

Balkan states towards Covid-19 – solutions & challenges



University of Wrocław
19.06.2020

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Introduction

The Balkan countries have implemented various measures to fight Covid -19. The report is focused on: precautions that governments have taken, statistics (death rate / recovery rate) and how society perceived governments work. Also it was analyzed what are the effects of government actions, does Covid-19 affect political, economic and regional instability and what are the prospects for releasing precautions?

When discussing the Balkan region, a subjective scope should be established, which varies depending on the historical, geographical, political and cultural dimensions. In the report, it is assumed that the Balkans in geographical terms include: Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, the post-Yugoslav area: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Northern Macedonia and north-western areas of Turkey¹, but the report refers to the entire territory of Turkey.

The report was prepared by Master Students of International Relations – Global Studies, which were participants of classes entitled: *The Balkans in International Relations*, in the Institute of International Studies at the University of Wrocław. The lecturer was Anna Jagiello-Szostak, PhD.

1. Slovenia: A European Success Story?

Elisabeth van Holthe tot Echten

On 15 May 2020, Slovenia became the first European country to declare the end of the COVID-19 epidemic². News outlet Vox called Slovenia a ‘success story’, praising its testing and quick implementation of restrictive measures³. Slovenia indeed started early with testing, has a relatively low number of confirmed infections, and its 106 deaths⁴ is only a fraction of what most other European countries have seen.

Amidst the Corona crisis, Slovenia also had to deal with political upheaval. In late January, after being only 16 months in office, then Prime Minister Marjan Šarec (from the liberal party LMS) resigned and called for new elections⁵. In the end, however, these elections did not take place, as Janez Janša (Slovenian Democratic Party) managed to form a new coalition⁶. This process was accelerated considerably, so that as soon as possible a new government would be able to deal with the epidemic. During the transition period, a crisis management staff (CMS) was appointed to handle matters concerning corona. This CMS was

¹ Enciklopedia Britannica, *Balkans*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Balkans> (accessed: 17.05.2020).

² A. Vladislavljec, *Slovenia Declares Victory Over Coronavirus Pandemic*, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/15/slovenia-declares-victory-over-coronavirus-pandemic/> (accessed: 27.05.2020)

³ A. Ward, *Vietnam, Slovenia, and 3 other overlooked coronavirus success stories*, <https://www.vox.com/2020/5/5/21247837/coronavirus-vietnam-slovenia-jordan-iceland-greece> (accessed: 27.05.2020)

⁴ Worldometer. *Slovenia*, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/slovenia/> (accessed: 05.06.2020)

⁵ P. Kentish, *Laughs turn to frustration as Slovenia's comedian PM resigns*, <https://emerging-europe.com/news/laughs-turn-to-frustration-as-slovenias-comedian-pm-resigns/> (accessed 05.06.2020)

⁶ H. Motoh, “Slovenia economy briefing: Because of the coronavirus, Slovenia’s economic growth forecast halved this year to 1.5 per cent, „China-CEE Institute” 2020, no. 2 (27), p. 3.

abolished on 13 March, when the new prime minister and his coalition took office⁷.



The first case on Slovenian territory was confirmed on 4 March and was rapidly followed by strong measurements to contain the spread of the virus. Within two weeks, the government had declared an epidemic and closed (part of) its borders, schools, public places, bars and restaurants. Moreover, public transport and air services were suspended and only 'necessary' shops, like supermarkets and pharmacies remained open. To further contain the spread of the virus, it was mandatory to wear a face mask in public spaces and public gatherings were forbidden⁸. Thus, the Slovenian government imposed a strict lockdown.

This quick response paid off and thus it was possible to lift some of the measures from April onwards⁹. This included the reopening of most shops, hairdressers and beauty salons¹⁰. It was further announced that schools, would partially reopen in the following month¹¹. In late-May, Prime Minister Janez Janša announced that Slovenia would reopen for holiday season, starting on 1 June¹². As of the time of writing, most of the restrictions have been lifted.

In total, Slovenia has had 1,479 cases of infections, from which 1,358 people recovered (92%). Between January and June almost 83,000 tests have been performed, and as of 4 June, there are only 10 people who are currently infected. Moreover, Slovenia has a containment rate of 99 per cent¹³. Despite these impressive results, not everyone is pleased with the government's approach.

