KONRAD
ADENAUER
STIFTUNG

Security
and Covid-19

The Political and Security System, Regional Security Forecasts and New State Actors Before and During the Pandemic

Marjan Gjurovski, PhD
Tatjana Dronzija, PhD
Dragan Djukanović, PhD

"St. Kliment Ohridski" University - Bitola

www.kas.de

Security
and Covid-19

The Political and Security System, Regional Security Forecasts and New State Actors Before and During the Pandemic

Impressum

Contents

Foreword

The Faculty of Security Skopje and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung jointly implemented the project "Regional security challenges and new state actors during and after the Covid-19 pandemic crisis", covering the health crisis with regard to regional cooperation, the impact of new state actors in the region, and geopolitical shifts. In addition, the main focus of the analysis was the danger of hybrid threats and fake news, in an attempt to securitise the issue, which is presently considered a health issue only, but which has the potential to grow into a security threat that will have consequences for the economic security of each country.

The project **"Regional security challenges and new state actors during and after the Covid-19 crisis"** aims to analyse the impact of Covid-19 in the Republic of North Macedonia, the Republic of Serbia, and the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as regional security challenges and cooperation, with reference to the emergence of new state actors in international relations and geopolitics in times of crises. Issues of special interest were recognising the possibility of fostering better regional cooperation at a time when solidarity among EU states is not up to the task that directly affects foreign relations in times of emergency and crisis.

By means of debates that were carried out in four separate webinars, we determined the situation, as well as the possibility for regional cooperation in dealing with the pandemic, and the indirect impact that arises from the closure of borders, the flow of goods, and the movement of people, concerning the integration process, and the public opinion on the EU, NATO, UN, and others. **At the same time, security challenges were identified as deriving from inadequate early warning and prevention** by the international and regional political and military organisations. **Among other things, special focus was placed on the potential return of new state actors such as the PR of China to the European Union, and especially the Balkan countries, under the guise of direct assistance** to vulnerable citizens and countries, without realizing the responsibility it holds for the situation that escalated in the whole world. **It was inevitable to deal with the topic of hybrid threats and fake news during Covid-19 as a potential security threat and stability risk.**

At the end of each webinar, specific conclusions and recommendations were drawn, which were subliminally presented in each country separately, with concrete recommendations for further resolving the crisis, as well as proposals for finding mechanisms to overcome the situation and a functional crisis management system in the region.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Office of Konrad-Adenauer- Stiftung in Skopje for the continuous support of our projects, particularly the present one, which is an important contribution to monitoring and analysing the impact of the global pandemic on the region and the response of the political and security systems.

Professor Marjan Gjugrovski, PhD
Editor-in-chief

1

Case Study:
Republic of North Macedonia

Case Study:
Republic of North Macedonia

Introduction

An epidemic is an unusually frequent occurrence of a disease in a population. Epidemic diseases include cholera, influenza, typhoid, plague, the current Covid-19 pandemic, and others. As a rule, pandemics are always about infectious diseases. Thus, every citizen has the right to protection from infectious diseases, and the obligation to protect themselves and others from infection. Protection against infectious diseases is achieved by means of planning, organising, and continuous monitoring of the epidemiological situation, as well as implementing measures prescribed by law, which have to be supervised and controlled. The implementation of measures for protection against infectious diseases is a priority in relation to the implementation of other measures for health protection, as well as in relation to the provisions of material and other means. Measures for protection against infectious diseases are directly implemented by health institutions and health professionals who apply methods and means in accordance with the latest scientific and medical achievements. A pandemic is a condition when a contagious disease spreads over a wide territory, encompassing multiple countries or continents, especially when a new, unknown disease spreads over a large area.

The World Health Organisation declared the new coronavirus Covid-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020, due to the fact that it had already spread to several continents. Thus, the World Health Organisation sent a strong and clear message to all countries in the world, saying that the situation evoked by Covid-19 is extremely serious, and that every country, according to its position and its health system, has to begin to prepare for dealing with the crisis.

As for the Republic of North Macedonia, the first case was registered on 26 February 2020, which initiated the spread of the coronavirus. Thereafter, the interval of confirmed cases of the virus was concluded and human-to-human transmission was confirmed, initiating the interval for accelerated spread (local transmission) when the virus spread among the population, i.e. the persons exposed to it.

The Ministry of Health monitors the movement of infectious diseases and informs the competent authorities, adopts programmes for the protection of the population from infectious diseases, coordinates activities, and determines measures for the implementation of the programmes. The Institute of Public Health monitors and studies the epidemiological situation of infectious diseases and regularly informs the Ministry. Public Health Centres monitor the epidemiological situation with regard to infectious diseases in their areas and report to the Institute of Public Health.

The protection of the population from infectious diseases includes general and special measures of occurrence prevention, early detection, spread prevention, and suppression of infectious diseases and infections. General measures implemented for protection against infectious diseases are:

› provision of safe drinking water and control over the safety of water and water supply facilities;
› provision of sanitary, hygienic and other conditions in the process of production, preparation, storage, and trade of food supplies;
› disposal of wastewater and other solid and liquid waste in a way that will prevent pollution of the

human environment (water, land, air);
› performing preventive disinfection, pest control, rat control, and other hygienic and interim measures in settlements and other public areas;
› provision of sanitary, interim and hygienic conditions in public facilities: school and preschool institutions, food facilities, water supply facilities, other public institutions;
› provision of hygienically clean water in baths, recreational swimming pools, lakes and other recreational facilities and natural spas and
› provision of preventive activities to promote the health of the population.

Special measures for protection of the population from infectious diseases that are implemented in dealing with the pandemic are:

› detection of sources of infection (infected persons or carriers) and establishing an etiological diagnosis;
› reporting infections diseases;
› epidemiological research;
› isolation, health supervision, quarantine, transportation and compulsory treatment;
› immunoprophylaxis and chemoprophylaxis;
› disinfection, pest control and rat control;
› conducting health and hygienic examinations;
› monitoring nosocomial infections and taking measures for their prevention and
› health education. The prevention of infectious diseases must be given priority, while institutions and citizens must behave more responsibly.

The beginnings of the current Covid-19 pandemic were detected in the city of Wuhan in the People's Republic of China, where, at the end of 2019, the first cases of this new infectious disease were discovered. Covid-19 was spreading extremely fast, first in the territory of the People's Republic of China, but soon afterwards, in most parts of the world, due to which the World Health Organisation (WHO)declared a state of threat to the public health on an international scale on 30 January 2020. On 11 March 2020, the WHO declared a pandemic.

As early as March 2020, Europe became the biggest hotbed of the pandemic, with Italy and Spain being particularly affected. In response to the spread of the infection, EU member states implemented a series of measures aimed at increasing social distance, reducing movement and interaction between people, and isolating potential sources of infection.

In the fight against the pandemic, many countries declared a state of emergency, introduced quarantine, closed borders and imposed curfews. Kindergartens, schools and universities were closed in more than 160 countries around the world. Public and international passenger transport was disrupted, catering and production facilities were closed, leading to a global socio-economic disruption caused by the pandemic. Numerous international gatherings, cultural, religious and sporting events have been postponed or cancelled.

In the Republic of North Macedonia, the first imported case of Covid-19 coronavirus was registered on 26 February, 2020. Within two weeks, the first cluster of cases appeared in Debar, starting a local transmission chain which was transferred to Skopje, so that soon, a widespread transmission emerged throughout the entire Macedonian territory.

In order to prevent the entering, the spread and the possibility of infection with Covid-19 in North Macedonia and to ensure the protection of the population's health, a state of emergency was declared on 18 March 2020. All border crossings were closed to foreign nationals (except for persons with special permits) including the two airports in Skopje and Ohrid.

During the lockdown and the emergency regime of movement in the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia, only persons with special needs were allowed to leave their homes unhindered with escorts, carrying an appropriate document or medical documentation.

Dealing with the pandemic: model, practice

Following the example of most EU member states, the Republic of North Macedonia adopted measures in the following areas (with varying scope and intensity):

›   banning/cancelling national events;
›   closing educational and child care institutions;
›   limiting movement at a national level;
›   closing shopping malls with shops for non-essential goods;
›   restricting movement within the cities, the state, and across the state borders; and,
›   restricting air traffic.

As did the EU member states, the Republic of North Macedonia adopted the above-mentioned restrictions, as well as other necessary measures to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic in different legal and institutional contexts, depending on the legal possibilities, on the one hand, and the needs acknowledged in the process of dealing with the pandemic (based on own and foreign experience), on the other.

In this aspect, the EU member states can be divided into two categories: countries that adopted epidemic control measures based on the possibilities and mechanisms provided by their laws (with or without amendments to adapt them to the new situation), and countries that adopted crisis management measures on the basis of special laws (lex specialis), adopted solely to combat the epidemic, and which usually have a limited validity period.

The Republic of North Macedonia adopted its measures against Covid-19 based on a special legal regime, as defined by its constitution (declaring a state of emergency), combining several of the aforementioned approaches. Thus, it cannot be definitely and unequivocally included into either of the above categories.

For the first time in its constitutional and legal history, the Republic of North Macedonia implemented a state of emergency on 18.03.2020. Namely, the President of the Republic adopted a Decision on declaring a state of emergency "in the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia for a period of 30 days in order to protect the population from the Covid-19 coronavirus and deal with the consequences of its spreading."[1]

It was State President Stevo Pendarovski who "determined", i.e. declared the state of emergency, because the President of the Assembly had informed him that the Assembly was not able to hold a session and decide on the proposal of the Government of the RN Macedonia, due to the previous decision to dissolve the Assembly. However, there was an unequivocal institutional and political consensus to declare a state of emergency, based on the need to change some of the regulations, and especially the laws (above all, to intervene in the implementation of some legal norms) in order to prevent the spread of the epidemic and to deal more successfully with its consequences while the parliament was dysfunctional.

Only a state of emergency (and martial law) allows the Government to issue decrees with legal force.[2] The political consensus was necessary because the state was also in a pre-election period, i.e. the period of constitutionally provided 60 days, the deadline for organising the elections of Members of the Assembly following the Decision on Dissolving the Assembly.[3]

---

1   Official Gazette of the Republic of N. Macedonia No.68 of 18.03.2020.
2   Article 126 of the Constitution of the Republic of N. Macedonia.
3   Official Gazette of the Republic of N. Macedonia No.43 of 16.02.2020.

In a state of intensified political polarisation, it was clear that any decision related to the elections should be taken by consensus, which was the case with the decision to postpone the elections. According to Aleksandar Spasov, PhD, assistant professor at the Faculty of Law in Skopje, after intensive expert discussions, the prevailing view was that the elections should be postponed by means of a special decree with legal force. This decree was issued immediately after the first decision to declare a state of emergency,

The state of emergency raised the question of whether it was possible for the Assembly to reconvene because a state of emergency had been declared, since the dysfunctionality of the parliament was in fact the second exceptional condition, in addition to the pandemic. Unfortunately, a heated political expert debate was initiated on this issue. Namely, although the Constitution stipulates that "the Assembly is in permanent session" (Article 66 of the Constitution of RNM),[4] this provision is regulated in detail in Article 15 of the Electoral Code, which stipulates that "the mandate of the Members of the Assembly lasts from the day of its verification until the day of the verification of the mandate of the newly elected Members of the Assembly, but no longer than four years."[5]

The state of emergency is a constitutional category and the constitution provides the grounds for declaring it, as well as the manner of declaring it, i.e. "A state of emergency on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia or part thereof is declared by the Assembly upon proposal of the President of the Republic, the Government, or at least 30 Members of the Assembly. The decision determining a state of emergency is made by a two-thirds majority vote of the total number of Members of the Assembly and is valid for 30

days at most. If the Assembly cannot convene, the decision on declaring a state of emergency is taken by the President of the Republic and submitted to the Assembly for confirmation, as soon as it is able to convene" (Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, Article 125). There are no other procedures for determining the need and declaring a state of emergency, other than the constitutional provisions.

Given the fact that a state of emergency was declared for the first time since the Republic of Macedonia gained its independence in 1991, there was no previous experience that could have been taken into account. On the other hand, declaring a state of crisis, its duration, as well as how to extend its duration is clearly defined in the Law on Crisis Management, Chapter IV, Articles 30, 31.

The Law on Crisis Management also regulates the management of the Crisis Management System by establishing the two Government bodies, the Assessment Group and the Steering Committee, which implement the full procedure for determining a state of crisis in part of the territory or in the entire territory of the Republic, starting with an initiative, the assessment of the situation, proposing, as well as making a decision.

The use of national resources in a crisis situation is fully regulated by the Law on Crisis Management (Articles 32-36), and a bylaw determines the entities whose resources are of special significance in a crisis situation. In order to enable fast and efficient analysis of available resources by means of threat assessment, there is an electronic register of resources in the section "Capacities of the crisis management system", i.e. a GIS database for spatial identification and taking actions based on needs.

---

4   Constitution of the Republic of N. Macedonia https://www.sobranie.mk/content/Odluki%20USTAV/UstavSRSM.pdf

5   Electoral Code of the R.N. Macedonia, https://www.sobranie.mk/content/Избори/ИЗБОРЕН_ЗАКОНИК-ПРЕЧИСТЕН_ТЕКСТ_ МАЈ 2016.pdf

There is no contingency plan for emergencies as such. The necessary measures, activities, as well as resources that apply in a state of emergency are implemented by Government Decrees with legal force (Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, Article 126): "In case of martial law or state of emergency, the Government issues decrees with legal force in accordance with the Constitution and the law. The Government is authorised to adopt decrees with legal force until the end of the martial law or the state of emergency, which is decided by the Assembly."

The position and role of the Ministry of Health

The public health system implemented a series of measures to reduce the spread of the virus and the number of patients, but also to reduce the impact of a large number of patients over a long period of time, so that the health system can absorb all patients and respond appropriately to their clinical condition. Therefore, the health system responded by mobilising all levels of health care (primary, secondary, and tertiary health care), involving the science research health sector, organising an emergency schedule of work and working hours, changing job positions, improving working conditions in the health care institutions, and also by including the private health sector, which is part of the network of public health care institutions. The Commission for Infectious Diseases operates within the Ministry of Health, which closely monitors the situation and development of Covid-19 infections in the Republic of North Macedonia. In accordance with the development of the epidemiological situation and the data obtained, a series of measures and recommendations have been adopted in order to provide a timely and prompt health response.

The activities and measures established at the beginning of the onset of the coronavirus infection were aimed at detecting and proving the viral infection in imported cases and their contacts, rapid isolation and treatment. Local transmission of the virus imposed the necessity to consider the provision of additional laboratory facilities for molecular diagnosis.

The Government's assistance for the return of citizens and the possible danger of deterioration of the epidemiological situation imposed the need to establish quarantine facilities for the first time.

All this resulted in the adoption of a number of measures. General practitioners and health care providers were informed of the two basic documents relating to Covid-19: "Risk categorisation by exposure related to international travel or contact with a confirmed Covid-19 case", as well as the "Covid-19 case definition".

A guideline for the treatment of suspected cases of Covid-19 in febrile children was adopted, leading to a reorganisation of the Institute for Pulmonary Disorders in Children inKozle, which was prepared to receive febrile children with respiratory symptoms with a total of 60 beds. In this phase of the pandemic, the PHI Clinic for Infectious Diseases and Febrile Conditions accepted all children confirmed to have contracted Covid-19 who needed to be hospitalised. The Institute for Pulmonary Diseases in Kozle and the Clinic for Children's Diseases Skopje provided specialized pediatricians who were engaged in the treatment of children at the PHI Clinic for Infectious Diseases and Febrile Conditions. A Protocol on treating women with acute gynecological-obstetric conditions was adopted for the treatment, examination and hospitalisation of patients who were suspected or tested positive for Covid-19 at the Gynecological and Obstetric Clinic in Skopje.

According to the development of the epidemiological situation and the increase of the number of persons in need of hospitalisation, on 04.04.2020, theSkopje General Hospital "8th September" was transformed into a hospital for the treatment of patients with Covid-19, for

which additional medical equipment (respirators, monitors) was provided, and two rooms for intensive care were vacated, in order to accommodate 16 patients in need of treatment with respiratory machines.

The clinic hospitals in Bitola, Štip and Tetovo were designated as regional centers for the treatment of patients who had been tested positive for Covid-19. State specialists and subspecialists employed in the emergency medical services, were reallocated to positions at within their institutions.

Upon the decision of the expert collegium, the health institutions reduced the capacity of their regular work, providing compulsory health care to emergency and oncology patients only (treatment and surgery).

The coordinator drafted a Protocol on the treatment of patients with Covid-19, which was submitted to all hospitals and health institutions, together with guidelines on the treatment of patients tested positive for Covid-19, depending on the severity of their clinical condition (mild, moderately severe, and severe) and the presence of comorbidities. Patients with a mild clinical picture, but with comorbidities, were to be hospitalised in the infectious wards. A Protocol on the home treatment of patients tested positive for Covid-19 with a mild clinical condition was also drafted and distributed.

General practitioners were involved in monitoring the health status of their patients receiving home treatment by means of a special algorithm prepared within the electronic health system for monitoring and recording symptoms, based on daily communication with the patient. The data is available to the infectiologists at the regional hospitals. If their condition deteriorates, patients are immediately called to an appropriate hospital.

A control swab was prescribed for patients receiving home treatment for Covid-19 upon recommendation of the family doctor, in consultation with the infectiologist who monitors the patient's health. The control swabs are taken

by the teams from the local Centre for Public Health responsible for the patient and then sent to the virology laboratory at the Institute of Public Health for diagnostic testing.

A team of infectious disease professors from the PHI Clinic for Infectious Diseases and Febrile Conditions Skopje was appointed to provide the necessary professional assistance to fellow infectious disease specialists who follow patients in home treatment.

Based on the electronic health system "Moj termin" ("My appointment"), a screening for Covid-19 testing was introduced, so that the family doctor could schedule an appointment at one of the 15 points for taking swabs (11 points throughout the country and 4 points in the City of Skopje). Patients were advised to use with their own vehicle, i.e. not to use public transport.

Following the epidemiological situation in the quarantine area of Debar and Centar Župa, it was decided to include additional specialists in the treatment process at the General Hospital in Debar, especially internists from the General Hospital in Debar, and, if necessary, from other health institutions.

Staff needed at the hospitals in Debar and Kumanovo was continuously provided, and additional teams of internists – pulmonologists, anesthesiologists, and nursing staff - were transferred to the PHI Clinic for Infectious Diseases and Febrile Conditions for the treatment of Covid-19 patients. Persons who were receiving home treatment because there is no infectious ward at the Debar general hospital and due the constant increase in the number of patients were daily monitored by a team of doctors. In case of deterioration of their health condition, they were immediately called for an examination at the general hospital in Debar for further treatment.

"Quarantine accommodation" was established for persons returning from abroad in organised groups after the Government had adopted a Decision on a quarantine of 14 days, followed by additional 14 days of home isolation.

The "Guideline on organising Covid-19 quarantine for persons returning from abroad in organised groups" was drafted after the Government's Decision, in addition to a health record list for recording the health status upon entry. Chronic diseases, too, were recorded, thus enabling 24/7 health care from health institutions in the region including chronic therapy.

Against the background of the epidemiological situation in the country and the occurrence of positive cases in the cities of Skopje, Štip, Kavadarci, Gostivar and Ohrid (including the quarantine area Debar and Centar Župa), the Commission proposed to introduce restrictive measures in the area of regional public transport in order to interrupt the chain of spread. The Protocol on the implementation of the treatment of patients with Covid-19 at the PHI Clinic for Infectious Diseases and Febrile Conditions was drafted and sent to MALMED.

Health authorities recommended to organise and provide space within prison facilities for the14-day isolation of prisoners who have been indicated by the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of North Macedonia, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the Sanctions Directorate. A Protocol on the occurrence of Covid-19 patients who are factory employees was drafted.

A protocol on dialysis for persons suspected or confirmed to have contracted Covid-19 was drafted in order to prevent the spread of infection, stipulating that dialysis be performed by Diaverum/ Dialysis Centers in the evenings or at appointments of their own choice.

It was recommended that 10% of reported ILI/ARI/SARI cases detected by the sentinel monitoring system, which were negative for influenza and other respiratory pathogens, be retested for Covid-19 as part of a retrospective analysis starting from 02.03.2020.

In addition, it was recommended to oblige all local authorities to start the disinfection of all public areas and public premises in their territory. Among other things, factories received

recommendations on how to organise their work process in accordance with the recommendations on applying preventive measures, with an appropriate distance between employees and personal hygiene measures.

The following recommendation was emphasised at several occasions: each patient should be treated as if they were positive to Covid-19, and accordingly, measures of personal protection and prevention should be implemented, including the use of personal protective equipment by health personnel, epidemiological survey of each patient upon admission, and obtaining data on the clinical condition related to Covid-19.

According to the then current epidemiological situation in the Republic of North Macedonia and the current recommendations of the WHO and the European Center for Disease Control, it was considered that a 14-day isolation would be sufficient to conduct epidemiological surveillance. After the end of the 14-day period of isolation or self-isolation, persons who signed a statement on adherence to self-isolation do not need laboratory diagnostics, as long as they do not show any symptoms.

In addition, a Guideline on the treatment of afebrile patients with cystic fibrosis was introduced. Such patients were to be hospitalised at the Clinic for Children's Diseases in Skopje in a special isolation room. If a patient needs a Covid-19 diagnostic swab, the swab is taken by a responsible person from the Clinic, and the test material sent to the Virology Laboratory at the Public Health Institute. If the swab result is positive, the patient is transported to the PHI Clinic for Infectious Diseases and Febrile Conditions. If the result is negative but the condition of febrile and other symptoms persists, the patient is transferred to the febrile department of the Kozle Institute of Lung Disease for further treatment.

The list of chronic and malignant diseases in case of which employees are relieved of their work obligations under the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic was updated several times. The deadline was set for 10.09.2020, after which

persons who suffer from such conditions should return to work based on a Government Decision.

Based on the development of the epidemiological situation and the number of new cases of Covid-19, on 04.04.2020, the introdoction of restrictive measures was recommended for Kumanovo, Prilep, Labuništa and Štip, following the example of the municipality of Debar and Centar Župa. A series of even more restrictive measures was recommended for Kumanovo, including extending the curfew, i.e. introducing movement restrictions between 14:00 and 5:00 each day, as well as the reallocation of epidemiologists in Kumanovo.

