US — and it may not work in Sweden." *Business Insider*, May 02, 2020. <https://www.businessinsider.com/sweden-coronavirus-strategy-explained-culture-of-trust-and-obedience-2020-4>
- Costa, Catia Miriam. 2020. "China after the pandemics." In *The World Before and After Covid-19*, edited by Gian Luca Gardini, European Institute of International Studies https://www.ieeiweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Full_book_FINAL_EN2.0-UNIDO.pdf
- European Commission. 2020. "Coronavirus response." Accessed August 03, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response_en
- Falke, Andreas. 2020. "The Covid-19 crisis and the United States." In *The World Before and After Covid-19*, edited by Gian Luca Gardini, European Institute of International Studies. https://www.ieeiweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Full_book_FINAL_EN2.0-UNIDO.pdf
- Gosling, Ryan. 2020. "Pompeo Visit: US's anti-China recruitment drive targets willing central Europeans." *Balkan Insight*, August 11, 2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/08/11/pompeo-visit-uss-anti-china-recruitment-drive-targets-willing-central-europeans/>
- Herzenhorn, David M. 2020. "Trump's Europe strategy: Nothing." *Politico*, June 4, 2020. <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-eu-strategy-nothing-g7-summit-angela-merkel/>
- Holligan, Anna. 2020. "Coronavirus: Why Dutch lockdown may be a high-risk strategy." *BBC*, April 5, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52135814>

- Hsu, Sara. 2020. "Effect of Coronavirus on China's Supply Chains." *China-US Focus*, May 14, 2020. <https://www.chinausfocus.com/finance-economy/effect-of-coronavirus-on-chinas-supply-chains>
- Jarrin, Mario Torres. 2020. "Covid-19 and the European Union: A crisis of values." In *The World Before and After Covid-19*, edited by Gian Luca Gardini, European Institute of International Studies
- Johnson, Keith. 2020. "Fighting Pandemic, Europe Divides Again Along North and South Lines." *Foreign Policy*, March 20, 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/30/coronavirus-pandemic-europe-north-south-euro-bond/>
- Kaletsy, Anatole. 2020. "Franco-German proposal can be Europe's Hamiltonian moment." *The Business Time*, May 26, 2020. <https://www.business-times.com.sg/opinion/franco-german-proposal-can-be-europes-hamiltonian-moment>
- Kelly, Caroline. 2020. "Washington Post: US intelligence warned Trump in January and February as he dismissed coronavirus threat." *CNN Politics*, March 21, 2020. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/20/politics/us-intelligence-reports-trump-coronavirus/index.html>
- Kortunov, Andrey. 2020. "How the Pandemic Will Change EU-Russian Relations." *Carnegie Moscow Center*, July 08, 2020. <https://carnegie.ru/2020/07/08/how-pandemic-will-change-eu-russian-relations-pub-81894>
- Liik, Kadri. 2020. "Coronavirus: Not Putin's kind of crisis." *European Council on Foreign Relations*, May 13, 2020. https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_coronavirus_not_putins_kind_of_crisis
- McGuinness, John. 2020. "Major Global Supply Chains Reorg Underway, Accelerated Further by COVID-19." *Backer McKenzie*, August 18, 2020. <https://www.bakermckenzie.com/en/newsroom/2020/08/reimagining-supply-chains>
- Ortega, Andres. 2020. "The deglobalisation virus." *European Council on Foreign Relations*, March 18, 2020. https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_deglobalisation_virus
- Schwarzer, Daniela. 2017. "Europe, the End of the West and Global Power Shifts." *Global Policy*, Volume 8, Issue S4, Pages 18-26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12437>
- Scott, Mark, Laura Kayali, Laurens Cerulus. 2020. "European Commission accuses China of peddling disinformation." *Politico*, June 11, 2020. <https://www.politico.eu/article/european-commission-disinformation-china-coronavirus/>
- Serhan, Yasmineen, Kathy Gilsinan. 2020. "Can the West Actually Ditch China?." *The Atlantic*, April 24, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/04/us-britain-dependence-china-trade/610615/>
- Soros, Alex. 2020. "A Biden victory could reset transatlantic relations." *European Council on Foreign Relations*, July 6, 2020. https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_a_biden_victory_could_reset_transatlantic_relations

- Taylor, Chloe. 2020. "Coronavirus will reverse globalization and create regional supply chains, economists predict." *CNBC*, May 13, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/13/coronavirus-will-undo-globalization-make-supply-chains-regional-eiu.html>
- The Global Economy. 2020. "China: Exports, percent of GDP." Accessed August 10, 2020. <https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/china/exports/>
- U.S. Department of State. 2020. "GEC Special Report: Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem." *Global Engagement Center*. https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/USSTATEBPA/2020/08/05/file_attachments/1512230/Pillars%20of%20Russias%20Disinformation%20and%20Propaganda%20Ecosystem_08-04-20%20%281%29.pdf
- White House. 2020. "Remarks by President Trump on Actions Against China." Accessed August 03, 2020. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-actions-china/>
- Wiley, Melissa. 2020. "Sweden's coronavirus death rate is nearly 6 times that of neighboring Norway and Finland." *Business Insider*, April 29, 2020. <https://www.businessinsider.com/photos-norway-sweden-different-coronavirus-responses-fatality-rates-2020-4>
- Wong, Brian. 2020. "China's Mask Diplomacy." *The Diplomat*, March 25, 2020. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/chinas-mask-diplomacy/>
- World Bank. 2020. "The Global Economic Outlook During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Changed World." Accessed August 03, 2020. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/06/08/the-global-economic-outlook-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-a-changed-world>
- Yuan, Nansheng. 2020. "Reflections on China-US relations after the COVID-19 pandemic." *China International Strategy Review* 2, 14-23 (2020) <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42533-020-00049-5>

Apărut: 2020

Procesare calculator:
DANIELA PAUL

Imprimarea executată prin Decizia nr. 14/2020,
de către Serviciul Tipografic al Institutului
de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale „Ion I. C. Brătianu“
București – 6, B-dul Iuliu Maniu, nr. 1-3
Telefon: 021 316 96 61