Since May, the streets in Slovenia have been filled with cyclist protesting against the government. Some believe that Janša, already a controversial figure¹⁴, is using the pandemic as a means to gain more political power¹⁵. To cope with the crisis, the CMS was established until the new government was fully operational, but the question has been raised whether the creation of this special team was

⁷ A Vladislavljec, *New Slovenian Government Raises Fears of 'Orbanisation'*, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/17/new-slovenian-government-raises-fears-of-orbanisation/#gsc.tab=0> (accessed 05.06.2020)

⁸ Republic of Slovenia, *Coronavirus disease COVID-19*, <https://www.gov.si/en/topics/coronavirus-disease-covid-19/> (accessed: 04.06.2020)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ E. Pavlovska, *Slovenia to ease coronavirus lockdown from April 20*, <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/slovenia-to-ease-coronavirus-lockdown-from-april-20/> (accessed: 06.06.2020)

¹¹ STA, *Slovenian Schools, Kindergartens Start Re-Opening 18 May, But Not For All*, <https://www.total-slovenia-news.com/lifestyle/6142-slovenian-schools-kindergartens-start-re-opening-18-may> (accessed: 11.06.2020)

¹² STA, *Janša on the BBC: "Welcome to Slovenia, It's a Safe Country"*, <https://www.total-slovenia-news.com/politics/6292-jansa-on-the-bbc-welcome-to-slovenia-it-s-a-safe-country-video> (accessed: 05.06.2020)

¹³ Coronavirus stats tracker, *Slovenia*, <https://visalist.io/emergency/coronavirus/slovenia-country> (accessed: 05.06.2020)

¹⁴ Janez Janša has been connected to several corruption cases during his political career and even served time in prison.

¹⁵ L. Besser, *Coronavirus might be giving some European governments an excuse to tighten grip on power*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-02/eastern-european-regimes-exploit-coronavirus/12109720> (accessed 05.06.2020)

legitimate¹⁶. In addition, the crisis team has been accused of some controversial actions, such as replacing the heads of the defence force, the military intelligence agency and the national policy shortly after it has been established¹⁷.



The protests started over dissatisfaction with the government policies that restricted individual freedom in light of the epidemic. However, protesters also accuse the new Prime Minister of fuelling hatred against migrants and attacking independent media and journalists¹⁸. Some fear Janša will pursue a similar direction as the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who used the corona crisis to significantly expand his power and curb the democratic apparatus¹⁹.

Moreover, the coronavirus and accompanying measures has affected Slovenia's economy. Over 14,000 people lost their job in April, resulting in an unemployment rate of 13.9%, almost double of the 7.9% registered in February. In addition, GDP is expected to shrink and the European Commission noted that "as a small open economy, Slovenia is particularly vulnerable to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic."²⁰ The government's stimulus package of 1 billion euro will probably ease some of these negative economic consequences²¹.

Next year, Slovenia will held new elections, and combining the current civil unrest with the yet unknown effects of coronavirus on the economy, the outcome for Janša is unsure. Slovenia may be a success story in terms of keeping the number of corona infections and deaths low, but political instability might just be around the corner, leaving the future uncertain.

2.Montenegro towards Covid -19.

Kristin Weidner

On the 17th of March 2020, the first COVID-19 case was confirmed in Montenegro²². This made the small Balkan state the last one in Europe to confirm a case of the novel virus²³. Already on the 13th of March, Montenegro had introduced several preventive measures in order to stop the virus from spreading.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ BBC, *Slovenia cyclists hold anti-government protest*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52597748> (accessed 06.06.2020)

¹⁹ A Vladislavljec, *New Slovenian Government Raises Fears of 'Orbanisation'*

²⁰ STA, *Coronavirus & the Slovenian Economy: Job Losses, Retail Sales & GDP*, <https://www.total-slovenia-news.com/business/6179-coronavirus-the-slovenian-economy-job-losses-retail-sales-gdp> (accessed: 11.06.2020)

²¹ Republic of Slovenia, *Slovenia Allocates EUR 1 Billion to Mitigate Consequences of Coronavirus on the Economy*, <https://www.gov.si/en/news/slovenia-allocates-eur-1-billion-to-mitigate-consequences-of-coronavirus-on-the-economy/> (accessed: 11.06.2020).

²² Reuters, *Montenegro reports first case of corona virus infection*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-montenegro/montenegro-reports-first-case-of-corona-virus-infection-idUSKBN2143SY> (accessed on 30.05.2020)

²³ RT, *Montenegro Is Europe's Last Remaining Coronavirus-free Country*, <https://www.rtmagazine.com/disorders-diseases/infectious-diseases/other-infections/montenegro-coronavirus-free-europe/> (accessed on 30.05.2020)