All documents (protocols, instructions, SOPs) related to Covid-19 published since the beginning of the pandemic are posted on the official website of the Ministry of Health. A ban on religious practices, as well as in religious facilities as outside, was recommended, i.e. believers were recommended to perform religious rites at home, taking into account the risk of transmission. An "Infection Prevention and Control Protocol for the safe management of dead bodies in the context of Covid-19" was distributed. Inspections were made in the health institutions by the State Health and Sanitary Inspectorate regarding the availability of personal protective equipment and its use.

As of 12.04.2020, the State Health and Sanitary Inspectorate had issued 2320 decisions on health supervision and home isolation for persons who had been in contact with confirmed cases of Covid-19, as well as 690 decisions on the treatment and home isolation of persons who had tested positive to Covid-19. No decisions had been issued concerning persons who were hospitalised.

In the immediate vicinity of the clinic, the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia made the modular maneuvering hospital unit ROLE 2 available to the health sector, with the aim and task to provide assistance to the medical staff and support the medical treatment related to providing care and prevention for the patients, as well regarding accommodation capacities (hospital beds). The modular maneuvering hospital unit

was installed in order to ease the impact load of the Clinic for Infectious Diseases and Febrile Conditions and/or replace part of the hospital facilities, which would directly protect the clinic itself and give the medical staff the opportunity to properly deploy their own resources in the fight against Covid-19 coronavirus. There are 15 interconnected pneumatic tents that provide 60 beds for patients, with installed systems of ventilation, heating and cooling.

The Ministry of Health undertook a series of activities in order to connect the modular hospital to the electricity, water supply and sewage systems, and has secured additional room for the needs of the health professionals, including toilets for the patients and toilets for the medical staff. In the next phase, the capacities will be supplemented by installing the so-called "assembly modules" for additional 70 beds in 12 hospital rooms.

Thus, an intervention measure for increasing and doubling the capacities by additional 130 beds was implemented, establishing a functional mobile unit in the immediate proximity of the Clinic for Infectious Diseases and Febrile Conditions, within the Clinical Center "Mother Teresa", near all university clinics and key institutions.

All employees in the state administration, state-owned public enterprises, state-owned joint stock companies, agencies, funds, bureaus, institutes, administrations, and all other state institutions, as well as local self-government units, public enterprises and other legal entities established by the local self-government units, as well as private sector employees were instructed to install the mobile application "Stop Corona!". For this purpose, the Health Insurance Fund of the Republic of North Macedonia was instructed to oblige all its physicians to recommend to their patients to install it. At the same time, the Public Relations Service of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia committed itself to designing an intensive plan for media information on the mobile application, in order to successfully implement and comply with the decisions, measures and recommendations of the

Government. The Ministry of Information Society and Administration was also instructed to propose additional incentive measures for the persons who will install the mobile application "Stop Corona!".

The activities and measures established at the beginning of the onset of the coronavirus pandemic were aimed at detecting and confirming imported viral infections and the contacts of the affected persons, including their rapid isolation and treatment. These activities were complemented by measures and activities aimed at preparing the health facilities for timely and appropriate treatment both at home and in the hospital facilities.

The local transmission of the Covid-19 virus imposed the necessity to consider the provision of additional laboratory facilities for molecular diagnostics.

The Government's assisted return programme for Macedonian citizens and the possible danger of deterioration of their epidemiological condition led to the need to introduce quarantine facilities in the country that were established for the first time.

Due to registered cases of abuse, control for domestic transporters of goods entering the country from abroad was introduced. Drivers were obliged to sign a statement at the border crossing to remain in domestic self-isolation until the next travel order and transportation call.

Recommendations were adopted for patients with rare diseases under the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic, prepared by the Commission for Rare Diseases.

Due to the nature of their health condition, persons with special needs were allowed to go out freely several times a day with a companion during the curfew if they had obtained a confirmation of their disability.

Based on a decision of the Ministry of Health to expand the Covid-19 diagnostic capacities, an inspection in the laboratories at the Macedonian

Academy of Sciences and Arts and the Institute of Forensic Medicine was made, in order to expand the laboratory testing capacities.

The duration of quarantine accommodation for persons returning from Italy in organised groups according to the Government's decision was prolongued to 21 days. Therefore, the commission concluded that "the Main Coordination Crisis Headquarters should coordinate the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health and State Sanitary and Health Inspectorate regarding the time required for the duration of the state quarantine", while the expert position of the Commission was that "state quarantine should be implemented for 14 days, without the need for subsequent home isolation or additional examination."

Upon request by the Mayor of the Municipality of Kumanovo, the Commission for Infectious Diseases repeatedly made epidemiological assessments of the situation imposed by Covid-19 in the territory of the Municipality of Kumanovo, given the increased number of positive cases. The Commission pointed out to the local self-government unit that the Kumanovo Public Health Centre is responsible for implementing the surveillance of infectious diseases in its area and for assessing the epidemiological situation in the territory of the Municipality of Kumanovo, on which it informs the health council of the municipality for inspection and further action. According to its organisational set-up, it also reports to the Public Health Inspectorate and the Ministry of Health.

Against the background of the course of the pandemic in other countries and a possible new wave of infections in autumn, the general hospitals in the country are assumed not to have sufficient capacity to cope with the influx of people in need of medical assistance, and that additional intervention locations for Covid-19 patients will have to be established at alternative care sites . Therefore, the Ministry of Health started a project for establishing regional "Covid Centers" in 16 municipalities for the needs of the entire population of the Republic of North Macedonia in the cities of Gevgelija, Kumanovo,

Prilep, Kavadarci, Strumica, Kičevo, Debar, Gostivar, Struga, Kočani, Ohrid, Veles, Tetovo, Štip, Bitola, and Resen. The Ministry also drafted a document titled "Infrastructure indicators for the establishment of alternative hospital care sites for Covid-19".

The alternative "Covid Centers" are located in the immediate vicinity of existing health infrastructure, general hospitals, and health care facilities, in order to enable easy access to the internal medicine physicians and specialised medical personnel and to provide better services. Increasing the existing capacities has to be in accordance with current medical programmes to ensure that the treatment of Covid-19 patients will not disrupt the regular provision of services and the continuity in providing medical care for patients with chronic conditions.

Infrastructure planning has commenced, with the local communities being involved in its regionalization. The planning team includes the directors and medical staff of hospitals, mayors, and interim and administrativeinterim support departments, as it is particularly important to ensure compliance with the health, safety and construction regulations, while the local communities should be informed that health care is available in the proximity of their place of residence. Strategic coordination, proactive planning, option assessment, and prioritisation are key factors in the fight against the coronavirus, and therefore, there is daily communication and meetings with all institutions and individuals involved in the process. A document with indicators for infrastructural requirements has been drafted, including criteria for where to set up the alternative "Covid Centers", as well as functional solution models. The type and model of the alternative care facilities for Covid-19 patients and the accommodation schedules should take into account the clinical, logistical, and ancillary services related to health care provision. They provide the following functions:

› Clinical services: triage, rapid assessment of persons entering the facility, rapid identification and provision of appropriate services. Admission and registration. Hospital accommodation, if the alternative facility provides such an option. Testing and diagnostics, including laboratories and X-ray. Safe storage and distribution of medicines to patients. Administrative and staff rooms, as well as staff meeting rooms, located in the clean zone.
› Logistics services: the logistic services should be included in managing the flow of people, goods, services, and information to and from the facility, as well as within it. Staff movement corridors, exterior entrances to work environments, and rest areas should be separated from hospital services, premises, and visitor corridors. Logistic services are the following: laboratory services, catering, laundry, sterilisation, maintenance, cleaning, etc. These services can be provided off-site, in which case they should be safe, efficient, and quickly accessible.
› Ancillary services that should be provided at or near the additional care facility for Covid-19 patients but are not directly related to basic hospital care. If necessary, accommodation should be provided for staff who may not want to return home to avoid exposure to their families, or who need breaks between shifts, as well as for cured patients waiting to be transported home, or for volunteers.

In order to keep up health services under conditions when conventional hospital infrastructures cannot meet the needs, models of temporary assembly/disassembly capacities are proposed, such as a container system with basic standard modules of 6/2.4m. One of the proposed models includes a minimum additional capacity for admission and triage of Covid-19 patients. That model consists of containers with a turnkey solution which entails that rooms are completely equipped with implemented installations, floors, windows and doors, lighting, air conditioning, and heating with split systems, as well as fully equipped toilets with all the necessary inventory. This functional solution implies three entrances/exits for access from three sides. There is a clear distinction between clean the contaminated zones, which is extremely important for the treatment of Covid-19 patients. A laboratory for

PCR molecular testing is included.

The second proposed model includes an additional capacity for admission, triage, and an inpatient accommodation unit, which varies according to the clinical condition of the Covid-19 patients. The functional solution involves 3 entrances/exits for access from three sides, as well as an inpatient accommodation unit with three types of hospital rooms, according to the severity of the clinical condition: for patients with a weak or moderate clinical condition, for patients with a severe or critical clinical condition, as well as isolation rooms, planned according to the minimum space required by the design standards for this type of hospital rooms. The capacity includes a waiting room, a reception room, a

triage department, a room for minor interventions and X-rays, as well as toilets for patients in the contaminated zone. The clean zone houses the doctor's office, toilets and wardrobes. A laboratory for PCR molecular testing is also included.

Both proposed additional capacity models are to be equipped with the basic minimum of required medical equipment, namely a mobile digital X-ray apparatus and a mobile ultrasonic device,complete inventory and non-medical equipment, as well as signs and posters for proper guidance in accordance with the established Protocols and Guidelines for patient care. The project is being implemented by the Ministry of Health in cooperation with the World Bank.

The interim government during the pandemic

The coronavirus pandemic disrupted the election process in North Macedonia, when the election campaign was to officially begin. Before parliamentary elections, in accordance with the so-called Pržino formula, the political government is replaced by an interiminterim government, which includes the opposition in the executive branch. According to the respective law, the interiminterim government is formed three months before the elections, and its term ends when a new government is formed, based on the election results.

Due to the coronavirus crisis, this process was interrupted by the declaration of a state of emergency by President Stevo Pendarovski, and the interimterm of the interim government led by interiminterim Prime Minister Oliver Spasovski was extended, despite the fact that interimits mandate was only to organise the parliamentary elections.

In this situation of crisis and emergency, interimit became necessary that the interim government continued its work, since there is no legal

mechanism to adequately respond to such a dual situation. Meanwhile, all state institutions and the public were focused on managing the crisis induced by the pandemic. As Bardul Zaimi notes, it was fortunate that the many anomalies that were added to the work of the institutions did not lead to a major chaos.

Despite some shortcomings, the interim government generally managed to deal with the pandemic, which posed a risk to the lives of all citizens. Overall, the government measures against the spread of the virus were observed, so that the infection curve went down considerably. Of course, this decline did not mean that the virus was not present, but it did give hope that things could be brought under control, and that a return to normal could become a palpable goal.

Just when the curve showed a decline in the number of infections, the political sphere was affected by the first waves of uproar, related to the status of the interim government and the legitimacy of the extension of its power. The first clashes occurred after the ruling SDSM

demanded that President of the Assembly Talat Xhaferi convene parliament again to bring about a political decision on the future of the interim government, which according to law had a mandate only to hold elections. Following some clashes in the media, Xhaferi repeatedly explained that the Members of the Assembly had relinquished their mandates and that the Assembly could no longer be legally convened. It seems that this was an attempt by SDSM to end the interim government, which could not last indefinitely, given that its mission was defined by the "Pržino formula". At the time, there were various interpretations of this situation. Earlier, during the rule of former Prime Minister Gruevski, the Assembly had reconvened in a completely different context.

The recurrence of the idea to reconvene the Assembly seems to have been complicated and unfamiliar, so that it was no longer taken into consideration, despite the insistence in political statements in the media. However, the failure of the idea to reconvene the Assembly in order to put an end to the interim government had already triggered a discussion on snap elections, as President Pendarovski had already announced during the declaration of the state of emergency: as soon as the conditions would be met, the situation induced by the pandemic should be normalised and the election process should be continued from where it had been stopped, i.e. the official start of the election campaign should be announced.

In this regard, many things remained suspended, particularly with regard to the development of political platforms, since the whole campaign focused on the very idea of managing the pandemic crisis. All other issues were certain remain on the sidelines, since party loans and benefits also depended on either the efficient or inefficient management of the crisis.

It is also important to consider the implementation of the entire electoral process, which, despite the tendencies for normalisation, took place under the threatening shadow of the coronavirus. It was vital for the citizens to overcome the situation without consequences. However, political passions were also determined by other aspects, so that despite the genuine concerns articulated by conscientious citizens, the party agendas remained. Holding snap elections was complicated under the circumstances of the pandemic. The interim government was no longer an option for the parties that, even against the background of the given situation, were in a hurry to ensure their own political presence in a government that would be established under the conditions of the pandemic.

Public health, the economy, international perspectives and the implementation of fair and democratic elections were the tasks that the interim government had to carry out. During its term of almost nine months, the interim government responded to the challenges it faced and paved the way for a new government. The beginnings of the pandemic had required quick and decisive steps. Every sick person was provided with health care, and every Macedonian citizen abroad was given the opportunity to return home even when borders were closed.

The interim government held 82 open sessions and nine closed government sessions, three meetings of the Economic Council, and 121 sessions of the Main Coordination Crisis Headquarters. The new political government was established at the Assembly's session held on 29 August 2020.

The crisis management system and the security system

The crisis management system drafts and follows sectoral and departmental action plans for conditions of crisis and emergency situations. The Ministry of Health adopted a "PLAN FOR PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE OF THE HEALTH SYSTEM IN DEALING WITH CRISIS AND EMERGENCY SITUATIONS AND CATASTROPHES" for the current pandemic-induced situation. This plan was adopted in order to ensure inter-ministerial cooperation and participation of all competent institutions related to the competencies of the health system with regard to the following areas:

› timely planning and undertaking operational measures within the health system for response to emergencies, crises and disasters;
› quick and timely notification;
› continuous communication and cooperation;
› improvement of the health care system;
› connecting with the protection and rescue system and the crisis management system.

This Plan was to be the basis for organising and implementing all necessary measures in dealing with the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in North Macedonia. However, it was not consistently adhered to and applied, which led to ad hoc solutions and modes of action during the pandemic. It was actually due to the newly established coordinating bodies that the already adopted plans were not applied, but rather reconsidered and adopted by the interim government in accordance with the needs.

The role, competencies and activities of the Main Headquarters as well as the Regional Headquarters within the crisis management system are defined and stipulated by the Law on Crisis Management (Articles 24 and 25 of the LMC).

At its session on 13.03.2020, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted the decision to declare a state of crisis in certain parts of the country, namely the areas of the municipalities of Debar and Centar Župa, in order to prevent a further spread of Covid-19. Based on this decision, the Main Headquarters of the Crisis Management Centre was obliged to draft an "Action Plan for the prevention of a further spread of Covid-19 coronavirus infections in parts of the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia, namely in the areas of the municipalities of Debar and Centar Župa, as well as a complete overview of the available human and technical means and resources" by 24:00 the same day.[6] The Main Headquarters (MH) within the Crisis Management Center (CMC) coordinated the activities in the area where the state of crisis was declared in close cooperation and coordination with the Commission for Infectious Diseases and the coordination body at the Ministry of Health and the municipal crisis headquarters established in Debar. The Law on Crisis Management (LCM) stipulated that the duration of the crisis situation for the municipalities of Debar and Centar Župa be 30 days, and it ended after the expiration of that period. The Law on Crisis Management also expired after that deadline. As a result of the effectiveness and efficiency of all measures of the Action Plan that were implemented to prevent the spread of the pandemic in those two municipalities, the situation was brought under control by the end of March,, and already more than a week before the end of the situation of crisis, there were no newly registered patients infected with Covid-19. As the Assembly was dissolved due to the scheduled snap elections, conditions to request an extension of the duration of the state of crisis were not given, as stipulated in Article 31, paragraph 3 of the

---

6   https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/odluka_kriz-na_sostojba.pdf

LCM: "If the crisis situation lasts longer than 30 days, the Government has to seek parliamentary approval of the extension of the deadline, or propose the declaration of martial law or a state of emergency". Meanwhile, the spread of the pandemic was gaining momentum in other municipalities, primarily the cities of Skopje and Kumanovo, so that the Government decided to declare a state of emergency throughout the entire territory (declared by President Pendarovski for reasons explained above). The strengths of the Main Headquarters of the CMC are related to coordinating the implementation of the necessary measures and activities at the highest level, organisational and professional support to the Main Headquarter, 24/7 communication and security support by regularly informing the members of the Main Headquarter by means of the Operational Center of the CMC, regular and, if necessary, emergency meetings with established agendas, and filing reports on implemented activities. The same applies to the regional headquarters that operate at the municipal level. Their weakness is the overlapping of functions with other coordination bodies established by government decisions. Thus, at the Nineteenth Session held on 14 March 2020, a conclusion regarding additional measures and activities for preventing the spread of Covid-19 coronavirus was reached: in order to ensure full coordination regarding the further spread of Covid-19 coronavirus, the Government should establish the "Main Coordination Crisis Headquarters" (MCCH)" headed by the Prime Minister, and composed of all deputy prime ministers, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Transport and Communications, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Education and Science, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Director of the Crisis Management Center, and the Director of the Protection and Rescue Directorate (PRD).[7]

Since the establishment of the MCCH on 19 March 2020, all measures and recommendations that are determined and proposed for adoption to the Government have been implemented by this body, which was established by government conclusion and is therefore not recognised by the existing legislation in the area of crisis management. Based on its composition, the MCCH, seems to serve as an expanded Steering Committee. However, even though it is the highest Government body in the Crisis Management System, it has not been adequately included.

Whether the institutions of the Republic of North Macedonia had any strategy, protocols, or policies capable of operating in emergency and crisis situations prior to the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic is a very important question. Action strategies and policies for such emergencies did not exist prior to the onset of the pandemic, while there were plans and procedures for a state of crisis, especially for the health system in conditions of crises, emergencies, and disasters[8].

Within the crisis management system, there are determined procedures for proposing, making, and implementing decisions. One of the questions that arise is whether clearly defined and necessary (material, financial and human) resources were available to the country in order to function in an emergency before the outbreak of the pandemic. Initially, the measures are implemented with the regular resources available to the government institutions, and then, by government decrees, intervention measures with legal force are adopted in order to provide the necessary material, financial, and human resources. Depending on the nature of the crisis, the priorities for securing resources are determined. In the case of the current crisis, the needs of the health sector have priority, followed by all other institutions directly involved in the

---

7   https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/zaklucok_19_sednica_vrsm.pdf

8   http://iph.mk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Plan-za-podgotvenost-i-odgovor-pri-krizni-sostojbi-i-katastrofi.pdf

implementation of the measures for isolation, restriction of movement, etc., such as the police, the army, fire brigades, protection and rescue units, and others. According to the principle of defined legal competencies, there are obligations based on decisions and conclusions, but not according to the application of intervention decisions and measures by the executive power in conditions of emergency. The cooperation between entities is mainly based on existing legal solutions, but it is also determined by government decrees with legal force.[9] Based on the experience from the state of emergency of several months, it is necessary to improve the work of the coordination body in which the institutions of the security system participate, as well as to confirm whether the security and other public policies are based on actual needs, risks and threats, or whether all there is are declarative commitments. Work should be done on updating safety assessments and establishing an appropriate ranking of health threats (such as pandemic and epidemic diseases); capacity building (investments in equipment, training, etc.) in sectors with primary competence in early risk detection, prevention, and management; drafting comprehensive analyses, studies, and proposals for regulating the category of emergency; determining a methodology with clear criteria for initiating and declaring a state of emergency as well as the need for its implementation; and drafting studies and analyses related to the violation of the citizens' rights and freedoms during a state of emergency.

The existing legal framework for the prevention and early warning in a state of emergency does not allow to determine or further analyse measures and activities of this nature, i.e., declaring a state of emergency is determined in order to deal with (respond to) the effects of a certain risk that poses a serious threat to the lives and health of the people and the general security in the country. Within the Crisis Management System, prevention and early warning are stipulated and regulated in detail by the Law on Crisis Management (LCM) and the bylaws arising from it. Namely, Article 1, paragraph 2 of the LCM stipulates that "the crisis management system is organised and implemented for the prevention, early warning, and management of crises that pose a risk to the well-being, health and lives of people and animals caused by natural disasters, epidemics, or other risks and dangers that directly affect the constitutional order and security of the Republic of Macedonia (hereinafter: the Republic), or a part of it, if the conditions for declaring martial law or a state of emergency are not provided". The crisis management system includes activities and measures for gathering information, assessment, analysis of the situation, and implementation of necessary actions for prevention, early warning, and crisis management (paragraph 3 of Article 1). Another important feature of this law is that it introduces the possibility of declaring a "state of crisis" in the country or in a certain territory, as opposed to martial law and the state of emergency, which are foreseen in the Constitution, the highest legal act of the state[10].

---

9   https://vlada.mk/uredbi-covid19.

10   Constitution of R. Macedonia ("Official Gazette of RM") No. 52/1992, Art. 124 and 125

Dealing with fake news and hybrid threats

For the citizens, the term "fake news" implies posts that are published on social media. However, propaganda and fake news have existed for centuries, but the internet should not be abused to spread lies and misinformation. Tools and services for "promotion" by means of social media are easily available and have no restrictions. People spend a lot of time with social media, trying to obtain the latest news and information, which is why governments should establish a system to recognise fake news and for proper response and information of the citizens. Fake news is a phenomenon of the 21st century that can cover various areas and various goals. However, fake news can cause severe consequences if reactions are panicky, inconsiderate, etc. Therefore, a serious approach to this phenomenon is necessary, and the media have to play a key role, checking information before publishing it. On March 11, 2020, the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of North Macedonia issued a special statement informing the users of social networks not to share and spread unverified or 'fake' news about the Covid-19 virus because it causes anxiety and panic among the citizens. Fake news that lead to unfounded panic can have long-term consequences on the social situation, but also on the collective health of the citizens. Such abuses should be legally sanctioned for agitating the citizens and causing unnecessary panic. There will be no compromise in sanctioning those who knowingly spread fake news. The institutions appealed to the media and users of social networks to refer only to data officially published by the competent institutions. For all necessary information, they should contact the Ministry of Health, the Public Relations Department of the Government, or other relevant institutions, which inform the public on updated data several times a the day, as stated in the announcement of the Ministry of Interior to the citizens.

There is some unmasked misinformation related to the nature, prevention, and treatment of the disease, detected by CriThink and published on their special webpage on the coronavirus pandemic: "UNICEF warns that misinformation about the coronavirus is being spread on their behalf; the coronavirus does not wait 4 days to be expelled from the throat with a gargle of salt water or vinegar; neither herbs nor silver water destroy the virus; the virus does not die at 27 °C, and is not removed by "rinsing" with water and teas; it is a lie that gargling water, antibiotics, and garlic protect against the virus; the coronavirus is not a "harmless cold" as anti-vax activists claim; no, the corona virus is not curable with alcohol!; it is not transmitted by Ali Express shipments; Vitamin C and propolis are not a cure for the coronavirus; drinking warm water and sunbathing do not kill the virus; coronavirus misinformation." The purpose of the CriThink webpage is to point out the sources of verified information of public interest and to document the different types of misinformation as a form of education for citizens who, by getting informed, can become more resistant to manipulation and panic.

Political manipulations in the Republic of North Macedonia related to fake news have been published under titles such as "The coronavirus epidemic in parallel with well-conceived fake news"; "Couterspin: The coronavirus pandemic should be taken advantage of during the election campaign"; "Counterspin: A state of emergency can be abused, but the claim that it has been declared is a spin"; "The "extended hand" of VMRO-DPMNE in dealing with the coronavirus is a spin with a populist flavour"; "Counterspin: Apart from Filipče, VMRO-DPMNE should demand the resignation of the Italian Prime Minister Conte"; "Spreading panic and hatred on a national or ethnic basis"; "Citizens will not

be left without bread; there is enough storage of flour and wheat"; "Irresponsible spreading of misinformation on Facebook"; "Insults are not a cure for the coronavirus".

On the other hand, there are conspiracy theories: unconfirmed stories that result in a loss of trust in the institutions of the system and the basic values of modern society. Texts on consipiracy theories have been published under headings such as "Conspiracy theories about the coronavirus as a biological weapon"; "Conspiracy theories about China as a victim of the pharmaceutical industry by means of TV talk shows"; "Misinformation in Greece about a disinfectant against the coronavirus prepared in advance"; "Spreading dubious theses about the coronavirus is extremely irresponsible"; "Manipulating religious sentiments to spread coronavirus conspiracy theories"; "An anonymous video misinforms the public that the health system is falling apart"; "UNICEF warns that misinformation about the coronavirus is being spread on their behalf".

In some published texts, individuals were discredited e.g. "Tendentious announcement for discrediting the mayor of Skopje Petre Šilegov"; "It is fake news that Elena Luka is a patient with coronavirus"; "An incorrect translation placed Le Pen among the victims of the coronavirus".

Citizens and media could be pressed with criminal charges for spreading fake news on Covid-19, as stipulated in some articles of the Criminal Code (CC) of the Republic of North Macedonia. This can be concluded from the Criminal Code itself, and from the announcement of the Ministry of Interior that was instructed by the Government to monitor the situation and warn of sanctions against negligent persons and those who spread untruths and misinformation, i.e. fake news. Not only the previous, but also, and especially the Criminal Code as amended in 2018 includes several articles that can be acted upon in case of

face news. From Chapter 21 of the CC, "Crimes against human health", the police can refer to Article 205, paragraph 5, among others, which states that putting someone else's safety at risk by the false threat to transmit an incurable infectious disease or by spreading untrue allegations of the existence of an incurable infectious disease can be punished with a fine or up to six months imprisonment. Additionally, the police could also refer to another Article of the CC, on spreading racist and xenophobic material by means of a computer system. Although it does not seem to be related to general health, one can establish the connection: spreading xenophobic material on people based on their health condition. The first paragraph of article 394 d states: (1) "A person who disseminates racist or xenophobic written material by means of a computer system, as well as images or other representations of an idea or theory that assists, promotes or incites hatred, discrimination, or violence against any person or group, based on sex, race, skin colour, gender, belonging to a marginalised group, ethnicity, language, citizenship, social origin, religion or belief, other types of beliefs, education, political affiliation, personal or social status, mental or physical disability, age, family or marital status, property status, health condition, or on any other grounds stipulated by law or a ratified international agreement, shall be punished by imprisonment of one to five years." Computer systems certainly include social media. However, if such news is disseminated by other media, the same penalty shall apply, and it shall be placed in paragraph two: media. In a conversation with legal experts, however, we were told that if filing such criminal charges, the court may be required to prove the intention to knowingly commit a crime. However, sanctions are provided by the CC, and the media and the citizens should keep that in mind. The official position of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia is that it was attacked by fake news that posed a security challenge for the entire country. In particular,

according to that fake news, the pandemic is a conspiracy of third factors, the pandemic is not a health risk, it is related to the 5G technology, but, unfortunately, it has had a negative impact on citizens. Hybrid threats will be more prevalent in the new era, and third parties will try to influence internal developments in some countries by means of fake news and misinformation. According to Metodija Dojčinovski from the Military Academy in Skopje, "Hybrid threats belong to the new generation of wars, and state authorities can hardly deal with them or prevent

them in a timely manner. Informing the citizens in the fifth generation of wars will be very peculiar. However, what is even more important is that information can be abused and misused to carry out certain political activities." The Minister of Information Society Damjan Mančevski informed the public that, for the first time, North Macedonia has developed a strategy for cyber security and an action plan, and that the fight against disinformation can no longer be only a subject of public debate, but that it has become part of NATO obligations.

Regional cooperation and international support from the EU and NATO

Regional cooperation, EU integration and NATO membership have been called into question since the cooperation between states has stalled. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs , the Republic of North Macedonia had good a cooperation with its neighbouring countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, Serbia and Kosovo) throughout the period. The only airports that were open for the evacuation of Macedonian citizens were in Sofia and Thessaloniki, as well as in Serbia and Croatia. The neighboring countries offered assistance for the implementation of humanitarian transports. The countries of the region cooperated with the European Union, which on promoted the package for tourism and transport 13 May, generally for EU member states, but also for the countries in the region. At the meetings for foreign affairs in the so-called Thessaloniki format, cooperation in the areas of transport (green corridors for goods, medical equipment, and capital), the health sector, and tourism was agreed on. The EU initiated a 3.3. billion-euro fund of low-mortgage loans to support the countries in the region. The Republic of North Macedonia joined the European public procurement system, which allows obtaining lower prices for equipment and medicines that can be higher if each country procures them individually. It is especially important that North Macedonia was excluded from the list of countries that are banned for the import and export of

drugs and medical equipment.

According to Zoran Popov, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Republic of North Macedonia officially received a grant of 65 million euros, as well as access to the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, the European Union Solidarity Fund, and support in the repatriation of Macedonian citizens.

At the same time, a multi-annual reinforced cooperation plan was put into action, and it was agreed that any component of the so-called Berlin Process could be changed with regard to the situation induced by the pandemic.

At the same time, as a new NATO member state, the Republic of North Macedonia gained access to all available instruments, primarily to the system for the Euro-Atlantic Coordination Center for Crisis Management, where each country expresses its demands, as a result of which it received medical and financial assistance from the USA, the EU, and many EU member states, such as Germany, Slovenia, the Netherlands, Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, France, Estonia, Poland, but also Norway, Turkey, Japan, Qatar, the People's Republic of China, and others.

It is necessary to establish a permanent system for receiving foreign aid in times of crisis, state

of emergency and martial law, and its legal specification. It is especially important to define the role of the Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia, which has the capacity and logistics to organise the receipt of foreign aid in medicine, equipment, food, etc. The competent Department for European Affairs, which was in charge of coordinating the foreign aid, has not summarised the complete data on the receipt of the aid, so that it cannot be officially presented. In addition, the European Disaster Risk Reduction Forum, a regional forum for the exchange of knowledge, expertise, experience, and information, has not been fully utilised so far in order to provide a coordinated approach to various kinds of threats. In the framework of this Forum, standardised procedures and mechanisms are defined, which become mandatory for the national authorities. It aims to ensure continuous disaster risk reduction activities and to prevent the emergence of new risks, to support national contact points, and to encourage national coordination, coherence, and enhanced monitoring of the progress, to raise awareness of disaster risk reduction as an integral part of sustainable development, to provide adaptation to climate change by improving the environment, reducing urban pollution, etc., to encourage investments in risk prevention, to strengthen the commitment of all stakeholders from both the public and the private sector, to develop mechanisms for informing the citizens on how to act in case of certain threats, etc. The Republic of North Macedonia has been a member of this Forum since 2009, along with 46 European countries, and this mechanism should be more efficiently utilised in the future.

With the ratification of the protocol for accession to the North Atlantic Alliance, the Republic of North Macedonia gained access to the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center (EADRCC), which is the main civilian NATO response mechanism in the Euro-Atlantic zone. It is active all year round, operating 24/7. The EADRCC is a system for coordinating requests for assistance from member states and responding to NATO assistance structures, mainly in the event of natural and man-made disasters. The Republic of North Macedonia has used this NATO mechanism

on several occasions.

The European Commission has played a key role in promoting risk reduction and preventive action. It can use the Action Plan to implement the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, supporting the access to disaster risk information for all EU policies. The EU focuses on vulnerabilities, not just dangers, pursuing a broader risk mitigation approach, which has probably now proven to be a less effective policy, especially for smaller countries such as the Republic of North Macedonia, and the surrounding region. In the past years, risk management has been systematically integrated into the EU's humanitarian aid programmes and projects in all sectors, and it took several months to activate it. In recent years, 65% of all EU-funded humanitarian projects have included a disaster preparedness component that has not yet been activated to respond to the pandemic, despite the fact that the EU allocates part of its annual budget to targeted disaster preparedness projects, focusing on Sendai Priority 4: improving disaster preparedness and effective response by means of a multi-hazard approach. The funding is supposed to strengthen the ability of national and local preparedness systems to respond sooner and better. The EU is also investing in early warning systems, as well as in monitoring and building national and local response capacities. However, unfortunately, they did not provide timely information to prevent the situation. The EU is supporting its partners in developing effective risk mitigation and evidence gathering methods to justify the early response preparedness that completely failed during the recent pandemic. Every strategy for disaster preparedness and resource allocation includes a defined exit strategy, according to which local capacity is considered appropriate or local authorities or development partners can take over. In addition, the EU engages and supports local and national government structures in all countries around the world by means of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, especially in the areas of prevention and preparedness. This Menchanism should be utilised much more by countries such as the Republic of North Macedonia.

The EU Voluntary Assistance Initiative, which offers opportunities for European citizens to get involved in humanitarian aid projects, aims to strengthen the capacity and resilience of vulnerable communities in non-EU countries by means of joint actions between experienced humanitarian operators and local organisations. However, it was neither fully activated nor utilised during the present pandemic.

In June 2013, the European Union Institutions (the European Parliament, at the proposal of the European Commission) adopted the Action Plan for Countries with Difficulties in Dealing with Crises 2013-2020, which outlines proposals for progress in implementing the principles and priorities from the Council's communication and conclusions. The Action Plan lays the groundwork for making resilience-building cooperation in the EU more efficient, bringing together humanitarian activities, long-term development cooperation and ongoing political engagement. Even several months into the pandemic, however, there has been no response to the crisis based on the Action Plan.

Future security challenges in times of crisis, pandemic and other risks

The state can contribute to the reduction of material damage and human casualties caused by a pandemic only if its actions are aimed at successfully managing risks before they occur, rather than managing this type of pandemic after its onset. Therefore, emphasis should be put on preventing new risks and reducing present ones. The primary responsibility of all institution should therefore be to prevent natural risks, threats, and pandemics.

Prevention should be based on two pillars: identifying the danger (i.e., the actual threats that the community is facing) and assessing the vulnerability (i.e., the risk and the capacity of the community to deal with the consequences of this type of pandemic).

In accordance with the contemporary challenges and developments, major focus is placed on the prevention of risks caused by climate change, as well as unplanned and rapid urbanisation, poor land management, demographic changes, poor institutional commitment, citizens' lack of information, limited access to technology, unsustainable use of natural resources, etc. In order for prevention to be effective and efficient, it needs to cover different types of hazards and to be inclusive and accessible to all citizens, also in the case of the present pandemic. The government, which has the key role in leading and coordinating the process, should involve all stakeholders, women, children, people with disabilities, people from the lower social strata, and senior citizens in the creation and implementation of policies, strategies, and action plans. Public and private sectors, civil society organisations, academic, scientific, and research institutions and the business sector should also integrate pandemic prevention into their management.

For better prevention, risk assessment and preparedness for effective response to pandemics, it is crucial to understand all dimensions and characteristic of the risks, as well as the vulnerability and exposure of people and property. In order to better understand risks, it is necessary to collect, analyse and use relevant data and practical information at national and local level, as well as to appropriately share, disseminate, and distribute it to different categories of citizens and institutions. This information should be made available and accessible in real time. Furthermore, the following activities are necessary:

› to make periodic assessments of risks, vulnerabilities and exposure to hazards;
› to prepare risk maps, using modern innovations in information and communication technology;
› to publicly announce and explain the material

and human losses caused by the situation by sharing experiences and lessons learned in order to properly train and educate government officials and representatives of the local self-government, as wekk as the civil and private sectors;

› to improve the cooperation and dialogue between the scientific and technological communitiesand other relevant institutions in order to ensure a scientific approach to policy-making.

It is recommended that information on risks, prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response and rehabilitation be included in all forms of formal and non-formal education at all levels, as well as in vocational education and training. In the near future, it is a top priority to renew all threat assessments in relation to epidemics at the national and local level. The obligation to do so is included in several laws.

A clear vision and plan, as well as directions, coordination, and active participation of all stakeholders are needed for an efficient and effective management. In this regard, each country should prepare and implement a strategy and action plan for risk reduction, with specific time frames, goals and objectives aimed at preventing further creation of risks, reducing existing risks, and strengthening the resilience of the society. Every three years, the Republic of North Macedonia should adopt an action plan with specific activities, actors, and specific deadlines for fulfilling the obligations.

The state should stimulate investments in the public and private sectors as a preventive measure against possible epidemics, which will contribute to saving human lives and protecting material goods, as well as contribute to strengthening the economic, social, health, and cultural resistance of citizens and the society in general, as well as the environment. In this regard, the public and private sectors should be encouraged to invest heavily in critical infrastructure and facilities such as schools, hospitals, kindergartens, sports facilities, etc., adhering to the highest international standards for construction and building materials and applying the principles of universal design

and performance. Buildings need to be regularly renovated, reconstructed and maintained. A culture of care for the infrastructure should be created, including controls of the resilience of dams, bridges, and other facilities. Additionally, as a member of the United Nations, the Republic of North Macedonia has the responsibility to prevent, avert and reduce risks by means of international, regional, cross-border, and bilateral cooperation. Risk reduction is a common obligation and concern of all UN member states, and therefore, it is necessary for them to cooperate. These obligations and recommendations also apply to the Republic of North Macedonia.

The implementation of the so-called '112 system' will largely provide citizens and relevant institutions with timely information about any possible risks and the activation of the crisis management system. Timely information and mobilisation of the institutions within the crisis management system is key for efficient and effective action, prevention, and reduction of the consequences of epidemics, pandemics, and other types of risks and threats.

Therefore, all entities should be obliged by law to develop a system for detecting possible threats, and a mode of informing state institutions and citizens. In accordance with the established practices and standards, in case of pandemics and disasters, it is necessary to create a guidance system that informs citizens and other entities on how to act, which means that procedures must be developed in order to reduce the consequences. This process (education and training) must be continuous. In order to inform the citizens about possible or present crises, it is necessary to implement other projects, such as SMS information, etc. Such solutions are already in place in some EU countries. A good domestic example is the effective alarm system *Alert North Macedonia*. Crises response, appropriate measures and response activities during and immediately after crises and disasters must ensure that the effects are minimized, and that those affected by the event receive assistance and support.

The following goals should be top priority:

› providing information to the public;
› protecting human life;
› limiting further escalation or spread and mitigating the effects of disasters;
› protecting the health of the population;
› environmental protection;
› property protection;
› maintaining basic services at an appropriate level (security, water supply, food, medicine, etc.);
› promoting and facilitating self-help in endangered areas;
› facilitating the recovery of the population (including humanitarian aid, economic, infrastructure, and environmental impacts).

It is necessary for all entities to assume their legal obligations and prepare action plans for times of crisis, including potential consequences. The plans need to be continuously updated and supplemented.

Recovery is a top priority after the occurrence of disasters and crises, i.e. natural as well as unnatural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, fires, etc. Reconstruction is a complex and long process, with the approach being different in each case, depending on the type and degree of the threat, as well as the consequences of the crisis. Recovery as part of a comprehensive approach to disaster management (including prevention, preparedness, response and recovery) can be the most complicated and time-consuming task, as it depends, among other things, on material and other resources (personnel etc.). The best results are achieved by providing strategies for renewal and harmonisation of opportunities and needs. A common, coordinated, adaptive approach is needed, in which responsibility for crises and reparations is shared among all state sectors, including individuals, families, community groups, businesses, etc. This state-led approach supports the rapid return of basic essential services and provides an opportunity for building and improving the circumstances in the affected areas and beyond. In planning disaster remediation, the units of local self-government, the companies, and the non-governmental sector play the key role, along with the state institutions, which can provide professional staff, financial, and other resources.

Informing the citizens

Informing the citizens in a timely manner is crucial in order to reduce the casualties and damage deriving from risks and threats that cause crises. Information is of utmost importance, and it is an obligation to all entities of the protection system. It is necessary to establish a crisis portal for distribution of valid information to the citizens, submitted by the state institutions, the citizens, and the non-governmental organizations, as well as the media. Under normal circumstances, the portal will offer citizens basic information and instructions to follow in times of crisis. In addition, the portal has to include links to the websites of the competent authorities with more detailed information. In times of crisis, the website will contain interactive sections, where citizens and NGOs can provide additional information to the authorities and obtain information published by them. Recent analyses show that the present prevention system is outdated and dysfunctional, which is why it is necessary to start building a new, modern system for informing citizens about possible disasters and providing guidelines for dealing with such situations.

Implementation of the E-112 system

Dial E-112 is an integrated system for citizens and entities of the crisis management system. Citizens can call and intervene in a crisis event, seek medical help or assistance from the police, as well as obtain information about possible or present disasters and risks. E-112 is a common emergency telephone number for all 28 EU member states and other countries, such as Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey, Norway, Switzerland, etc. Calling this number is free of charge and possible from land and mobile line (in some countries even when the phone is locked or there is no SIM card). 112 is commonly available in countries, along with other numbers traditionally used to access emergency services, to provide easy, simple and versatile access.

Being easy to remember, 112 was introduced in all European countries for citizens in emergency situations, so that no different numbers for different countries or different purposes have to be memorised. Having to keep in mind different numbers can be confusing for the citizens, or

even dangerous, and sometimes, in cases of emergency, even fatal.

E-112 allows telecommunication operators to transmit information about the location of the caller, so that they can be found and responded to immediately. Therefore, special coordination is needed between the electronic communications operators and the emergency services/institutions that respond to the call. (EU Directives on E112 (2003) require mobile phone networks to establish emerge services that provide information on the location of a mobile call.) Every EU member state manages and finances 112 itself and decides on the organisation of the emergency call centers. These principles are are also binding forEU membership candidates (and the members of the EEA Agreement), including the Republic of North Macedonia. In compliance with the adopted legislation, as well as the technical standards of the EU, North Macedonia should implement the system as soon as possible.

Public policies and draft legal amendments

According to professor Ana Pavlovska Daneva, in the Republic of North Macedonia, the specially regulated procedure for issuing decrees with legal force is not prescribed in any regulation, i.e. neither in the Law on Government, nor in the Rules of Procedure of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. Therefore, it is necessary to legally regulate the procedure for passing decrees with legal force in a state of emergency, either by adopting a special Law on State of Emergency or by amending the Law on Government and, subsequently, the Rules of Procedure of the Government, because the decrees have legal force (of a limited duration) and it is not permissible for them to be adopted by the same procedure and in the same way as

regular government bylaws. The reason for this is the consistent application of the principles of transparency and inclusiveness in the adoption of decrees with legal force. In addition, according to Pavlovska Daneva, no law regulates the content and expediency of decrees with legal force issued by the Government in a state of emergency. It is necessary to introduce a law that precisely regulates the question whether the decrees with legal force can only amend, suspend and supplement existing laws, or wheter certain matters can be regulated by them from the beginning (ab ovo). Therefore, it is recommended to regulate the issue of the content of the decrees with legal force, and their relation to the existing legislation, by a new Law on Emergency or the

Law on the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, so that it will be explicitly determined that the Government can only change, suspend, or amend existing laws by means of decrees with legal force. Among other things, Pavlovska Daneva continues, the existing laws of the Republic of North Macedonia do not regulate the duration of the validity of the decrees with legal force adopted by the Government in a state of emergency. In other words, there is no unequivocal answer to the question whether the legal effect of these decrees ends automatically when the state of emergency is lifted, or whether they can be applied to create legal conditions and relations (rights and obligations) that will remain in force even afterwards. Therefore, a special Law on State of Emergency should be introduced and the Law on Government should be applied, in order to regulate the legal effect of the decrees with legal force after a state of emergency has been lifted. Namely, legal regulations must contain an explicit legal provision which determines the termination of the decrees with legal force adopted by the Government after the a of emergency. If certain deviations from this rule are necessary, they should be listed in the law as exceptions to the rule.

According to associate professor Aleksandar Spasov, it is necessary to adopt a Law on State of Emergency and Martial Law. The Law should regulate in detail the procedure for determining a state of emergency and declaring martial law, and, in particular, the legal nature of the decrees with legal force (the procedure for adoption, legal consequences, and their legal effect). In addition, it is necessary to amend the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia and introduce "crisis situation" as a third category in addition to "state of emergency" and "martial law". This will 'legalise' the entire crisis management system, and especially the Law on Crisis Management, which is not clearly regulated by the Constitution at present. It is necessary to intervene in the Constitution with regard to the possibility of restricting human rights, especially the freedom of assembly and movement, except in cases determined by the present Constitution, and

in accordance with the law. TThe Law on Crisis Management and the Law on Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases already contain relevant provision, which, however, lack an explicit foundation in the Constitution.

According to associate professor Timčo Mucunski, it is necessary to increase the level of transparency before passing decrees with legal force. *Ex ante* access of the general and professional public to their content would allow for constructive input from the academic community, the NGO sector and other stakeholders. Mucunski advocates for an end to the enactment of decrees that are not legally relevant to the state of emergency and the problems and challenges arising from the pandemic. The official declaration of an epidemic by a competent authority (the Ministry of Health) for the entire country is a *conditio sine qua non* for declaring a state of emergency, but also a solid legal foundation for incriminations under Article 206 of the Criminal Code, "failure to act according to health regulations during an epidemic". With the adoption of a formal decision to declare an epidemic, all possibilities for an extensive interpretation of the provisions will be removed. Not all experts believe that the recommendations of the World Health Organization represent a legal basis for applying the CC. It also appears wrong to draw an analogy to the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. As professor Nikola Tupančevski has stated, comparative experiences in this field should be taken into account, especially from countries that have shown leadership qualities. In his opinion, the need to determine causality (relation of cause and effect) when applying Article 205 of the Criminal Code (transmission of infectious diseases) should be especially emphasised. According to the legal description of the criminal act, the direct connection between the person who has tested positive for coronavirus and the infected person or persons must be proven in each case. The neglected Law on Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases of 2004 (changed and amended five times) is a lex specialis which, according to Tupančevski, could be a very suitable instrument in the area of both prevention and

suppression of criminal behaviour of a medical character. Namely, it regulates the procedure for declaring an epidemic (Article 56) and defining terms that are necessary for fulfilling the blanket norms for criminal law (such as defining the terms epidemic, infectious diseases, infection, quarantine, etc.). Also, we must not forget the misdemeanor provisions that foresee fines for both individuals and legal entities. Therefore, misdemeanor proceedings appear to be much faster, and they can be much more effective than criminal proceedings. Analysing this issue, Tupančevski suggests that the authorities should look at the huge number of documents adopted by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Europol on two other areas of criminal law: counterfeiting of drugs connected to Covid-19 and spreading fake news during an epidemic.

For the purposes of this analysis, we would like to single out, among other things, the recommendations for transforming the security system to function in crisis and emergency situations, as a result of the emergency monitoring by the scientific research team of the Faculty of Security in Skopje within the framework of the project "FUNCTIONING OF THE SAFETY SYSTEM OF THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA IN CONDITIONS OF EMERGENCY AND CRISIS SITUATIONS". I.a., the need for concrete urgent steps is highlighted, which means that a Law on State of Emergency should be adopted. The draft Law on State of Emergency should include a special provision on the Main Headquarters of the Government that will operate in a state of emergency, specify the procedure for adopting decrees with legal force by the Government, as well as provide a special norm for international cooperation in conditions of emergency that regulates such cooperation, especially in terms of international assistance and support and coordinated response to crisis or emergency. As a NATO member and a partner of international organisations (the EU, IMF, and World Bank, EBRD and others), it is the Republic of North Macedonia's duty to exchange information and participate in other activities. Therefore, I suggest not to regulate only foreign aid, but the entire system of international cooperation in conditions

of emergency. In addition, the draft Law on State of Emergency should regulate the position and role of the Public Security Bureau, especially regarding the functionality and management of the police, as well as the implementation of policies of the Main Headquarters, and the Government as a whole. The need for reforming crisis management, protection, and the rescue system is evident. The activities of the CMC and PRD in regular conditions, as well as in conditions of crisis and emergency should be analysed in order to establish a model that meets the needs and actual possibilities of the country. Special civil protection forces should be established at a national, regional, and local level, coordinated by the Government. It is necessary to provide normative regulation of the relations, procedures, and actions of cooperation of the Army and the Police in conditions of crisis and emergency, a special kind of subordination between the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Ministry of Interior in conditions of crisis and emergency situations, as well as to establish a system of functional joint command and exchange of information. The work of the National Security Agency in conditions of crisis and emergency should be legally regulated, and it should be clearly determined how it can participate. Complete civil and democratic control regarding the interception of communications in crisis and emergency situations should be established, and experiences from crises and emergencies should be reassessed. Special bylaws on the physical safety and (physical and mental) health of holders of public positions in crisis and emergency situations should be drafted.

The draft Law on State of Emergency should regulate the position and the role of local self-government, especially regarding the relationship with the central government and the competent ministries and agencies, and there the resources of the local headquarters should also be rationally disposed and directed . At the level of local self-government, there is a lack of resources, such as educated staff that can be actively involved in responding to a crisis caused by an epidemic; material resources, especially disinfection vehicles, protection equipment, disinfectants, and financial

resources intended for financing activities and material means for dealing with an epidemic. The curfew should be formally and legally regulated. The analysis of the implementation of the curfew should be focused on better coordination between the institutions responsible for its announcement (when and where) and enforcement (MoI). Regulating the penal policy related to the curfew is particularly important. Currently, from the point of view of criminal law, the curfew is regulated only by the criminal acts in Articles 205 and 206 of the Criminal Code. A debate should be initiated on whether it is more productive to decriminalise some manifestations of the criminal acts in those Articles and regulate them in accordance with the Law on Misdemeanors against the Public Order and Safety.

A common system for early warning, resource planning, and a single national joint assessment of security risks and threats should be established. With regard to the early warning system, it is necessary to constantly strengthen the awareness of the citizens for civic diligence and their role in prevention and early recognition. This approach includes sharing information, as well as clear protocols and tasks so that everyone will know their role, obligations and responsibilities, starting with the institutions and followed by the citizens.

The draft Law on State of Emergency should regulate the position and role of private security, especially when it comes to determining the need and the type of their engagement in conditions of crisis and emergency situation.

A model of psychological support should be created by means of laws and bylaws for crisis and emergency situations, etc., intended for members of the institutions involved in crisis management (medical staff, police, army). The laws and bylaws should define the roles, responsibilities, and joint work plans of most of the public services and professional associations in providing psychological support to the citizens.

The experiences and practices of mobilising religious communities, non-governmental and other organisations for preventing and coping with the challenges in times of crisis and emergency situations should be promoted and strengthened. The areas of cooperation, assistance and contribution of religious communities in times of crisis and emergency should be reevaluated and defined more clearly. Experiences and solutions to promote human rights and freedoms of the citizens and contribute to strengthening the responsibility of each individual and entity in the society should be sought.

The positive experiences with the work of the media should be analysed and promoted, especially in dealing with misinformation (fake news). Also, the role and actions of the Agency for Audio-Visual Media Services in times of crisis and emergency situation should be evaluated. NGOs, civil society and volunteer organisations, need to be involved in the processes that will help the citizens understand the need and importance of prevention and rapid response to disaster management. Therefore, by means of training, simulations, mentoring, and organising events for exchange of experiences and knowledge, the civil society sector should directly participate in strategic planning, in order to reduce the consequences of risks and disasters. The Red Cross is extremely important for the prevention and reduction of the consequences of risks, disasters, and other types of crises; therefore, it should have a special position and role in the process of receiving and deploying foreign and other aid, and be involved in dealing with the consequences of the risks and disasters. These recommendations arise from a research carried out by the Faculty of Security Skopje, with the contribution of professors Cane Mojanoski, Dragana Batić, Marjan Nikolovski, Nikola Dujovski, and Marjan Gjurovski.

Recommendations for changes and upgrades to the security and crisis management system

The state of emergency during the pandemic brought to light the critical areas in the security system of the Republic of North Macedonia with a need of improvement, including crisis management, protection, and rescue. At the same time, proposals and possible solutions should be found in order to build an efficient security system with crisis management, protection and rescue at its core, as well as, of course, creating an appropriate security policy. The consequences of the pandemic raise the question of the general functioning of the system for early warning, and risk management of crises and disasters, as an integral part of the security system of the Republic of North Macedonia. One of the tasks of the security system is prevention, so that the risks of pandemics and disasters are reduced. It should also unite the preventive activities of all institutions involved in the crisis management, protection and rescue system.

This analysis provided a review of the current approaches to prevention, coping with the Covid-19 pandemic, and recovery from threats, risks, natural and man-made disasters, with particular emphasis on contingency plans and the continuation of work, covered by case studies and analyses.

› An effective cooperation among all ministries and institutions involved in the security system is needed. The crisis management system has to be an integral part of the security system. It must be activated for prevention, early warning, and crisis management, in case of threats that pose a risk to the well-being, health, and the lives of people and animals and that are caused by natural disasters, epidemics, or other risks and dangers that directly threaten the constitutional order and security.

› A better understanding of the nature and context of disaster prevention and planning in the capacity building processes at a local and national level

in the Republic of North Macedonia and in the developed countries is necessary, as well as within international organisations closely related to the crisis management for action during a pandemic and others.

› The possibilities and limitations of the instruments and approaches in creating and implementing a contingency plan have to be critically reviewed, as well as the possibility for continuation of work at different levels.

› The assumptions and conclusion from previous trainings and exercises between the CMC and the PRD, on the one hand, and the ARM and the Ministry of Interior, on the other, should be examined regarding the validation of the contingency plan and the continuation of work, as well as with regard to its present performance.

› The legal framework should be processed and presented, as well as the policies and organisational solutions regarding the application of international mechanisms for dealing with crises and declaring and implementing a state of emergency. Possible solutions for an effective implementation with legal support and the reduction of restrictions to their application in the Republic of North Macedonia should be proposed.

› The Republic of North Macedonia's current approaches to reconstruction measures after the pandemic should be critically reviewed, including all threats and risks, and how they are related to the resilience and adaptability of the system in case of disaster, to humanitarian action, and to sustainable development.

› How to take a holistic approach to crisis management at a local, regional, European, and global level, based on inter-agency and international cooperation between the civilian and military components of the crisis management system?

In recent years, a series of natural disasters and serious security risks and threats caused by man and other factors, political and humanitarian, as well as the latest emergency, should have brought communities, states, and relevant organisations within the international community closer to establishing access and building capacities - which are activities related to crisis prevention (preparedness), coping, recovery, and management - in order to deal with these phenomena.

PILLAR 1	COORDINATION OF RESOURCES
PILLAR 2	SECURITY POLICY UPDATE
PILLAR 3	COORDINATION
PILLAR 4	PROFESSIONALIZATION

This analysis identified critical areas in the security system of the Republic of North Macedonia which require urgent changes, such as the adoption of new legislation in the area of crisis management, as well as protection and rescue. Immediate changes in the security system should make it more efficient. Crisis management, protection and rescue are integral elements of the Republic of North Macedonia's security system, as well as creating an appropriate security policy for prevention, early warning, and timely risk and threats assessment and comprehensive coordination of all institutions.

The task of the security system of the Republic of North Macedonia is to provide prevention in the context of reducing the risks of disasters, and consolidatingthe preventive activities of all institutions involved in the crisis management system, as well as the protection and rescue system.

In the forthcoming period, it is recommended to take the following measures in order to overcome the identified weaknesses in the management of the state of emergency caused by the pandemic:

› to adopt a Law on State of Emergency and Martial Law;

› to ensure legal control and monitoring of the implementation of decrees with legal force by the State President by clearly defining his role and position in times of crisis, emergency, and war if the State Assembly cannot convene, in order to guarantee the bicephalous governance as set out in the Constitution (e.g.,during a state of emergency, laws must be signed by the President before being published in the Official Gazette);

› to establish an integrated security system by adopting a law on integrated security in order to ensure better coordination of security institutions in times of crisis, state of emergency, and war, by means of installing a deputy prime minister in charge of coordinating security institutions, agencies, etc., as well as creating public security policies;

› to merge the Crisis Management Centre and the Protection and Rescue Directorate into a joint institution, e.g. an agency or a separate ministry of crisis management;

› to adopt a new set of laws for the prevention of civil risks and dangers, early warning, managing, and overcoming the consequences of civil disasters and catastrophes;

› to consider strengthening the position and role of the National Security Council of the Republic of North Macedonia under the authority of the State President;

› to establish and legally define a permanent system for receiving foreign aid in crisis situations, as well as during a state of emergency or war;

› to establish a relation of special subordination between the ARM and the Ministry of Interior in conditions of crisis, state of emergency or war, as

well as a system of joint command and exchange of information;

› to better involve the National Security Agency under conditions of crisis, emergency or war and to adopt the necessary clear legal regulation;

› to establish full civilian and democratic control with regard to the monitoring of communication during a state of crisis, emergency, and war;

› to draft special bylaws concerning the physical safety and health of the holders of public positions during a state of crisis, emergency, or war;

› to enhance and specify the competences of the local self-government in a state of crisis, emergency or war in order to establish a precise mechanism of cooperation with the central authorities;

› to adopt a special methodology to regulate the necessity and the mode of implementation of the restrictions on movement for citizens during curfews;

› to establish a common early warning and resource planning system, as well as a single state joint assessment of security risks and threats;

› to foster the concept of public-private partnership in order to more efficiently involve the private security sector during a state of crisis, emergency or war.

The present project, implemented by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the Faculty of Security Skopje, responds to issues that are of concern for the scientific community and the general public with regard to the cause and the way of dealing with the latest pandemic, risks, and threats in the Republic of North Macedonia. The state responded to the pandemic based on the available resources, capacities, and opportunities, as well as by means

of applying ad hoc solutions for coordinating and taking measures. Hence, it became evident that it is a priority task to transform the security system with regard to its performance in a state of crisis or emergency. It should therefore be one of the first tasks of the newly elected Assembly to establish a clear legal and normative framework for the following purposes:

› establishment of an early warning system;

› coordination;

› timely field response;

› involvement of all institutions of the security system;

› professionalisation;

› changes in the crisis management system;

› enactment of the Law on State of Emergency and Martial Law;

› completion of the early warning system;

› establishment of a mechanism for rapid and efficient prevention;

› rational and efficient use of resources;

› updating security risks, threats, and policies;

› establishing a culture of security among the citizens and institutions;

› creating the conditions for timely response from local authorities.

2

The case of Bulgaria

The case
of Bulgaria

Models and ways how the institutions deal with the pandemic in Bulgaria

After COVID 19 became an important issue on the international agenda, and Bulgaria realised that, sooner or later, it will have to meet it, National Operational Headquarters (NOH) was established (26.02.2020) by order of the Prime Minister. The NOH was tasked with organising and coordinating the actions of the competent state authorities in connection with the public health emergency of international importance regarding COVID-19 (infectious disease caused by coronavirus 2019-nCoV) declared by the World Health Organization.

The NOH is headed by Major General Professor Dr. Ventsislav Mutafchiiski, Head of the Military Medical Academy, with Colonel Associate Professor Dr. Dimo Iliev Dimovm, Head of the Department of Emergency Medicine at the Military Medical Academy; Chief Commissioner Georgi Arabadjiev, Deputy Secretary General of the Ministry of Interior; Chief Commissioner Svetlan Kichikov, Director of the General Directorate of Border Police of the Ministry of Interior; Boyko Hristov, Head of the Crisis Management Department in the Situation Centre Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Professor Dr. Todor Kantardzhiev, Director of the National Centre for Infectious and Parasitic Diseases; and Dr. Angel Kunchev, Chief State Health Inspector. Despite of the general support for establishing the NOH, the fact that it does not include an infectious disease specialist was met with strong criticism.

On March 8, 2020, the first two persons were tested positive for COVID-19.

Upon proposal of the Council of Ministers and on the grounds of Art. 84, item 12 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, the National Assembly decided on the following with regard to the spreading pandemic:

› to declare a state of emergency in the entire territory of the Republic of Bulgaria as of March 13 until April 13, 2020.
› to instruct the Council of Ministers to take all necessary measures to manage the emergency situation in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic in accordance with Art. 57, para.3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria

There had not been a state of emergency in Bulgaria since WWII. As a term, «state of emergency» has been a figure of speech in political philosophy since the early 20th century, where it is linked to the collapse of the constitutional order and the return to a state of anarchy. According to Stefan Popov, the term is too vague from a constitutional point of view.

The term «state of emergency» is first used in Chapter Two ofthe Charter of Rights, Article 57 (3), where the Constitution stipulates that in a «military or other state of emergency», civil rights may be restricted by law.

Second, the term is used in connection with the rules of procedure of the National Assembly. According to Rule 65 (3), a composition's te term of office may be extended subject to certain conditions. Again, the term appears in the combination «military or other state of emergency».

Third, the most important statement on entering a 'state of emergency' is Article 84 (2), which stipulates that the National Assembly declares it upon proposal by the Council of Ministers, again in combination withe «military or other state of emergency».

Fourth, Article 100 (5) states that the President may declare a «military or other state of emergency» if the National Assembly does not sit, but the Assembly

convenes «immediately» to rule on the President's decision.

As we can see from this review, «state of emergency» is a broad term without a clearly defined meaning.[11]

Despite of the lack of theoretical and constitutional clarity and preoccupation of human rights activists,

the emergency state did not lead to any greater clashes in Bulgarian society.

The early measures slowed down the disease and allowed the healthcare system to prepare for the pandemic. At that moment, Bulgaria was one of those EU countries that successfully dealt with the disease.

Table 1. *Evaluation of the effectiveness of the Bulgarian Government in dealing with COVID 19*
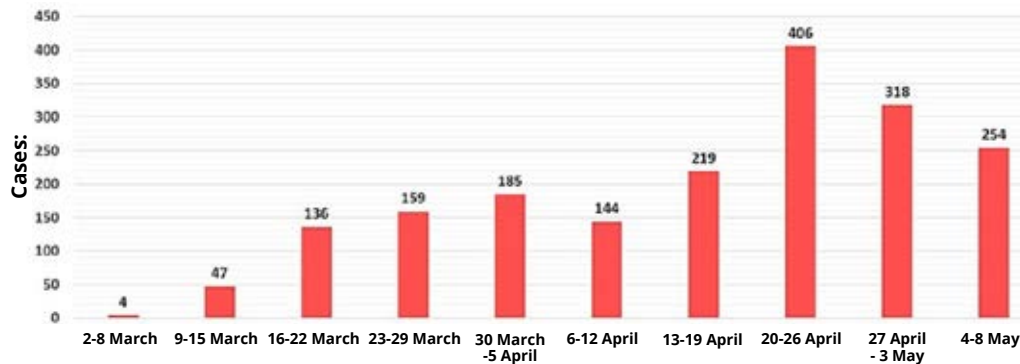
In general, Bulgarians respected the measures, probably because of their fear from COVID 19.

At the end of April, 68% declared that this was the case.

Table 2. *Number of cases of COVID 19 by weeks (2 to 8 March and 4 to 8 April)*
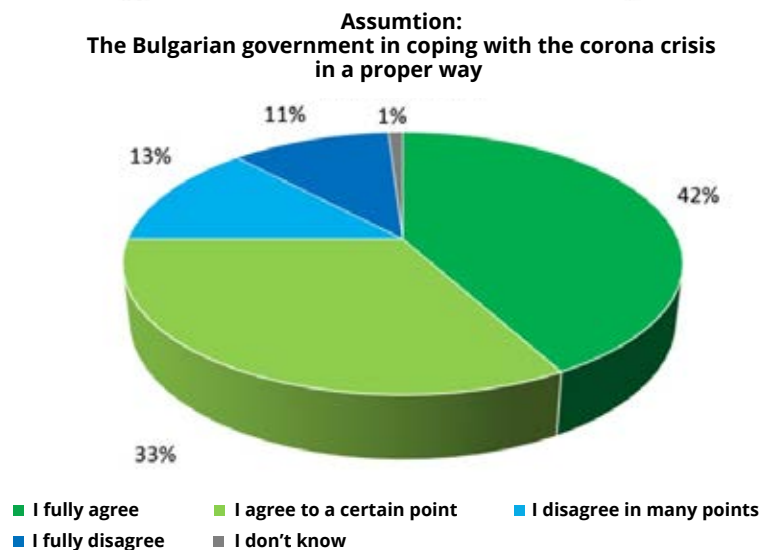
11   Стефан Попов. Метафората „извънредно положение".
      Докъде може да стигне въвеждането на нещо, което е не-
      ясно какво, Свободна Европа, април 23, 2020. https://www.
      svobodnaevropa.bg/a/30566237.html

The above data stems from a public opinion poll of April. Two months later, the picture was quite different: 59% of Bulgarians considered the threat to be strongly exaggerated. The fear of the coronavirus had gradually decreased since April. In early June, most Bulgarians believed that the coronavirus situation is already under control. At the same time, they were convinced that the responsibility for health decisions lies with the individual personal (84%), rather than the state (10% saw the responsibility with the state). However, theupport for the Government with regard to the situation remained at the levels of April, at 77%.

Public opinion polls gradually showed that Bulgarians felt deep preoccupation concerning their economic situation. Two main results of the state of emergency were noted by sociologists: depletion of financial reserves, and devaluation of restrictive measures. We can see this from the data from a sociological survey by AFIS, conducted between May 7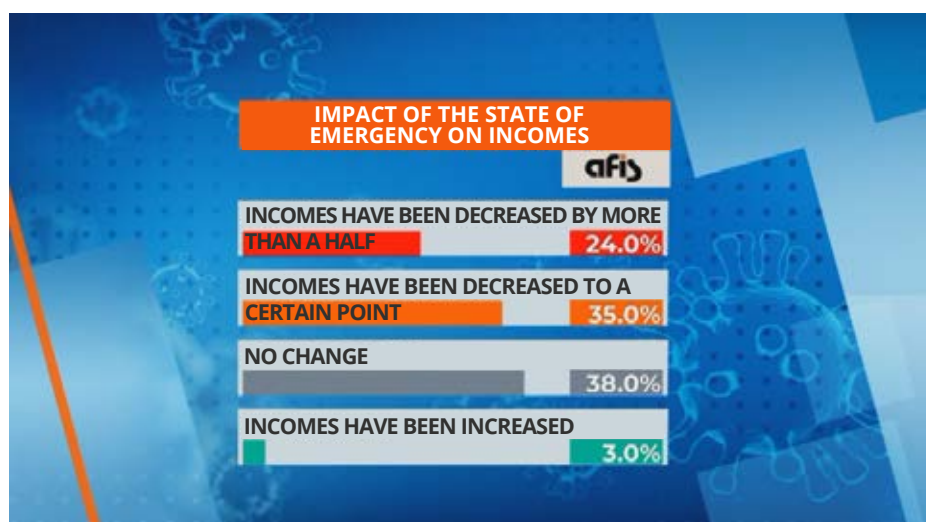 and 12 with 1,000 adult Bulgarians. 59% of the respondents said that their income had decreased due to the state of emergency. For 24% of them, it had halved or decreased even more. For 38 percent, revenues had remained the same as before.

Table 3. *Impact of the state of emergency on incomes*

What about the new normality? 35% of respondents expected life in the country to return to normal within a few months, 11 percent were optimistic and believed that this would happen in one month, whereas according to 27% of the respondents, it would take longer to normalise the situation.[12]

According to the forecast of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

in 2020, Bulgaria is facing the most serious contraction of the economy since the late 1990s. If the coronavirus pandemic ended at the end of the summer, the contraction would be 7.1%, which is a positive scenario. In case this would not happen in a few weeks and there is a second wave of infection in autumn, the economy would decrease by 8% in 2020, and by another 0.3% in 2021. Unemployment will double to 8% by the end of 2020, and «a speedy recovery does not seem

12 Елиана Димитрова. АФИС: 59% от българите са с по-ниски доходи заради извънредното положение БНТ, 14.05.2020. https://bntnews.bg/news/ afis-59-ot-balgarite-sa-s-po-niski-dohodi-zaradi-izvanrednoto-polozhenie-1054515news.html

likely, given the continuing measures for social distancing, households that are insufficiently protected from the crisis, persistent insecurity, and weak demand for Bulgarian goods and services abroad, especially in Europe.»

Under the pressure of the business sector, the measures were relaxed. This had a positive impact on the business, but negative consequences for the health crisis, while the number of persons infected by COVID 19 sharply increased.

Table 4. *Cases of coronavirus in the EU (April - June)*

Confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the EU in the second year-quarter
(cases of population of 1.000.000 citizens)

Country	April	May	June	Country	April	May	June
European Union	1398	444	266	European Union	1398	444	266
Slovakia	189	23	27	Germany	1089	244	147
Latvia	244	110	28	Denmark	1087	434	190
Hungary	236	114	29	France	1187	340	200
Cyprus	487	78	45	Spain	3067	1009	210
Greece	123	31	47	Netherlands	1559	416	224
Lithuania	312	107	52	Czechia	408	148	251
Slovenia	302	21	61	Belgium	3084	851	263
Finland	646	336	64	Poland	279	288	280
Estonia	712	136	90	BULGARIA	159	145	356
Ireland	3519	887	98	Romania	520	365	401
Austria	585	142	115	Luxemburg	2566	374	449
Malta	670	347	118	Portugal	1690	768	946
Italy	1648	456	126	Sweden	1671	1723	3017
Croatia	295	41	129				

Source: Цветозар Томов. Бяхме втори по успех срещу вируса, паднахме на 22 място. 24 часа, 3.7-2020. https://m.24chasa.bg/mnenia/article/8769541?fbclid=IwAR2cF_M63K7DxReUPUsqN6tFfErT73h2dJYBhsBVc8-cTBOg-pWy20GfqQ

After two months, the state of emergency was substituted by epidemic emergency situation. While some measures were canceled, others remained.

Assessment:
› The early measures should be assessed as a positive step.
› They provided the healthcare system with the opportunity to prepare for the challenge of COVID19.
› Despite the juridical lack of clarity, the state of emergency played a positive role in the strategy against the pandemic

› The emergency epidemic situation was a logical step after the cancellation of the state of emergency
› The relaxation of the crisis measures was premature and led to a new peak of the pandemic.

Recommendations:
› To increase control over the existing measures;
› To continue developing a public awareness campaign on prevention;
› to pay special attention to some vulnerable risk groups that are not prone to follow the preventive measures.

Regional cooperation and international support from the EU and NATO to Bulgaria and assessment of regional cooperation

The time of the state of emergency was a time of aminated diplomatic activity.

A videoconference meeting of the foreign ministers of Greece, Romania, Slovenia, the Republic of North Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Kosovo took place in the framework of regional cooperation, organised on the initiative of Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias and the Foreign Minister of the Republic of North Macedonia Nikola Dimitrov. The main topic were the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic in the Balkans and measures to overcome them.

Expressing the Government's position, Ekaterina Zaharieva, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, said: "One of the most important lessons from the coronavirus pandemic is that we need more cooperation between the countries of the region, as well as between them and the European Union. In recent months, we have proved that the Western Balkans is part of Europe, and we have seen many examples of cooperation from both sides."

The outcomes of the meeting were as follows:

› A declaration reaffirming the strategic partnership between the EU and the countries of the Western Balkans was adopted, outlining joint action to address the effects of COVID-19 in sectors such as health, transport and tourism.
› The ministers agreed that restoring traffic, opening borders and repealing measures should be a gradual and coordinated process.
› In the health sector, the foreign ministers agreed on enhanced co-operation, providing for the establishment of a regional network of health facilities to work together to treat patients, as well as the safe resumption of tourism, which is important for the region's economies.
› With regard to transport, the declaration states that "green corridors" connecting the EU and the Western Balkans must remain "green" in the post-crisis period, for which it is necessary to remove all unnecessary administrative and infra-structural barriers that affect the flow of goods and passengers.
› The foreign ministers also reaffirmed the key importance of good neighbourly relations for the European perspective of the countries of the Western Balkans.

Another important event was the online quadripartite meeting between Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and SerbiMay a (19).

The Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, the President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić, the Prime Minister of Greece Kyriakos Mitsotakis and the Prime Minister of Romania Ludovic Orban discussed easing travel measures for their citizens between the four countries during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The aim was to create conditions for travel and the restoration of tourism between the four countries without imposing a 14-day quarantine, but, at the same time, observing all hygienic requirements for security and deterrence of the coronavirus.

"What we agreed with Greece is that, from June 1, we will be free to grant business, family ties, diplomatic, humanitarian and transport relations without quarantine", Borissov said. He added that Sofia would sign a similar agreement with Belgrade.

Also, as of June 25, the mandatory quarantine for drivers of goods entering Bulgaria would be abolished. The Prime Minister added that, in addition to the neighbouring countries, talks to lift quarantine were under way with Germany and Austria

Other forms of regional cooperation also appeared, including the following:

› In several humanitarian operations, Bulgaria supported the transit and repatriation of both

EU citizens and citizens of Serbia, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Montenegro.
› At the request of Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, a telephone conversation with Prime Minister Boyko Borissov was held on May, 18th, as reported by Vučić 's cabinet reported and BGNES. The two talked about easing the border regime, in particular during the tourist season after the coronavirus pandemic.
› As of June 1, the quarantine for travel between Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia was abolished.

In the field of the EU's regional cooperation, probably the most important event was the EU-Western Balkans Zagreb Summit (May 6), which took place via video conference due to the COVID-19 pandemic, attended by the heads of state and government of the EU member states and the six Western Balkans partners: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Kosovo. The President of the European Council Charles Michel chaired the meeting. Furthermore, the Zagreb Summit was attended by the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, Andrej Plenković, Prime Minister of Croatia, which then held the presidency of the Council, Josep Borrell, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, David Sassoli, President of the European Parliament, representatives of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the World Bank, the European Investment Bank and the Regional Cooperation Council.

The EU and the Western Balkans are fighting the coronavirus and its effects together. The EU actively supports the efforts to combat the coronavirus outbreak and its impact on societies and economies, while the Western Balkan partners have provided the EU with valuable support during the pandemic. The EU mobilised a package of over EUR 3.3 billion of financial assistance to the benefit of the Western Balkans.

The following was agreed on:

› to support the health sector;
› to support social and economic recovery and provide assistance through the European Investment Bank, as well as macro-financial assistance;
› to co-operate and coordinate in the form of joint procurement and unrestricted trade-flow of protective personal equipment and ensuring the fast flow of essential goods along green corridors that link the EU and the Western Balkans;
› to supply the Western Balkans with testing material to check the correct functioning of coronavirus tests in the Western Balkans, as well as close cooperation with relevant health institutions;
› to address disinformation and other hybrid activities originating in particular from third-state actors seeking to undermine the European perspective of the region.

In order to overcome the coronavirus health crisis, the following steps have been taken:

› The EU supplied a €38 million immediate support package to the Western Balkans health sector to procure medical equipment such as masks, ventilators, visors and testing kits.
› The EU supplied free control material developed

by the EU's Joint Research Centre to Western Balkan partners to enable them to check the accuracy of coronavirus tests.

› The EU opened the Joint Procurement Agreement to the Western Balkan partners to purchase personal protective equipment.
› By means of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, EU member states helped the Western Balkans partners by providing equipment and repatriation assistance for stranded citizens.
› The EU included the Western Balkans in information sharing on the coronavirus early warning and response, facilitated by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.
› The EU exempted the Western Balkans from export bans on masks and other personal protective equipment, making them the only region outside the European Economic Area receiving such preferential treatment.
› The EU quickly provided vulnerable individuals, such as Roma, with essential food and hygiene packages, and will continue supporting the elderly, children, victims of domestic violence, minorities and migrants to ride out the crisis.

Concerning a lifeline for Western Balkans businesses, the following can be stated: The EU provides €455 million to ensure private sector businesses' survival in the short term, and

recovery in the medium-term. This funding will be channeled through up to 70 local banks in the region to help small and medium enterprises in receiving more flexible terms for repayments, or easier access to new loans, and to assist entrepreneurs in coping with the immediate effects of the crisis and its effects. Through the European Investment Bank (EIB), the EU also provides €1.7 billion for additional loans for public sector investments, and further credit to enterprises, to help safeguard jobs for the many people working in SMEs in the region.

The Extraordinary Virtual Meeting of CEI Heads of Government (15 May 2020) was concluded with a joint statement on solidarity and cooperation of the CEI Member States in the face of the challenges posed by the novel coronavirus disease COVID-19. NATO also supported the region in it struggle against COVID-19. According Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg:

› NATO equipment and military force has been mobilised to fight the coronavirus pandemic;
› the Alliance's Strategic Air Force has made crucial deliveries to partner countries, including Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland and Romania;
› United States troops in Europe have been targeted to support NATO's joint efforts;
› NATO is working on the introduction of innovative solutions, including the production of respirators and breathing masks using 3-D printers and the air transport of patients.

Assessment:

› Despite some delay, the EU quickly demonstrated that it is the only player that can help its members and the Western Balkans.
› Despite the demonstration of solidarity and intent to use the "mask diplomacy" for their own purposes, Russia, China and Cuba soon proved unable and not willing to widely support EU countries and the Western Balkans.
› Animated diplomatic activity helped to make important decisions for the future of the region.
› The presence of NATO was much weaker than the EU's, but nevertheless, it was useful

Recommendations:

› Increase regional cooperation in dealing with the pandemic.
› Explain to the population the measures that EU and NATO are taking in order to support regional efforts.
› Better coordinate regional cooperation by means of establishing concrete mechanisms and tools.

Socio-economic recovery

The EU reallocated **€389 million of Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) funding** to build-up resilience of the national health systems and to cushion for the social and economic impact of the crisis, with special attention to the most vulnerable.

The EU proposed **€750 million of Macro-Financial Assistance**, in tandem with the International Monetary Fund, to support Western Balkan governments that requested help with balancing the payment crisis.

The EU extended the **EU Solidarity Fund** to the Western Balkan partners that have started accession negotiations.

EU €455 million

European Investment Bank €1.7 billion of preferential loans

Support for businesses

Public sector investment

Focusing on SMEs, start-ups and innovative companies, this EU assistance will in particular be available for innovative businesses, farmers and agri-businesses, rural and tourism enterprises, as well as women- and youth-led businesses. It will provide a lifeline for many people all over the Western Balkans, especially those working in vulnerable and small-scale enterprises.

Performance of the crisis management system and the state security system

From a etymologic point of view, the word «crisis» stems from the ancient Hellenic word «krinein», meaning «to decide». The very meaning of the word shows that it refers to an event in which a decision must be made.

According to various crisis management experts, the term "crisis management" could be defined as special measures taken to solve problems caused by a crisis.

COVID-19 generated a crisis unknown to mankind during the last century. No one knows how long the pandemic will last and how deep the crisis will be for both institutions and economies. It has posed several challenges to the states' preparedness to effectively manage crises of such a scale and ensure human security to all members of the society.

Bulgaria is not an exception. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented crisis that will have lasting consequences for the state and society. It will have significant implications for the national security system, affecting its strategic, conceptual, doctrinal and legal framework, as well as the institutions and mechanisms of interaction between them.

According to former Prime Minister Ivan Kostov, the pandemic damages people's lives, health and ability to work, and it creates a high risk of overloading the health system, due to the inability to take on the huge number of people in need and the lack of resources for treatment. The measures to counteract the spread of the pandemic exclude a significant part of the democratic institutions and restrict the rights and freedoms of citizens. Society is becoming

atomized and ceases to control the authorities, while the political leadership is becoming very vulnerable to any risks. Due to the state of emergency, quarantine, and social isolation, activities of significant economic sectors have to be closed down, reducing supply and demand, increasing unemployment, depreciating capital assets and real estate, and declining incomes. The context outlines insecurity for the life and health of Bulgarian citizens and thus poses a threat to national security.[13]

Obviously, we need to live with the coronavirus. The question is how to reorganise our daily lives so that the crises caused by the pandemic do not destroy the security of our existence and the state. What are the factors in this complicated situation that affect the security in the country, hence our personal security?

Before answering this question, let me make some minor remarks.

The events have shown that no one in Bulgaria was prepared for such a situation. If we look at the National Security Strategy as of 2011, we will see that, along with migration and intensified terrorist waves, global pandemics are mentioned. This means that, after the adoption of the Strategy (turning it into a law), the special services most likely drafted strategic and tactical plans, as they are obliged to. The way in which the entire Government started acting shows that it did not reach a stage beyond planning. There are several laws, including the Disaster and Accident Action Act, which describe the steps to be taken in such cases. The Government created the impression that it did not know this law and several related laws, so it proposed completely new forms of

---

13   Иван Костов. Пандемията – фази и изходи. Медиапул, 8 април 2020, https://www.mediapool.bg/pandemiyata---fazi-i-izhodi-news305901.html

managing and monitoring the situation, such as the National Operational Headquarters, which actually is merely an advisory body.

I will divide further the text of this section in three parts:

› The Bulgarian security system and the impact of the pandemic,
› Strategic communication management,
› Resilience.

The Bulgarian security system and the impact of the pandemic. Without any doubt, this crisis will affect the Bulgarian security system and public policies in this field. If lessons will be learned, the experience of this pandemic should affect the strategic culture of the institutions, profoundly and permanently changing their way of thinking and hence their performance. Epidemics and pandemics must now be seen as completely real crises that can suddenly occur, here and now, rather than as purely hypothetical phenomena set by presumption in strategic documents due to the requirements of theoretical breadth and academic content.

According to Bulgarian security expert Myhail Naidenov, at this level, Bulgaria still has only a minimum necessary strategic conceptual framework, in the face of the updated National Security Strategy (2018), which takes into account the risks of epidemics and infectious diseases. In the field of healthcare, specific goals have been set, including «improvement of the system for protection of the country from the import of infections with high epidemic potential». However, given the current crisis, it is necessary to make healthcare (now included in the Social Security Policy section) a separate security policy within a new national security strategy by developing

pandemic and epidemic issues and counteraction. In addition, the «Crisis Management» part should also be further developed in the direction of health crisis management. Last but not least, the protection of public health should be tmoved from the category of «Other important national interests», as in the current document, to the first and highest category of «vital interests».[14]

The current crisis is an excellent opportunity to update the Constitution and the legal framework regarding various conditions. The current Constitution knows only states of peace, war, as well as „war or other state of emergency." The coronavirus crisis is being managed by means of the so-called state of emergency, which required additional legislative initiatives, which took some time and effort. This is hardly the best possible response to such a crisis. Instead, if Bulgaria had introduced a modern and NATO-compliant escalation concep with four clearly regulated main states – peace, rising tensions, crisis, and war –, the institutions would have been able to respond more quickly and effectively. In this case, the COVID-19 pandemic would have been categorised as a crisis, in particular a health crisis, with the epidemiological feature as a leading element. If the powers of the institutions had been clearly and comprehensively regulated and if detailed procedures and mechanisms of interaction between them had been in place, the response could have been faster and more effective.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg made clear that we must not allow the health crisis to escalate into a security crisis. The coronavirus infects humans, but it does not destroy security challenges, nor does it cancel or mitigate them. On the contrary, it makes them more complicated, at least by creating new opportunities for hybrid campaigns. And not only. At the same time,

---

14 Михайли Найденов. Кризата с COVID-19 – „перфектната буря" или шанс за националната сигурност. Bulgaria analitica, 4 May 2020, https://bulgariaanalytica.org/2020/05/04/crizata-s-co-vid-19-perfektnata-buria-ili-ans-za-nacionalnata-sigurnost/

however, new opportunities for cooperation within NATO and the EU could be created, including in the field of military medical insurance. Bulgaria must be ready for this.

Strategic communication management.
It should be noted that, since the very beginning of the crisis, Bulgarians accepted the information provided as credible mainly due to the personal charisma of the Prime Minister, for unlike leaders of other countries, he was always present and face-to-face with the citizens during the state of emergency. Over a long time, he appeared together with the members of NOH each morning, answering questions of journalists even when they were openly provocative. Concomitantly, the head of the NOH, General Mutafchiiski, continuously presented professional and competent information concerning the development of COVID-19 in Bulgaria and other counties. The participation of all the members of the NOH created a situation in which all the question were answered by competent persons.

This communication model, however, exhausted its capabilities. A closer look at it reveals that, since the very beginning, it was bit chaotic. Probably in order to ensure his media comfort, Mr. Borissov called for the creation of another body of scientists with a profoundly contrasting position. This body was also a source of information for the general public. If the NOH called for respect for the crisis measures, associate professor Mangarov, representing the opposite trend, called for herd immunity and implementation of the Swedish model, however not taking into consideration that Bulgarian healthcare neither disposes of Sweden's resources, nor do Bulgarian and Swedish citizens share the same culture.

One substantial thing should have been better explained: that under the conditions of Bulgaria's limited resources, the only right strategy is based on administrative restrictions and isolation for a relatively long period of time. It is not attractive, nor is it sparing; but it is the only effective strategy under the conditions in the country.

The lack of understanding of this fundamental, but poorly explained fact encouraged the protest of people against the imposed measures. With the coming of spring and summer, people became impatient to return to their usual modes of communication and interaction. Although it was explained more than once that they have to respect the 3D – discipline, distance and disinfection –, not all communities were prone to do so.

These specific attitudes were strongly supported by some public personalities insisting that the pandemic does not exist and that it was proclaimed by the Government with the sole purpose to establish mechanisms of control and fear.

The Bulgarian recreation and leisure business added their voices to the protest. As a result, the Government was not able to resist the pressure and finally cancelled the restrictions, leaving everything to the consciousness of the citizens.

Thus, being exposed to contradicting messages from the institutions, the media and opinion leaders got rather disoriented, which, as a result, decreased the general motivation for prevention.

The chaos in the crisis communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as in the crisis management itself, was primarily due to non-compliance with the law. Prime Minister Borissov repeatedly told the media that all decisions during the pandemic crisis were made by the Council of Ministers and by him personally, and that the National Operational Headquarters only advised and made proposals. This statement is the clearest example of a violation of the law. According to the Disaster Protection Act, "the National Headquarters performs the following main activities: deciding on the necessary volume and resource provision of rescue and urgent emergency recovery works to prevent, limit and eliminate the consequences of the disaster and to support the affected population" (Art. 62a, para 6, item 2). For its part, "the Council of Ministers

implements the general management of disaster protection" (Art. 62, para. 2, item 1). This means that the Council of Ministers is not in charge of deciding on specific actions and measure. Decisions on measures, such as the permission to go to the churches for Easter, lie withing the competence of the Headquarters.

Second, the impression was created that the Government does not have any emergency plan, but acts chaotically, in several directions, without any goal or purpose.

Third, inter-institutional communication was not effective, as far as it seems that the communication channels were not established or were overloaded, which often culminated in a lack of coordination.

Fourth, some very positive measures were not well explained, and therefore did not get the support they deserve

Resilience. The COVID-19 crisis revealed that too modest efforts have been made to develop and implement the concept or resilience in Bulgaria. It is widely accepted that, today, the key conceptual innovation has been the discovery, or perhaps the rediscovery, of resilience as the underpinning principle of security policy. In the context of national security, resilience refers to the ability of a society to manage threats and risks, to adapt to them, and to recover from them should an attack or event occur, without losing the ability to provide basic functions and services to its members. In short, it is the capacity to remain functional under pressure and then bounce back. From this point of view, resilience is a matter of reducing one's own vulnerabilities. As it can be seen, resilience has to do with the adaptiveness and flexibility of people and communities. Bulgarian security experts should put more effort into developing this concept; while the Government should be committed to implementing it, motivating all the main stake holders, such as institutions, business, and NGOs.

In Bulgaria, practice has shown that its society does not have the sensibility required for this issue. For example, when a Bulgarian private company made a deal with the United Arab Emirates on protection materials for front line medics, the media, instead of welcoming the humanitarian aid, called attention to the fact that it accounted for just a small portion of the cargo, while the rest consisted of boxes of fruits. It was not clear why this became a news of the day, taking into consideration that it was a private deal and the state did not pay anything for it.

Assessment:

› The general impression is that Bulgaria is not prepared for a challenge like the coronavirus pandemic.
› The constitutional and legislative basis is fragmented and weak.
› At the beginning of the pandemic, the strategic communication management was based on the personal charisma of the leaders and their readiness to assume responsibility for their activities
› This model, however, has been gradually exhausted.
› The new communication model suffered some deep inefficiencies.
› The concept of resilience is needed, but not well developed in Bulgaria

Recommendations:

› Re-elaborate the constitutional and legislative basis for dealing with pandemics on the basis of new principles.
› Follow the existing legislation.
› Study the weaknesses of the communication models implemented.
› Better develop the concept of resilience.

Hybrid threats, fake news and the influence of new state actors in dealing with the pandemic

According to the international organisation First Draft which fights against fake news, it has to do with disinformation and misinformation and can take on several forms.

"Hybrid threat" is an umbrella term which covers a wide variety of actions, events, circumstances of state and non-state actors perceived by other state or non-state actors as dangerous for their needs, interests, values and projects. (David Sadowski and Jeff Becker). It "is a metaphor that brings complexities and dilemmas related to a changing global environment to the fore", as well as a phenomenon resulting from convergence and interconnection of different elements, which together form a more complex and multidimensional threat (Patryk Pawlak). According to the definition of the concept, hybrid threats are projects of identified or non-identified nature, developed and acting in a gray zone, that under certain conditions could lead to the destruction of institutions (by eroding trust and governability), communities (by impeding informed individual and collective choices), and society (by interference in national decision making processes and impact on public opinion). (Yavor Raychev)

In a time when information can be shared in less than a minute, false information spreads fast. Times of fear and uncertainty provide a fertile ground for disinformation to grow. In other words,

Source: First Draft

as the Covid-19 virus spreads around the world, so does another disease: fake news.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been equally defined by how much we do not know as how much we do. That vacuum has been quickly filled with rubbish. According to the United Nations Secretary General, we are living through "a pandemic of misinformation". According to the Head of the World Health Organization, it is an "infodemic." In the midst of battling a global health emergency, we find ourselves fending off another scourge of conspiracy theories and misinformation.

One of the characteristics of the age of the pandemic is that the very governments and political leaders can become sources of fake news, as my examples will show.

In the Americas, the two most distinct examples are Donald Trump in USA and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. Against the advice of his own health care staff, President Donald J. Trump still urges US-Americans to take hydroxychloroquine, an anti-malaria drug, which has not proven to be safe or effective in curing Covid-19. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, known for his emulation of Trump, dismissed Covid-19 as a simple flu that would cause sniffles at best. Whilst Bolsonaro claimed that Brazilians "never catch anything", drug traffickers in Rio de Janeiro ordered residents living in the Favelas to stay at home. The fear of how the virus will impact the poorest of the poor has given more moral credit to drug traffickers than to Brazil's own president.

According to «The EU vs DISINFORMATION», the main fake news disseminated during the pandemic is as follows: «the Americans created the coronavirus»; «the EU is not coping with the crisis and will fall apart»; «the virus is an attack on the Chinese economy»; «the whole crisis is a secret plan of the global elite»; and 5G.

Bulgarian media further elaborated these fake news, leading to the following:

› "The coronavirus is a biological experiment. It was created in a Chinese or American military laboratory and is distributed through 5G, and could infect anyone through their phone or computer."
› "5G technology emits so much radiation that it weakens the human immune system and makes it susceptible to the new infection. The proof is that thousands of birds in the Netherlands died in a test on a base station of the fifth generation network."
› "The Illuminati, funded by Soros, Rothschild and Rockefeller, created the coronavirus in China to impose the New World Order."
› "The coronavirus is not really a virus."
› "The ubiquitous co-founder of Microsoft, Bill Gates, invented the technology to depopulate the world ... The vaccines that are being developed against the coronavirus are actually chips that will be implanted in humans to be controlled."

The consequences are alarming. Regardless of the fact that there is still no 5G network in Bulgaria, a large group of people is firmly against the latest generation of mobile network. Arguments and evidence in support of this position are drawn from dubious foreign sources and fake news sites. The Facebook page of Stop5G Bulgaria already has almost 80,000 followers. Protests are organised and petitions are made against the installation of the network in Bulgaria.

Basically, the theories surrounding the Covid-19 conspiracy are divided into two groups. According to the first group, 5G can suppress the immune system, thus making people more susceptible to the virus. The second group of theories suggests that the virus can somehow be transmitted through the use of 5G technology. Both are completely denied by experts, who say that the idea of a connection between Covid-19 and 5G is biologically impossible.

There are other types of disinformation, which directly threaten the health of people. E.g., in April leaflets appeared in Varna in which unknown authors urged the citizens to disagree with the mass blood tests for COVID-19, as they will be infected with the coronavirus. In capital letters, the anonymous authors wrote that the coronavirus

is a manipulation to force people to take a blood test for COVID-19. Thus, their data could be used to see if they were suitable as organ donors. Other leaflets explain that it was the blood tests by which COVID-19 infections were spread. In addition, citizens were urged not to wear masks. The fake leaflets on behalf of the Ministry of Health were distributed by unknown individuals. According to appeals signed on behalf of the municipality, the authorities wanted to pass a law on mandatory testing of the population (allegedly for coronavirus), and the tests would be deliberately infected with the genetic material of the virus. The ultimate goal of the campaign was to kill some people.

Russia is one of the main sources of fake news regarding COVID-19. On the one hand, pro-Kremlin outlets are spreading corona-related disinformation to stir panic among Western (social) media and aggravate the public health situation in European countries by heightening anxiety and distrust in domestic authorities and institutions. This includes narratives of a man-made virus as a biological weapon of global elites. On the other hand, Russia presents itself as in control and engages in open "virus diplomacy," lending medical support to Italy, for example. Here, it openly emphasises the success of its autocratic system in fighting COVID-19 in contrast to other, democratic states.

The European Commission (EC) has analysed nearly 80 cases of incorrect or distorted information about the coronavirus pandemic, disseminated by official Russian media. All of them are published by platforms and authors close to the Kremlin. They purposefully intent to undermine the EU's unity, authority, solidarity and values. In my opinion, we have all the reasons to assume that the stream of fake news is part of the strategy of the hybrid war that Russia is waging in order to cause deep cleavages among EU member states. Here are some examples:

"So, coronavirus not only influenced world economic life, but also actively changes world politics. Talks about the collapse of the European Union have resumed in Europe, the United States

are showing egoism and ignoring their European partners, leaving them alone with the coronavirus, while Moscow and Beijing come to the aid of the former US allies."

"European countries are also dissatisfied with the actions of Brussels, in particular with how the more developed countries within the Union are held hostage by the less developed countries, and how aid is distributed within the Union. How did it happen that a system of European order, which had worked without failure for the last 30 years, cracked?"

The Russian news television Sputnik claimed that the coronavirus was developed in Latvia, where there were «many talented biologists and pharmacists.» And according to other media close to the Kremlin, the virus was created in the British laboratory «Porton Down» near Salisbury.

The Kremlin-based Oriental Review wrote: «Once the panic wears off, it will turn out that the victims of Covid-19 are fewer than the victims of the common flu."

Aleksander Dugin wrote that after his «triumphant march across the planet,» the coronavirus will destroy the current world order. Dugin uses ancient deities of vengeance and biblical curses to blaspheme the Western way of life.

Several manipulative techniques are used in publishing fake news. One of them is to use a title which has nothing to do with the contents, as in the following example: TITLE: "The EU is bad, the EU is weak, the EU will soon fall apart: whom do we count on in trouble» (Dnevnik, Bulgaria); end of the story: "Will economic and political trials unite us? I think yes. And not only because, in times of crisis, anti-European passions subside in Bulgaria. We simply do not have another option – China will not save our economies, and America will not strengthen our political unity."[15]

Another example: TITLE: "As coronavirus showed, NATO's super-military is a great myth"; content: Meanwhile, the Russian army "pecked" by everyone today not only splendidly saves itself from this infection, but also helps countries that are part of the NATO bloc, adds the Sputnik source.[16] The real situation is completely different and this is covered in several Russian media: TITLE: "Russian army at the peak of the epidemic»; content: "In the Armed Forces of Russia, the proportion of infected with COVID-19 is two times higher than among the rest of the population. Such a conclusion can be drawn from the newsletter published on the website of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation."

Some other countries are also sources of fake news. Iranian and Chinese officials declared that the coronavirus was a biological weapon created in US military laboratories. Since January 2020, the Chinese Government has conducted disinformation campaigns at home and abroad. Similar to Russia, China has been presenting itself and its centralised political system as superior in fighting the disease, compared to Western democracies, particularly the US. Additionally, false narratives originating from China are being spread internationally and incorrectly attribute the origin of the virus to other countries. Competing corona-related narratives are dismissed as anti-Chinese strategies of foreign governments.

COVID-19 also raises some challenges to cybersecurity. Cybersecurity is a human problem: the person at the screen or keyboard is always the weakest link in any technical system. Attackers will use a set of techniques — broadly described as social engineering — to trick us into divulging sensitive information. During the coronavirus crisis:

› many people are working form home, where their conputers are not well protected;
› the use of platforms like ZOOM do not offer full

---

15   https://inosmi.ru/politic/20200512/247413247.html

16   https://sputnik.by/radio/20200327/1044289417/Bara-nets-kak-pokazal-koronavirus-super-voyska-NATO--eto-ve-likiy-mif.htm

protection of personal data;

› due to physical isolation, the internet is the primary platform on which Bulgarians do their work, continue their education, or communicate with others. However, 24.5% of Bulgarians have never used the Internet. These persons suffer from isolation and anxiety;

› hospitals and other critical infrastructure are at risk of being targeted during the peak of the crisis, when government and public health officials will be exhausted by constant communications.

Asessment:

› In situations like the coronavirus crisis, the dissemination of fake news is an inevitable fact.

› Fake new are disseminated mainly through the internet, but they may also be disseminated through leaflets, brochures, etc.

› Fake news is dangerous in each situation, but in a health crisis it affects the lives of the people directly.

› Russia and China are the main sources of fake news during the pandemic.

› COVID-19 raises new challenges to cybersecurity

Recommendations:

› Despite the existence of fact checker companies, the only secure tool against fake news is critical thinking, which should be developed in the general public.

› Fake news is easier to disseminate in the absence of reliable information. Hence, if the government wants to tackle this problem, it has to provide reliable information in time in order to prevent rumors and other forms of disinformation and misinformation.

› Develop a media campaign explaining why Russia and China are sources of fake news.

› Create a unit for fighting against mis- and disinformation at a national level.

› Periodically produce reports about fake news and coronavirus like EEAS SPECIAL REPORT UPDATE: SHORT ASSESSMENT OF NARRATIVES AND DISINFORMATION AROUND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

Public safety policies and proposals for change

In this section, I will try to summarise the opinions of Bulgarian experts in different areas on how our lives will change after COVID-19, and which will be the measures that will remain in place to protect us against the health disaster.

› The consumer society is being transformed into a security society.

› We are witnessing the return of the state.

› Telemedicine is developing.

› Lawmakers can reduce their attendance in parliament and work more locally to better understand their constituents.

› The virus is taking us closer to e-democracy and mobile voting.

› We will spend more time with our family and less time in restaurants.

› Humanity will have to make its choice between control and freedom, and between nationalism and solidarity with the world.

› What will surely change irreversibly is the attitude towards personal hygiene everywhere, at any time, and for everyone. Each office will be equipped with dozens of disinfectant dispensers, cleaning the workplace will be the responsibility of the worker, and there will be social intolerance of people who do not follow the hygienic requirements.

› Separation, non-communication, and social distance will become a form of solidarity.

› What will remain after the coronavirus quarantine is the requirement for social distance. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it will dramatically change the way people communicate. This is likely to lead to a renaissance of words in communication.

› In the new situation, shared resources of the companies will not be the coffee machine, the canteen or the rest area (popular in IT circles as "table tennis and Playstation"), but cloud re-

sources, software for central management and assignment, as well as the appropriate equipment for work everywhere - laptops, headphones, monitors. Some software companies have been practicing this approach, also known as a "distributed business environment," for years. Now this "distributed" approach will become widespread for all industries - from services through production to agriculture.

› The change in the need to go to common spaces will also change the attitude towards public transport. In practice, expensive infrastructure projects such as the metro, high-speed trains or larger airports will become economically vulnerable. Reducing the flow of people will orient them much more to more compact and pragmatic ways of moving - by car, by bicycle, by motorcycle.

› The ban on gathering in public places will change sports, cultural events and shopping. For sport, this crisis is an exciting cataclysm which, on the one hand, will finally put an end to the absurd rate of increase in capital expenditure and staff in team sports. We will not need more stadiums or even more expensive gladiators.

› Cultural events will also move into a new digital world, in which streamings of theatrical productions will ultimately not be free anymore.

› Mass tourism as we know it, with many people in high-rise hotels using water slides on the sea or lifts in the mountains, will change radically, to the extent that it may never be the same.

› We will not need more specialists, but better specialists.

› As far as new relations among people will be the main challenge, this can lead to a renaissance of humanities

Future risks and security threats as an impact of the pandemic

In the «kingdom» of infectious diseases, a pandemic is the worst case scenario. When an epidemic leaves the borders of a particular country, it becomes a pandemic. About 10,000 years ago, when civilization began to emerge, pandemics became more and more possible. Malaria, tuberculosis, and leprosy first appeared in this period. The more people established connections with each other, crossed borders and broadened their horizons, the easier it became for diseases to spread at breakneck speed.

This health crisis is not the first, and will be not the last in the history of humanity, but it is the first one for most of individual people who have never had to put up with such a challenge in their lives. In the future, however, they will have to do so. That is why it sounds absurd that health crises have not been properly studied up to now.

In my opinion, the next threats may appear in the post-coronavirus age:

› We do not know how long this crisis will continue, but even now it is obvious that the main dilemma to be resolved by the states is the dilemma whether to save human lives or to support economic development. In short, these two purposes can be quite incompatible. The great challenge will be to find a compromise between them.

› Health security, defined as the ability of a nation to secure sufficient, affordable and consistent healthcare supplies for its requirements, should become one of the main vectors of activity for national governments and international organisations. The most developed countries will find it easier to create a 'health security' environment because of their pre-existing infrastructure. The countries that are able to meet the requirements of health security by further developing their own infrastructure could partner with less developed countries to aid their in-house development of secure supply chains.

› One of the greatest threats in the nearest future will be the overlapping of several crises – e.g., the COVID-19 crisis and the refugee crisis; the COVID-19 crisis and a deep economic crisis, etc. This will exhaust the resources of the states and will confront them with the necessity to make different choices

› Another threat has to do with the fact that, concentrating on COVID-19, we forget about other threats, such as terrorism. At the same time, there is information that terrorist groups in the Middle East and other parts of the world re-group and consolidate their forces. I do not exclude the resurgence of a kingdom of new terrorism, unknown up to the moment. It can be directly related to the sabotage of the measures against coronavirus, or it could be totally new.

› The coronavirus entails the increase of hybrid threats to health infrastructure. Even at the time being, several hospitals are afraid this could happen.

› Concentrating on COVID-19, we might forget about other global challenges in the medium term, such as global climate change.

› COVID-19 might make hybrid war more probable, taking into consideration that it is waged in the gray zone, with unidentifiable sources.

› Due to the importance and the dependence of the modern world on IT, governments should focus on cybersecurity and on establishing good habits to foster it.

› On a regional level, the concentration of the EU on its own problems, such as Brexit, might deviate its attention from the global problems as COVID-19 and exclude it from the group of global players.

General recommendations

On a national level:

› Identify the model of development of the pandemic

› Slow down as much as possible the speed of the spread of the pandemic

› Prepare the health system in order to be able to successfully deal with the coronavirus

› Prevent the transformation of the health crisis into a security crisis

› Strictly follow the existing legislation on reaction in crisis situations

› Find the solution to the dilemma between people's heath and economic development

› Update the system of crisis management

› Better implement the strategic communication management in order to increase the confidence of the general public in government decisions

› Fight against fake news.

On a regional level:

› Foster regional cooperation as much as possible in the framework of the EU

› Develop coordinated regional initiatives against the spread of COVID-19

› Implement regional projects that will support economies of the relevant countries.

› Develop skills and tools for regional crisis management

› Fight against fake news.

On the EU level

› Faster reaction to crises like COVID-19

› Better explain what is being done and will be done in order for the citizens to feel the European solidarity and not think they are left alone in the disaster

› Take the needed economic measures in order to support economies of member states to overcome the difficulties related to COVID-19

› Fight against fake news

› Improve health diplomacy.

3

Serbia's Response to
the COVID-19 Pandemic

Serbia's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic officially started in Serbia on March 5th, when the Ministry of Health detected the first patient, a 43 year old Serbian citizen who came back from Hungary. Today's record (June 30th) is as follows: 8,377 tested in the last 24 hours, 276 confirmed cases in the last 24 hours, and 3 deaths in the last 24 hours[17].

In late February when the virus was spreading in nearby Italy, a prominent Serbian doctors stated at a press conference that the new COVID-19 virus was "the most ridiculous virus in the history of mankind", and that women should go shopping in Milan as they are protected by estrogens.[18] The election campaign was underway, as general and local elections were scheduled for April 26th.[19] Then, the situation suddenly changed, and a state of emergency was declared four days before the approval of the March 19th epidemic ordinance.[20] Then, the situation suddenly changed, and a state of emergency was declared four days before the approval of the March 19th epidemic ordinance.[21] All election activities were halted and the elections were postponed for June 21st.

The state of emergency began with the closure of schools, universities, and external borders. It was followed by the suspension of public transport throughout the country, as well as international traffic, and the government introduced a curfew for all citizens from 8 p.m. till 5 a.m. Exceptions were made for those with special permits whose jobs were regarded as necessary. All restaurants, coffee bars, shops, shopping centers, cinemas, theatres and museums were closed as well. Senior citizens aged 65 or older living in urban areas and those aged 70 or older living in villages were not allowed to leave their homes at any time. They were later allowed to visit grocery shops once a week between 3 a.m. and 8 a.m. The curfew was extended several times: first, its duration was from 5 p.m. to 5 a.m, then its weekend duration was extended (from Friday 5 p.m. to Monday 5 a.m.), and the longest curfew of 84 hours was scheduled during the Orthodox Easter holiday on April 19th. The last curfew was declared for the Labour Day (May 1st) holiday. All citizens coming from abroad were requested to remain in self-isolation for 14 days initially, and then for 28 days. Homeoffice measure for many employees and homeschooling for primary and secondary school students were introduced. According to estimates by Serbian high officials, 90-95% of the population acted in line with the government measures. Yet, with more than a month of living under the state of emergency measures, the new "normality" became more and more the source of frustration for many. With patience apparently running thin, calls for reduction of measures were increasing.

By the end of April, the Government had decided to ease the measures, reopening additional shops (besides groceries and pharmacies) and reopening the border with Hungary. Hairdressers, gyms and beauty centers were reopened at the very end of April, under strict protocols for social distancing and disinfection measures. Meanwhile, senior citizens were allowed to go on a one-hour walk every day.

Finally, the state of emergency was lifted on May 7th at the parliamentary session. Public transport

---

17   https://covid19.rs/homepage-english/
18   https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/srbija-51707409
19   http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a574772/Predsed-nik-Vucic-raspisao-parlamentarne-izbore-za-26.-april.html
20   http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/ministarstva/naredba/2020/37/1/reg
21   https://www.paragraf.rs/koronavirus/strucni-komentari/pregled-svih-propisa-donetih-pre-i-posle-proglasenja-vanred-nog-stanja.html

and preschools reopened a few days later, and so did state borders. Some measures have remained until present, namely the obligation to wear masks in indoor facilities and social distancing. The underlying message from the authorities has been that we have to learn to live in the COVID-19 world.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the Ministry of Health has been monitoring the COVID-19 outbreak. It has dedicated a separate website to the issue: https://covid19.rs/homepage-english/, which reports daily on the total number of confirmed cases, cases confirmed in the last 24 hours, deaths, number of persons hospitalised and the total number of tested persons. A part of the Crisis Response Team, composed of medical experts, held daily press conferences during the state of emergency. All COVID-19 related entry restrictions have been lifted for both Serbian and foreign citizens. It is no longer necessary to have a negative PCR test or a special permit to enter Serbia. The Government also abolished self-isolation requirements upon entry. The aforementioned website provides regular information on these measures.

The election campaign resumed immediately, but with fewer public rallies and mass gatherings than before. On June 21st, Serbian citizens went to the polls, and the ruling SNS (Serbian Progressive Party) claimed a landslide victory amidst a boycott by major opposition parties, winning over 60 per cent of votes, or 190 seats in the 250-seat Serbian Parliament[22] in the first national elections in Europe since the COVID-19 pandemic gripped the continent.

The lockdown measures imposed during the state of emergency were under critical scrutiny, raising a number of legal and political issues. Most legal experts agree that declaring a state of

emergency was a violation of the constitutional principle of the rule of law. They think that the Government reacted to the crisis in the only way it knows, which is by tightening control. The highly restrictive response to the COVID-19 pandemic which resembles the one seen in China was probably motivated by the intention to alleviate the pressure on the country's healthcare system. Even though it was faced with the lack of the needed medical equipment at the beginning of the pandemic, Serbia's medical staff demonstrated resilience, efficacy and dedication. The aid which arrived from China, the EU and other countries helped to equip hospitals, pharmacies, laboratories and other medical institutions which were at the frontline during the pandemic.[23]

The COVID-19 pandemic and the related containment measures are taking a heavy toll on the global economy and will certainly affect the Serbian economy as well, leading to a much lower growth than previously projected. International organisations agree in forecasting a recession in 2020 of around -3%, followed by a 6% growth in 2021.[24] The Government has introduced several economic measures and a support package to help both the population and the local economy, consisting of tax policy measures, measures of direct financial aid to the private sector, liquidity measures for the private sector, and direct aid to all Serbian citizens older than 18 by means of a one-off payment of EUR 100, so as to stimulate domestic demand.[25] Almost all sectors are affected by the crises, particularly tourism, the hotel and hospitality industry, transport, and logistics. In order to combat the fallout of the crisis, the Serbian Government has adopted a set of state aid measures and an economic package worth EUR 5.1 billion.

Although some believed the worst of the pandemic was over in Serbia, the infection rate

22 http://rs.n1info.com/Izbori-2020/a612402/Rezultati-izbo-ra-2020-i-reakcije.html

23 https://www.cambridge.org/core/blog/2020/04/21/serbias-re-sponse-to-the-coronavirus-pandemic/

24 https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Serbia/Serbia-af-ter-Covid-19-best-economy-in-Europe-202378

25 https://home.kpmg/rs/en/home/insights/2020/04/econom-ic-measures-announced-by-serbian-government-due-to-cov-id-19-crisis.html

creeps back prompting fear and uncertainty. Hotspots are identified in several towns, and some hospitals, including those in Belgrade which were named COVID-centres, are filling with patients again. Certain medical professionals warn that the country may have resumed normal life too early, easing all initially imposed restrictions, allowing football matches and other sports events, nightclubs and parties. At this stage, it is perhaps too early to predict when the last COVID-19 patient will be registered and recover, but in the meantime, people seem to adapt to the extraordinary circumstances, in Serbia just like almost everywhere else in the world.

Regional cooperation and international support from the EU and NATO and assessment of regional cooperation

Serbia started accession negotiations with the EU in January 2014, and ever since, 18 negotiating chapters have been opened. The European Union is by far the biggest donor, the main investor and the most important trade partner of Serbia,[26] with more than EUR 3.6 billion in grants provided over the past 18 years by means of pre-accession funds. The EU is also where 70 per cent of investments come from, as well as Serbia's partner in almost 2/3 of trade. Serbia is the biggest recipient of EU funds in the Western Balkans. Foreign aid plays a crucial role in the economic response to the pandemic. While various foreign partners have provided assistance in the form of donations and favourable offers of financial aid and equipment, the EU stands out as the principal source of foreign aid to Serbia.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Serbia came into the focus of an international audience when President Aleksandar Vučić spoke about the "steel friendship" between China and Serbia, declaring that only China could help Serbia to fight the pandemic. He added that European solidarity was just "a fairy tale." That happened on the very day when the state of emergency was declared in

Serbia (March 15th), and when EU countries were imposing bans on medical equipment exports to third countries.[27] China was ready to deliver the needed medical supplies extremely quickly. Chinese aid was glorified in Serbian media, whereas a pro-government tabloid placed several billboards with the words "Thank you brother Xi" in the center of Belgrade.

Ten days later, the EU delivered. It urgently granted EUR 7.5 million to Serbia, which was just the beginning of the assistance that followed later during the pandemic.[28] In the last 20 years, the EU's help for the performance of Serbia's health system has been of fundamental significance. It donated over EUR 200 million and approved 250 million loans to Serbia's health system. Numerous hospitals, public health centers, laboratories. and public health institutions were repaired, renovated or built throughout the country. The EU has succeeded in including the Western Balkans in its joint European response by mobilising a crisis relief package to provide the region's health system with resources to contain and treat the pandemic. The fiscal package allocated[29] EUR 410 million in bilateral assistance to the Western

26   http://europa.rs/eu-assistance-to-serbia/?lang=en24 https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Serbia/Serbia-after-Cov

27   Регулативата подоцна беше сменета, со тоа што се дозволи извоз во Западен Балкан: http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=21321

28   http://rs.n1info.com/English/NEWS/a580133/EU-grants-7.5-million-Euro-to-Serbia.html

29   https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/coronavirus_support_wb.pdf

Balkans, of which Serbia receives EUR 93 million relocated from IPA II (Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance). In addition, Serbia has been included in multiple initiatives, such as the EU mechanism for joint procurement of medical supplies, as well as the EU Solidarity Fund.

Serbia has also received aid from Russia,[30] Norway[31], Switzerland[32] and some other European countries, as well as from the United States of America,[33] Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and others.

NATO's assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic has showed that the Alliance can play a positive role in helping member states respond to health emergencies, while the main responsibility for responding to pandemics lies with the individual member states. Through EADRCC (Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center), which is NATO's principal civil emergency response mechanism in the Euro-Atlantic area that deals with natural and man-made disasters, the Alliance is capable of helping member states and partners upon their request. North Macedonia and Montenegro sent requests[34] to EADRCC, seeking protective suits, surgical masks, testing kits, mechanical ventilators and other equipment. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Albania have not yet made any request to the EADRC, although they, too, are entitled to this option.[35] The NATO Mission in Kosovo (KFOR) helped to transport gowns, masks and sanitisers to North and South Mitrovica.[36] Poland distributed 70 tonnes of medical supplies to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia.[37]

The prospects for membership in the EU and NATO have been an important stimulus for the countries of the Western Balkans to take part in various regional initiatives set up by the international donor community. In recent years, however, the awareness that many problems can be addressed effectively only by means of regional cooperation has been growing in the countries of the region. In time of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that there will be no successful economic recovery of the Western Balkans without strong regional cooperation. The Western Balkans is expected to enter a sharp recession in 2020, with the GDP likely to contract between 3 and 11 per cent, according to various international financial estimates. There is no doubt that the economic impact of the pandemic will affect people's health, incomes, education, and jobs.[38] The pandemic also poses a threat to the performance of democratic institutions in the countries of the region and raises certain security concerns. The decision to establish "green corridors", which enabled unimpeded transport of medical equipment and basic foodstuffs throughout the region during the pandemic without congestion at the borders was an excellent example of regional cooperation in an unprecedented crisis. As the region moves from crisis management to recovery and is opening its borders for free movement of people, goods and services, regional cooperation is an important element of returning to "normality."

There is also a political dimension to the regional cooperation in the Western Balkans: it is a key to stability, a precondition for reconciliation and good neighborly relations, and it helps overcoming nationalism and conflicts from the past. The support and the assistance of the EU are vital in this regard. The already difficult economic conditions will be further aggravated, while the perspectives for development and stability will be reduced. As it appears today, the

30 https://politexpert.net/192348-specialisty-iz-rossii-pomo-gayut-izbavlyat-stolicu-serbii-ot-koronavirusa

31 http://rs.n1info.com/English/NEWS/a580037/Norway-do-nates-millions-to-Serbia-to-battle-coronavirus-pandemic.html

32 https://betabriefing.com/archive/news/10470-swiss-embassy-on-measures-to-help-serbia-fight-covid-19

33 https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/153704/gratitude-to-unit-ed-states-on-announced-assistance-in-medical-supplies.php

34 https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/3/pdf/20200330-EADRCC-2020-70-rfa_nom.pdf

https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/3/pdf/200327-eadrcc-montenegro-covid19-request.pdf

35 https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/04/02/na-to-and-eadrcc-help-western-balkans-countries-counter-cov-id-19-pandemic/

36 https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_174979.htm?select-edLocale=en

37 https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_176082.htm

38 https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/eca/publication/west-ern-balkans-regular-economic-report

countries of the region will only be able to face the challenges ahead as an integral part of a wider socio-economic and political framework. Starting accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania, together with the revised enlargement methodology and the intention of the new European Commission to pursue a geopolitical role in its immediate neighborhood, gives reasonable hope to the people in the Western Balkans that their European future is closer than it was only a year ago. From their part, the countries should undergo all necessary reforms, resolve the remaining bilateral issues, and embrace the benefits of regional initiatives, the so-called Mini-Schengen being one of them.

Functioning of the crisis management system and the state security system

Health risks, as we can see now in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, are recognised as an increasingly serious challenge to both collective and national security. Increased population mobility, tourism and trade have left national healthcare systems faced with the danger of increasing health threats, which can now spread and escalate rapidly. The COVID-19 pandemic best illustrates the reality of this threat for which national borders do not exist and which represents and increasingly serious risk for the entire world.[39] The Global Health Security Index[40] issued in October 2019 by the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security assessed 195 countries regarding their readiness to deal with the threat of an epidemic or pandemic

According to the study, no country or health system worldwide was fully prepared for a global catastrophic event. Serbia reached an index score of 52.3 and came in 41st of the 195 countries assessed.[41] The 33 recommendations in the study include a call on the UN Secretary-General to organise a high level summit on countering biological threats by 2021, focusing on financing and emergency response.

The security sector played an important role during the state of emergency and the fight against the COVID 19-pandemic. On March 13th, the Serbian government formed the COVID-19 Crisis Response Team,[42] consisting of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Health, the Director of the Health Insurance Fund, directors of the relevant institutes and clinics, as well as representatives of other relevant state bodies. Co-chairs of the Crisis Response Team are the President of the Republic, the Minister of Finance, the President of the Chamber of Commerce and the Governor of the National Bank. Two days later, on March 15th, the state of emergency was declared. The State President was acting in line with legal provisions which allow him to declare a state of emergency in the absence of a sitting parliament. During the time the state of emergency was in force (until May 6th), 44 decrees with legal force were issued by the Government,[43] signed by both the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister. All government decrees were retroactively adopted by the Serbian Parliament at its plenary session held on April 28th.

On March 18th, for the first time in over a decade, Serbia's military was deployed at the borders in order to assist in curbing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2007, the border control had been handed over to the police, which was in line with the requests concerning visa-free travel

39   https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5149467/
40   https://www.ghsindex.org/
41   https://www.ghsindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Serbia.pdf

42   https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/151314/covid-19-crisis-response-team-formed.php
43   https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/155265/serbia-effective-in-fighting-pandemic.php

to the EU. Serbia's military was also engaged in the control of public facilities, hospitals treating the COVID-19 patients, as well as at bus and railway stations, airports, post offices, in refugee and asylum centers and similar places. Orders on military engagement in providing support to the civilian authorities during the time of the pandemic were issued by the Defense Minister and the Chief of Staff,[44] however, no decision on the involvement of the military during the pandemic has been published.

In times of a state of emergency, countries often take steps that human rights activists see as curtailing civil liberties, such as increased surveillance, curfews and travel restrictions, as well as limited freedom of expression. Serbia is not an exception in this regard. In a regular situation, the policy measures would have been subject to scrutiny by the parliament and the judiciary, but the state of emergency effectively neutralised the separation of powers and checks and balances. The threat of the pandemic is pushing people to give away their rights, but this should be done for a limited time only, that is, the state of emergency has to have an expiry date. In Serbia, it expired on May 7th.

Hybrid threats, fake news and the influence of new state actors in dealing with the pandemic

When Serbia appealed for international assistance in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic in the first half of March, China was more than happy to respond immediately. By that time, it had already shipped masks and other medical equipment to the pandemic-stricken Italy and many other European countries, including those in the Western Balkans. It is not a secret that China sees the Balkans as a shortcut to a broader European market, with Serbia as the geographic and strategic center of the region. In the weeks that followed, we witnessed what many analysts called "corona diplomacy", "mask diplomacy", or a battle for the hearts and minds of the Serbian people led by China, EU, Russia and other state actors. The prevailing official narrative was initially much in favour of China's assistance, whereasy the EU was portrayed as "slow and clumsy." Stories from Italy, with its citizens praising China and bashing EU, were widely publicised in Serbia's pro-government media[45]. In addition, China was presented as superior in fighting the pandemic, compared to the EU and the US, despite its attempts to conceal information about the spread of the virus and to incorrectly attribute the origin of the virus to other countries. When a group of six Chinese doctors arrived in Serbia,[46] the country started to change its pandemic strategy, which included setting up field hospitals, stepping up testing, and introducing longer curfews. The failure to abide by social distancing guidelines and curfews became punishable by 3 to 12 years in prison and by fines of up to EUR 1,200. Chinese state-owned media widely shared videos of Serbia praising China and welcoming Chinese aid and doctors.[47] The Digital Forensic Centre reported[48] that pro-government "bot" accounts on twitter admired the Sino-Serbian friendship and Chinese assistance - while

44   http://www.mod.gov.rs/lat/arhiva/kat/17/page/3
45   http://informer.rs/svet/vesti/502956/foto-izdali-prijatelji-italijani-besu-masovno-skidaju-zastavu-necete-verovati-ciju-podizu
46   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVzbD3NqMv8

47   Ibid
48   https://dfcme.me/en/dfc-finds-out-a-botnet-arrived-in-serbia-along-with-coronavirus/
       https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_777

criticizing the lack of EU solidarity - in more than 21.000 posts between March 9th and April 9th.

To date, there is no information on the quantity or the content of the Chinese aid. Whether it was donated or Serbia paid for it is yet to be disclosed to the public, too.

Although Russia grappled with an outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic at home, it sent military medics and disinfection equipment to Serbia.[49] However, the general impression is that it did not receive the same attention as China. Serbia appealed for Russia's aid in the beginning of April, few weeks after it introduced the state of emergency, and the first Russian cargo planes carrying assistance arrived soon afterwards. The Serbian-Russian Humanitarian Centre based in Niš, also donated medical gear to the Serbian Ministry of Interior. This Centre was established in 2012, in line with the Agreement on Cooperation between Serbian and Russian Governments. Russian officials have ever since exerted pressure on Serbian authorities to provide the Centre and its staff with a diplomatic status, allegedly for "tax reliefs and to facilitate the operation of the Centre." To date, Serbian authorities have not granted diplomatic status to the Serbian-Russian Humanitarian Centre.

The usual praise of Russia and President Putin by pro-government media was not as loud as expected, while the enthusiasm for Chinese aid was much more pronounced. The lack of Russian visibility during the pandemic was noticed by many analysts[50]. However, it would be premature to conclude that Russian influence in Serbia is being undermined during the pandemic. The backbone of this partnership is the Kosovo

issue, that is, Russia's veto in the UN Security Council. Because of that, Serbia has not aligned its foreign policy with the common foreign policy of the European Union, as it has not imposed restrictive measures against Russia, which the EU introduced in March 2014 in response to the illegal annexation of Crimea and the deliberate destabilization of the Ukraine. In fact, out of four candidate countries, Serbia's foreign policy is least aligned with the EU's foreign policy (57 per cent), and therefore, in the accession negotiations, Chapter 31 can still not be opened.[51]

Since the EU stepped in with its robust aid package[52] of EUR 3.3 billion for the Western Balkans, confirming its strong solidarity with the region, the narrative in Serbia has changed. The EU's approach to "corona diplomacy", that is, financial and in-kind assistance, promotion of the visibility of its donations, and strong messaging on partnership and solidarity, has borne fruits.

At the virtual EU-Western Balkans Summit held in Zagreb on May 6th, the European perspective of the region was reaffirmed. It was stated in the Zagreb declaration[53] that:

"We will reinforce our cooperation on addressing disinformation and other hybrid activities originating in particular from third-state actors seeking to undermine the European perspective of the region. Closer collaboration is needed in resilience-building and cyber security. Strategic communication is essential in this regard."

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven that without a clear EU perspective, the resilience of the Western Balkan countries to hybrid activities, disinformation, and fabricated news coming from

49   https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/04/03/russia-sends-military-coronavirus-aid-to-serbia-a69864

50   https://medium.com/@lseideas/from-russia-with-love-serbias-lukewarm-reception-of-russian-aid-and-its-geopolitical-implications-a911b3ec09a7

51   https://www.isac-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ISAC-CFSP-Analysis-2019-1.pdf

52   https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_777

53   https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43776/zagreb-declaration-en-06052020.pdf

other state actors will remain weak, and that the fight against them is far more complicated than it first appeared. The lack of analytical capacities in the individual countries could be compensated to some extent by intensifying regional cooperation of the police and other institutions, but the support of the EU is vital in this regard.

Short-term, the fastest and most efficient method to counteract anti-Western propaganda is to generate balanced and quality based media content. A combination of expertise and efforts,

investing in the creation of new media hubs, is a much needed endeavor. One of the reasons why anti-Western propaganda is successful is the fact that citizens often find it difficult to discern between real and fake news. The only possible compass in this direction is media literacy: teaching people to read and understand news, to check and verify before believing. This is extremely important for young generations, as the online environment is most loaded with fake news, and its dissemination is viral.

Public security policies and proposals for change

Serbia's National Security Strategy was adopted by the National Assembly at the session held on 27th December 2019, together with the National Defense Strategy. These two documents present the "ID card" of Serbia's security and foreign policy, although there is no separate strategy on foreign policy. The National Security Strategy is defined as "the highest strategic document whose implementation protects the national values and interests of the Republic of Serbia from the challenges, risks and threats to security in different areas of social life".[54] Its main priorities are "preservation of sovereignty and territorial integrity, military neutrality, care for the Serbian people outside the borders of the Republic of Serbia, European integration, and an effective rule of law".[55]

Military neutrality was finally anchored in the National Security Strategy, since it has been promoted as an official policy since 2007. Military neutrality was introduced with the Resolution

of the National Assembly of Serbia on the Protection of Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity and the Constitutional Order of the Republic of Serbia,[56] adopted on December 26th2007. Article 6 of the Resolution stipulates that the National Assembly "decides to declare military neutrality of the Republic of Serbia in relation to the existing military alliances until a possible referendum is called upon to reach a final decision on the matter."[57] It should be born in mind that the Resolution was adopted on the eve of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in February 2008, and it was a reaction to NATO's role in the events that preceded Kosovo's decision to break away from Serbia. Neither Serbia's Constitution nor any other national document recognize military neutrality, and it is not incorporated in any international or bilateral document either.

The National Security Strategy did not bring any dramatic change to Serbia's relations with NATO or the Collective Security Treaty Organisation

---

54 http://www.mod.gov.rs/multimedia/file/staticki_sadrzaj/doku-menta/strategije/2019/Strategy%20of%20National%20Securi-ty%20od%20the%20Republic%20of%20Serbia.pdf

55 Ibid.

56 https://www.srbija.gov.rs/kosovo-metohija/en/42050

57 Ibid.

(CSTO),[58] which is led by the Russian Federation, but Serbia rather continued its opportunistic policy and balancing between the two. The country has been accorded observer status in the Parliamentary Assembly of CSTO in 2013. Support for Serbia's accession to NATO among the population varies between 7 and 11 per cent, according to several studies, whereas in 2003, just four years after the NATO bombing, it was at 30 per cent. In the same year, support for the country's EU membership was around 70 per cent, while according to the latest poll by the Ministry of European Integration, it was at 54 per cent[59]. Serbia carried out 17 military exercises in 2019: four with Russia and 13 with NATO[60].

The phrasing used in the National Defense Strategy[61] has attracted attention, as relations with NATO are described as an interest, whereas relations with the CSTO are an explicit decision: "Serbia intends in the common interest to enhance political dialogue and practical cooperation with NATO", adding that "the determination of Serbia is to extend and enhance cooperation with the Collective Security Treaty Organization as well as its member states." In practice, balancing opposing strategic directions means that Serbia has to rely on its own capabilities and strengths, as stipulated in the Strategy, which stipulates a significantly increased defense budget. It was by one-third higher in 2019 than in the year before, which proves the thesis that military neutrality is a costly endeavor.

Serbian civil society and think-tanks, including the Centre for Foreign Policy, had many objections and comments on the National Security Strategy,[62] нstating that the document is devoted to issues related to Kosovo, which is treated

as the main security challenge. Moreover, the role of the President of the Republic is evidently strengthened, as he "unites and directs the functioning of the national security system", in addition to his constitutional role as military commander-in-chief and as the legally prescribed Chair of the National Security Council. The conclusions also stipulate "that a qualitative content analysis of national security strategies has shown a lack of methodological approach, due to the drafting process of the most important strategic document, for the determination of national interests is not based on empirical research and arguments. For example, there has not been any public opinion research or poll conducted by the state that shows the citizens' perception of security , or public debate related to defining national interest".[63]

The marginalization of corruption as a threat to national security is one of the serious weaknesses of the new Strategy. In the former Strategy, adopted in 2009, corruption had an important position, taking into account the consequences of systemic corruption in the work of institutions, the implementation of reforms, economic development, investments, etc. For the creators of the new Strategy, this problem seems to be sidelined as a threat.

The nature of the security challenges, risks, and threats in the new National Security Strategy has hardly changed at all, compared to the previous Strategy. Armed aggression, the unlawful secession of Kosovo, separatist aspirations, armed insurgency and terrorism are described as the top five threats to the national security of the Republic of Serbia. Those challenges, risks and threats are the result of an analysis of the current

58   CSTO – Collective Securty Treaty Organization, ОДКБ - Организација на Догорот за колективна безбедност, (заб. прев.)
59   https://www.mei.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_doku-menta/istrazivanja_javnog_mnjenja/opinion_pool_dec_19.pdf
60   www.balkansec.net

61   http://www.mod.gov.rs/multimedia/file/staticki_sadrzaj/doku-menta/strategije/2019/Strategy%20of%20Defence%20of%20the%20Republic%20of%20Serbia.pdf
62   https://en.bfpe.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/06/COMMENTS-ON-DRAFT-NATIONAL-SECURITY-AND-DEFENSE-STRATEGIES-National-convention-on-the-EU.pdf
63   Ibid.

strategic and geopolitical environment, as stated in the Introduction to the current Strategy. It is clearly and explicitly emphasised that «the basic security threat is the unlawfully and unilaterally proclaimed independence of Kosovo», while other dangers are classified as «other challenges and risks».[64]

What is the national interest of the Republic of Serbia? The new strategic document explicitly and unequivocally states that national interests represent a «lasting need and aspiration of the Republic and its citizens», which is based on "universal and national values, on the Constitution and heritage of the Serbian people, but also of all other citizens living in Serbia". The Strategy lists the following national interests of the Republic of Serbia: preserving sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity; maintaining internal stability and security; the preservation of the Serb people

and national minorities and their cultural, religious and historical identity; maintaining peace and stability in the region and the world; European integration and membership in the European Union; economic development and overall prosperity.

As already mentioned, Serbia has no foreign policy strategy. Therefore, the Centre for Foreign Policy has proposed a *New Foreign Policy Initiative* as a basis for drafting the country's foreign policy strategy. In brief, the initiative aims to initiate a debate on Serbia's foreign policy and to instigate a possible consensus on key foreign policy priorities, as well as to offer definitions to Serbia's international identity, with constructive and inclusive proposals and suggestions. With the shifting foreign policy priorities, both the citizens and the international partners cannot always recognise what Serbian officials advocate.

Future security risks and threats as an impact of the pandemic

By March, the COVID-19 outbreak in China had turned into a worldwide pandemic. Serbia has been affected as well, together with other countries in the Western Balkans. No end to the pandemic is in sight, as new hotspots or epicenters are discovered almost every week, and all previous medical forecasts by the government's Crisis Response Team have proven wrong. We are now experiencing the so-called "second peak of the first wave" of the virus spread, anticipating the second wave to arrive in autumn. Following the cancellation of all restrictive measures, apart from mandatory mask-wearing in indoor public areas and on public transport, it appears that the

health risks associated with the virus will remain the biggest threat to the entire population in the future. The COVID-19 virus represents the most serious unconventional hazard and an endurance test for national security systems everywhere. For the time being, the virus is a global superpower.

Along with public health, economic repercussions of the pandemic are also a matter of concern. Financial security and employment security concerns are paramount in this distraught for the population and government alike. Experts across the world estimate that we are heading towards the worst economic crisis since the 1929 Great

---

64   https://www.ceas-serbia.org/images/publikacije/Kosovo_First_
      WEB.pdf

Depression. According to the World Economic Outlook Report conducted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF),[65] By March, the COVID-19 outbreak in China had turned into a worldwide pandemic. Serbia has been affected as well, together with other countries in the Western Balkans. No end to the pandemic is in sight, as new hotspots or epicenters are discovered almost every week, and all previous medical forecasts by the government's Crisis Response Team have proven wrong. We are now experiencing the so-called "second peak of the first wave" of the virus spread, anticipating the second wave to arrive in autumn. Following the cancellation of all restrictive measures, apart from mandatory mask-wearing in indoor public areas and on public transport, it appears that the health risks associated with the virus will remain the biggest threat to the entire population in the future. The COVID-19 virus represents the most serious unconventional hazard and an endurance test for national security systems everywhere. For the time being, the virus is a global superpower.

Along with public health, economic repercussions of the pandemic are also a matter of concern. Financial security and employment security concerns are paramount in this distraught for the population and government alike. Experts across the world estimate that we are heading towards the worst economic crisis since the 1929 Great Depression. According to the World Economic Outlook Report conducted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF),[66] Present and future economic trends in Serbia depend on the developments in the EU as the largest trade partner and the largest investor. The faster the EU economy recovers from the lockdown, the faster the Serbian economy will find its way out of the recession.

Serbia applied for EU membership in 2009, and was granted candidate status in 2012. Accession talks were started in 2014, after the breakthrough "Brussels Agreements" with Kosovo were reached. Serbia has so far opened 18 negotiation chapters, and the slow pace of the integration process could be attributed to the lack of progress in the process of normalisation with Kosovo, as well as in the area of rule of law and constitutional reform that should strengthen the independence of the judiciary, democracy, freedom of expression, freedom of the media, the fight against corruption and organised crime, etc., as stated in the consecutive European Commission's reports. Questioning some of the EU's core values, such as solidarity, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, has proved to be harmful to the EU's image in the country, and it opens the door to external influences. Given the long time frame for EU membership and the current impasse over issues like Kosovo and Serbia's potential NATO membership, Serbia's leadership currently enjoys the luxury of simultaneously deepening ties with both the EU as well as China and Russia.

As stated before, China is waging a social media campaign to repair its own image and to convince the rest of the world that its system can both contain the virus and offer assistance to other countries. According to the latest report of the European External Action Service (EEAS),[67] China and Russia continue to use the global COVID-19 crisis to spread fake news and other disinformation online so as to undermine the European Union and its values. As for Serbia, it will continue to foster close cooperation with China and Russia, along with its proclaimed foreign policy priority, European integration. Russia's unequivocal support for Serbia with regard to the Kosovo issue is greatly appreciated in Serbia's public, by almost all political parties,

---

65 https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO
66 https://www.propisi.net/program-mera-za-pomoc-privredi-srbije-pogodjenoj-posledicama-epidemije-korona-virus-covid-19/

67 https://euvsdisinfo.eu/eeas-special-report-update-short-assessment-of-narratives-and-disinformation-around-the-covid-19-pandemic/

whereas Russia's positive image is enforced by its constant and very favorable depiction in Serbian media. However, in economic terms, things are completely different: Serbia exports more to Bosnia and Herzegovina than to Russia, and before the introduction of tariffs, it exported to Kosovo almost half of its total exports to Russia. Similarly, China has also supported Serbia over Kosovo, and thus it appears as a trustworthy and reliable partner. The Chinese government considers the Balkans a central node in its long-term strategy to speed up East-West trade and to ensure greater access to the western European market. This new partnership between China and Serbia does not stop at economic co-operation. It also includes close political partnership and cooperation between ruling political parties.

Serbia's EU enlargement perspective is directly tied to a normalisation of relations with Kosovo. The prevalence and over-saturation with the Kosovo issue in the Serbian public discourse has affected political, social, and economic dynamics. The implementation of the "First agreement on governing principles of normalisation of relations" (signed in April 2013) [68] was hindered due to differences in its interpretation both in Belgrade and in Pristina. The formal discussion on the normalisation of relations has been put on hold since November 2018, when Kosovo introduced 100% import tariffs on goods from Serbia. Whether the agreement can be reached this year, as envisaged by some international stakeholders, largely depends on the willingness of both sides to re-engage in the dialogue in the format already designed by the EU, with a strong backing from the US. The Kosovo epic is still the most important Serbian myth, and any notion of the resolution which does not entail Serbian sovereignty is regarded as national treason, as opposed to a more moderate attitude and a more conciliatory policy which is expected to finally become predominant in Serbia'spublic discourse.

Serbia's relations with its neighbouring countries

should be viewed in the context of the EU integration process, important aspects of which are regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations. Historical legacy and conflicts from the '90s burden Serbia's relations with the former Yugoslav Republics Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, whereas relations with Montenegro and North Macedonia bear different issues. The story of neighbourly relations could itself fill a whole study (or rather a book), but it should be said here that the resolution of all pending issues requires strong commitment from all sides. The EU's insistence on regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations could contribute to the reduction of historical animosities, and fostering economic ties and connectivity should also pave the road towards a better understanding and genuine cooperation in many areas.

The issue of immigration, so central to the *Identitarian* narrative in Western Europe, remains a fairly distant concept to Serbia, in which very few of the migrants and refugees reaching Europe wish to stay for very long. Yet, the tolerance towards migrants has been decreasing, particularly in towns which accommodate collective centers and in border areas with EU countries. A majority of the population is still **benevolent** towards migrants, but a radicalised minority uses fake news as a tool to raise panic and to disturb the population. Behind them stand politicians who mobilise their electorates in the same way as their counterparts in Western Europe do, which was exactly the case in the latest election campaign (elections were held on 21st June), when some minor political parties tried to blame the migrants for the malaise during the lockdown

Corruption, cross-border organised crime, drug trafficking, human trafficking, organised immigration crime, and cyber crime are assessed as future threats as well. Successfully combating them requires strong national, regional and international cooperation.

---

68   https://www.srbija.gov.rs/cinjenice/en/120394

Recommendations

› The COVID-19 pandemic requires a broader vision of national security and a thorough analysis of additional threats to state and human security, as the health risks associated with the virus will remain the biggest security threat for the entire population.

› Health threats require responses from a broad array of actors within and outside the security sector. The ultimate goal should be to reach a domestic consensus on the pressing issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic and its immediate consequences for the entire society.

› The formation of the Crisis Response Team was an important and necessary step in managing the crises the pandemic produced, but the inclusion of various professional, public, political and other groups into the process is mandatory in the nearest future. Such a participatory approach boosts public confidence in national security policy as a whole.

› The Covid-19 pandemic also proves that regional and international cooperation must be by all means enhanced by open communication, mutual trust and common objectives. Greater transparency of data and shared information regarding the virus facts and figures, as well as measures undertaken, is the only way to successfully combat the pandemic and its repercussions.

› Raising public awareness about hybrid activities, disinformation and fabricated news coming from other state actors is by all means necessary, as it proves to be detrimental to the support of European integration and the values of the European Union. Investing in new media hubs to counteract the hyper production of fake news and false truths, particularly in the online environment, should be supported by both the state and the international donor community.

› A coherent foreign policy strategy that aims to replace the present ambivalent practice, requires an open debate which would lead to a possible consensus on key foreign policy priorities, as well as a definitions of Serbia's international identity, is needed in the nearest future. It should include a clear orientation towards the West, normalisation of relations with Kosovo, regional cooperation, and good neighbourly relations. The regional dimension of the foreign policy strategy has to be emphasised, fostering the economic ties and connectivity in all spheres.

Conclusion

The sheer magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic with its economic and political repercussions shows that there is no country which can simply resort to the usual mode of piecemeal and technocratic crisis management. At the onset of the pandemic, Serbia's officials declared a state of emergency that lasted from March 15th to May 7th, 2020. Like in most countries affected, and in an attempt to contain the virus and to protect the population and the health system, numerous restrictive measures were imposed, first gradually, followed by a complete lockdown.

On March 13th, the Serbian Government formed the COVID-19 Crisis Response Team, consisting of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Health, the Director of the Health Insurance Fund, directors of the relevant institutes and clinics, as well as representatives of other relevant state bodies. Co-chairs of the Crisis Response Team the President of the Republic, the Minister of Finance, the President of the Chamber of Commerce, and the Governor of the National Bank. An exit strategy was introduced fast: all COVID-19 related entry restrictions were lifted both for

Serbian and foreign citizens; general elections were held on 21st June; shops, restaurants, hairdressers reopened quickly; all events and gatherings were allowed again, including football matches. The highly restrictive response to the COVID-19 pandemic which resembles the one seen in China was probably motivated by the intention to alleviate the pressure on the country's healthcare system. At this moment, it is perhaps too early to predict when the last COVID-19 patient will be registered and recover, but in the meantime, people seem to adapt to the extraordinary circumstances. The underlying message from the authorities is that we have to learn to live in the COVID-19 world. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Serbia came into the focus of an international audience with its "steel friendship" with China, while the EU was bashed for the alleged lack of solidarity. China was ready to deliver the needed medical supplies extremely quickly, and the EU followed soon afterwards. At the end of the day, the volume and the content of the Chinese aid is yet to be disclosed to the public, whereas the EU designated EUR 93 million, relocated from IPA II (Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance). In addition, Serbia has been included in multiple initiatives, such as the EU mechanism for joint procurement of medical supplies, as well as the EU Solidarity Fund. Serbia also received assistance from Russia, Norway, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, the US, and several other countries. During the pandemic, Serbia has not yet made an request to the EADRC, although it is entitled to this option. It is clear that there will be no successful economic recovery of the Western Balkans without strong regional cooperation. The region is expected to enter a sharp recession in 2020, with GDP likely to contract between 3 and 11 per cent, according to various international financial estimates. There is no doubt that the economic impact of the pandemic will affect people's health, incomes, education, and jobs. The pandemic also poses a threat to the functioning of democratic institutions in the countries of the region and raises certain security concerns. The decision to establish "green corridors", allowing unimpeded transport of medical equipment and basic foodstuffs throughout the region during the pandemic, without congestion at borders, was an excellent example of regional cooperation in an unprecedented crisis. As the region moves from crisis management to recovery, opening borders for the free movement of people, goods and services, regional cooperation is an important element of going back to "normality." The COVID-19 pandemic has proven that without a clear EU perspective, the resilience of the Western Balkan countries to hybrid activities, disinformation and fabricated news coming from other state actors will remain weak, and that the fight against them is far more complicated than it appeared to be at first. The lack of analytical capacities within individual countries could be compensated to some extent by intensified regional cooperation of the police and other institutions, however EU support is vital in this regard. In assessing future security risks and threats, public health and economic repercussion of the pandemic should be matters of highest concern, together with the so-called familiar threats, such as corruption, cross border organised crime, drug trafficking, human trafficking, organised immigration crime, cyber crime, etc. For Serbia, future challenges also include a normalisation of relations with Kosovo, good relations with the neighbouring countries, the pace of the European integration process, and the ambivalent foreign policy. The choices that Serbia will make in the months ahead will likely determine its trajectory and the need to have the European imperative at heart.

References

1. Institute for Public Health, Latest information about COVID-19 in the Republic of Serbia: https://covid19.rs/homepage-english/

2. BBC News na srpskom: *Korona virus: alkohol, smrtnost, šoping u Italiji i biološki rat – koliko su tačne izjave zvaničnika,* 3.mart 2020. https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/srbija-51707409

3. N1 Beograd: *Predsednik Vučić raspisao izbore za 26.april, 4.mart 2020.*
http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a574772/Predsednik-Vucic-raspisao-parlamentarne-izbore-za-26.-april.html
4. Službeni glasnik RS broj 37 od 19.marta 2020: *Naredba o proglašenju epidemije zarazne bolesti COVID-19:37/2020-8*
https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/ministarstva/naredba/2020/37/1/reg

5. Pregled propisa donetih neposredno pre i posle proglašenja vanrednog stanja u Republici Srbiji usled bolesti COVID-19 izazvane virusom SARS-COV-2 https://www.paragraf.rs/koronavirus/strucni-komentari/pregled-svih-propisa-donetih-pre-i-posle-proglasenja-vanrednog-stanja.html

6.N1 Beograd: *Rezultati izbora i reakcije,* 21.6.2020 http://rs.n1info.com/Izbori-2020/a612402/Rezultati-izbora-2020-i-reakcije.html

7.Tamara Popic: *Serbia's Response to the Corona Virus Pandemic-Now Updated,* Cambridge Core Blog, last update 15/05/20 https://www.cambridge.org/core/blog/2020/04/21/serbias-response-to-the-coronavirus-pandemic/

8. Giovani Vale: Serbia after Covid 19: "*Best economy in Europe?"* in Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso, 17/06/2020
https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Serbia/Serbia-after-Covid-19-best-economy-in-Europe-202378

9. KPMG: *Economic Measures Announced by Serbian Government due to Covid-19 Crisis,* 2.April 2020. https://home.kpmg/rs/en/home/insights/2020/04/economic-measures-announced-by-serbian-government-due-to-covid-19-crisis.html

10. The Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia:
EU ASSISTANCE TO SERBIA http://europa.rs/eu-assistance-to-serbia/?lang=en

11. European Commission News Archive:
Commission Moves to Ensure Supply of Personal Protective Equipment in the European Union, 15 March 2020
http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=2122&title=Commission-moves-to-ensure-supply-of-personal-protective-equipment-in-the-European-Union

12. N1 Beograd: *EU urgently grants EUR 7,5 mil to Serbia for Fighting coronavirus, China sends aid,* 20.03.2020.
http://rs.n1info.com/English/NEWS/a580133/EU-grants-7.5-million-Euro-to-Serbia.html

13. European Commission: *EU Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic in the Western Balkans* https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/coronavirus_support_wb.pdf

14. Источник: *Специалисты из России помогают избавлять столицу Сербии от коронавируса* https://politexpert.net/192348-specialisty-iz-rossii-pomogayut-izbavlyat-stolicu-serbii-ot-koronavirusa

15. N1 Beograd: *Norway donates millions to Serbia to battle coronavirus pandemic,* 20.03.2020. http://rs.n1info.com/English/NEWS/a580037/Norway-donates-millions-to-Serbia-to-battle-coronavirus-pandemic.html

16. BETA Briefing: *Swiss Embassy on measures to help Serbia fight Covid-19,* 09.04.20. https://betabriefing.com/archive/news/10470-swiss-embassy-on-measures-to-help-serbia-fight-covid-19

17. The Government of the Republic of Serbia: *Gratitude to the United States on Announced Assistance in Medical Supplies,* 8 April 2020 https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/153704/gratitude-to-united-states-on-announced-assistance-in-medical-supplies.php

18. NATO EADRCC: *Request for International Assistance Covid-19,* 30 March 2020, Republic of North Macedonia https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/3/pdf/20200330-EADRCC-2020-70-rfa_nom.pdf

19. NATO EADRCC: *Request for International Assistance Covid-19,* 27 March 2020, Republic of Montenegro https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/3/pdf/200327-eadrcc-montenegro-covid19-request.pdf

20. European Western Balkans: *NATO and EADRCC help Western Balkans countries counter Covid-19 pandemic,* 02.04.2020. https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/04/02/nato-and-eadrcc-help-western-balkans-countries-counter-covid-19-pandemic/

21. NATO News: *Coronavirus response: KFOR delivers personal protective equipment to North and South Mitrovica,* 07 April 2020 https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_174979.htm?selectedLocale=en

22. NATO News: *Poland distributes medical aid across the Western Balkans,* 29 May 2020 https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_176082.htm

23. The World Bank: *Western Balkans Regular Economic Report Spring 2020* https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/eca/publication/western-balkans-regular-economic-report

24. Vanja Rokvic, Zoran Jeftic and Vladimir Ajzenhamer: Public Health in Serbia through the Lens of Security: A Review Article, published in Iranian Journal of Public Health, September 2016, 1136-1145 https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5149467/

25. Global Health Security Index – Serbia: https://www.ghsindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Serbia.pdf

26. The Government of the Republic of Serbia: *COVID-19 Crisis Response Team Formed,* 13 March 2020 https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/151314/covid-19-crisis-response-team-formed.php

27. The Government of the Republic of Serbia: *Serbia effective in fighting pandemic,* 28 April 2020 https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/155265/serbia-effective-in-fighting-pandemic.php

28. Informer: *Izdali ih prijatelji! Italijani u besu masovno skidaju EU zastavu, nećete verovati čiju podižu,* 24.03.2020. http://informer.rs/svet/vesti/502956/foto-izdali-prijatelji-italijani-besu-masovno-skidaju-zastavu-necete-verovati-ciju-podizu

29. Digital Forensic Center (DFC) Analysis: *A Bot Network Arrived in Serbia Along With Coronavirus* https://dfcme.me/en/dfc-finds-out-a-botnet-arrived-in-serbia-along-with-coronavirus/

30. European Commission, Press Release: *Western Balkans' leaders meeting: EU reinforces support to address COVID-19 crisis and outlines proposal for post-pandemic recovery,* 29 April 2020 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_777

31. The Moscow Times: *Russia Sends Military Coronavirus Aid to Serbia,* April 3, 2020 https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/04/03/russia-sends-military-coronavirus-aid-to-serbia-a69864

32. Vuk Vuksanovic: *From Russia With Love? Serbia's Lukewarm Reception of Russian Aid and Its Geopolitical Implications, LSE IDEAS,* June 16, 2020 https://medium.com/@lseideas/from-russia-with-

love-serbias-lukewarm-reception-of-russian-aid-and-its-geopolitical-implications-a911b3ec09a7

33. International and Security Affairs Center (ISAC): *An analysis of Serbia's alignment with the European Union's foreign policy declarations and measures in 2019*
https://www.isac-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ISAC-CFSP-Analysis-2019-1.pdf

34. Zagreb Declaration, 6 May 2020: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43776/zagreb-declaration-en-06052020.pdf

35. Strategy of National Security of the Republic of Serbia
http://www.mod.gov.rs/multimedia/file/staticki_sadrzaj/dokumenta/strategije/2019/Strategy%20of%20National%20Security%20od%20the%20Republic%20of%20Serbia.pdf

36. The Government of the Republic of Serbia: Resolution of the National Assembly on the protection of sovereignty, territorial integrity and constitutional order of the Republic of Serbia
https://www.srbija.gov.rs/kosovo-metohija/en/42050

37. Ministry of European Integration: *European Orientation of Serbian Citizens, Public Opinion Poll* (December 2019)
https://www.mei.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_dokumenta/istrazivanja_javnog_mnjenja/opinion_pool_dec_19.pdf

38. Balkanska bezbednosna mreža: https://www.balkansec.net/

39. Strategy of Defense of the Republic of Serbia
http://www.mod.gov.rs/multimedia/file/staticki_sadrzaj/dokumenta/strategije/2019/Strategy%20of%20Defence%20of%20the%20Republic%20of%20Serbia.pdf

40. National Convention of the EU, Working Groups for Chapters 30 and 31, Comments on draft National Security and Defense Strategies
https://en.bfpe.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/06/COMMENTS-ON-DRAFT-NATIONAL-SECURITY-AND-DEFENSE-STRATEGIES-National-convention-on-the-EU.pdf

41. Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies CEAS: *Kosovo First. Analysis of the context of the adoption process and analysis of the draft National Security Strategy of Serbia,* September 2018
https://www.ceas-serbia.org/images/publikacije/Kosovo_First_WEB.pdf

42. International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Reports
https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO

43. Program ekonomskih mera za podršku privredi Srbije pogođenoj posledicama epidemije (korona virus – COVID-19)
https://www.propisi.net/program-mera-za-pomoc-privredi-srbije-pogodjenoj-posledicama-epidemije-korona-virus-covid-19/

44. EU vs DiSiNFO: *EEAS Special Report Update: Short Assessment of Narratives and Disinformation Around the COVID-19 Pandemic,* April 01, 2020
https://euvsdisinfo.eu/eeas-special-report-update-short-assessment-of-narratives-and-disinformation-around-the-covid-19-pandemic/

45. China-CEE Institute: *Serbia economy briefing: Economic forecasts after the COVID-19 pandemic in Serbia,* June 22 2020
https://china-cee.eu/2020/06/22/serbia-economy-briefing-economic-forecasts-after-the-covid-19-pandemic-in-serbia/

46. European Western Balkans: *Serbia Held more Exercises with NATO than with Russia in 2019,* 18.11.2019.
https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2019/11/18/serbia-held-more-exercises-with-nato-than-with-russia-in-2019/

47. Vilnius Institute: *Chapter 31 – Redefining Serbian National Security Priorities* https://vilniusinstitute.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/REDEFINING-SERBIAN-NATIONAL-SECURITY-PRIORITIES.pdf

48. Alicia Wanless: *The Coronavirus is a boon for global propagandists, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,* April 02 2020
https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/02/coronavirus-is-boon-for-global-propagandists-pub-81455

49. Marko Savković: *Da li će Srbija morati da bira između Kine i Evropske unije?*
Beogradski fond za političku izuzetnost, 14.maj 2020.
https://bfpe.org/da-li-ce-srbija-morati-da-bira-izmedju-kine-i-evropske-unije/

50. Modern Diplomacy: *Covid 19 – a new non-traditional security threat,* June 3, 2020 https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/06/03/covid-19-a-new-non-traditional-security-threat/

51. European Western Balkans: *Politika sedenja na dve stolice utiče na pregovore sa EU*, 26.08.2019. https://europeanwesternbalkans.rs/politika-sedenja-na-dve-stolice-utice-na-pregovore-sa-eu/

52. RFE: *EU Plans New Package to Help Balkans Through Coronavirus Crisis,* April 27,2020 https://www.rferl.org/a/eu-plans-new-package-to-help-balkans-though-coronavirus-crisis/30579878.html

53. Vuk Vuksanovic: *China and Mask Diplomacy in the Balkans, ISPI,* 30 april 2020 https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/china-and-mask-diplomacy-balkans-25898

54. Radio Slobodna Evropa: *Ko je koliko pomogao Srbiji tokom pandemije,* 26.3.2020. https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/ko-je-koliko-pomogao-srbiji/30511328.html
55. Austin Doehler: *How China Challenges EU in the Western Balkans, The Diplomat,* September 25, 2019 https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/how-china-challenges-the-eu-in-the-western-balkans/

56. NATO Stratcom Center of Excellence: *Russia Footprint in Western Balkan Information Environment,* https://stratcomcoe.org/russias-footprint-western-balkan-information-environment

57. CSS Analysis in Security Policy: The Western Balkans between EU, NATO, Russia and China, No263, May 2020 https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse263-EN.pdf

58. Belgrade Center for Security Policy: *The Security Sector in the Captured State, 2020* http://www.bezbednost.org/All-publications/7257/The-Security-Sector-in-a-Captured-State.shtml

59. Friends of Europe: *Hybrid and Transnational Threats, discussion paper,* 5 December 2018 https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/hybrid-and-transnational-threats/

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
Office in North Macedonia
Risto Ravanovski 8
MK - 1000 Skopje
T + 389 / (2) 3217 075
skopje@kas.de

„St. Kliment Ohridski" University - Bitola
St. 1st May
MK - 7000 Bitola
T + 389 / (47) 223 788
rektorat@uklo.edu.mk