These included the banning of public gatherings (including the closure of bars, restaurants, hotels etc.), the closure of schools and of the country's ports and marina for incoming ships, as well as it blocked its citizens from travelling to France, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark and Slovenia and ordered the isolation of foreign nationals arriving from these countries²⁴. On the 15th of March, the government announced the state of emergency and closed its borders and imposed a ban on the entry of foreigners one day later²⁵. As of March 31st, a nation-wide curfew came into effect, where individuals were prohibited from leaving their home between 7pm and 5am on weekdays, and between 1pm on Saturday and 5am on Monday²⁶. On 21st of April, Montenegrin authorities announced that the curfew would be shortened as lockdown measures began to ease. The ban on gatherings in residential buildings remains in effect, as well as the ban on all sports and recreational activities in public spaces²⁷. In mid-May some restrictions were lifted, including the overnight movement bans and also beaches have reopened under social-distancing measures²⁸. On the 24th of May, the Government announced that Montenegro has reported no new cases of coronavirus since the 5th of May. Therefore, Montenegro's borders reopen from 1st of June, but only for countries that meet certain criteria²⁹. A sharp rise of cases was registered from the end of March until mid-April³⁰. To date (4th of June), health authorities have confirmed a total of 324 COVID-19 cases, with 315 recoveries and nine associated deaths in the country, with 10,167 tests³¹.

Due to the severe lockdown in Montenegro, COVID-19 will leave its traces on the economy of the country. According to the employment bureau in Montenegro, a total of 3,156 people had lost their jobs since the pandemic started, mostly in the tourism and hospitality sectors. By April 22, according to data, 38,622 people were unemployed in the country. Nevertheless, these numbers are contested

²⁴ Reuters, *Montenegro bars gatherings, closes schools, ports and border crossings*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-montenegro-idUSKBN2102WD> (accessed on 20.05.2020).

²⁵ R. Ralev, *Montenegro closes borders to avoid coronavirus*, <https://seenews.com/news/montenegro-closes-borders-to-avoid-coronavirus-690877> (accessed on 30.05.2020)

²⁶ Garda World News, *Country/ Region: Montenegro: Update 4*, <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/345981/montenegro-montenegro-to-open-borders-to-certain-countries-from-june-1-update-9> (accessed on 30.05.2020)

²⁷ *Ibidem*, Update 6

²⁸ *Ibidem*, Update 8

²⁹ *Ibidem*, Update 9

³⁰ Worldometer, *Total Coronavirus Cases in Montenegro*, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/montenegro/> (accessed on 04.06.2020)

³¹ OECD (2020), *The Covid-19 crisis in Montenegro*, <https://www.oecd.org/south-east-europe/COVID-19-Crisis-in-Montenegro.pdf> (accessed on 30.05.2020)

because of lack of registration³². As tourism accounts for a total of 25 percent of the GDP in Montenegro, an economic recession has been predicted for the country³³. Furthermore, Montenegro's economy heavily relies on remittances, which are likely to fall short due to the lockdown³⁴. The Montenegro stock exchange index has also lost around 12 percent of its value from January until April but has already recovered slightly in May (ibid.). On the 24th of April, the Ministry of Economy has announced a "business and employee support programme" with subsidies supporting businesses, the tourism sector and for endangered industries. Furthermore, the European Council has adopted the decision to provide 60 million euros of macro-financial assistance in the form of loans to the country, in order to counteract the economic fallout (ibid.). In April, the European Commission has also announced a support package of 53 million euros in bilateral assistance for Montenegro to "cover urgent health needs and economic and social recovery"³⁵.

Regarding the political consequences of the Corona-crisis, it must be said that tensions between the government and the opposition of Montenegro were running high even before the crisis and could easily boil over now. In April 2020, the opposition also hardly criticized the government's response to COVID-19, accusing the government of using the pandemic as cover for a further authoritarian crackdown³⁶. Therefore, the crisis might not only have economic consequences for the small state but may also lead to further political instability.

As the last country in Europe to confirm a case of COVID-19 and as one of the first countries in Europe without any new infections since the beginning of May, Montenegro seemed to have had the crisis under control. The government's fast reaction to the outbreak of the corona virus with severe preventive measures has also kept the numbers relatively low, with a total of 324 confirmed cases. Nevertheless, the restrictions imposed by the government have left their traces not only on Montenegro's economy, which is strongly dependent on tourism, but has also fuelled further political tensions in the country.

³² Balkan Insights, Coronavirus Causes Massive Layoffs Across the Balkans, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/04/coronavirus-causes-massive-layoffs-across-the-balkans/> (accessed on 30.05.2020)

³³ EBRD, *Responding to the Coronavirus Crisis: Update on Montenegro*, <https://www.ebrd.com/documents/admin/montenegro-coronavirus-policy-response-.pdf?blobnocache=true> (accessed 30.05.2020)

³⁴ OECD, *op. cit.*

³⁵ European Commission, *Montenegro and its European path*, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/near_factograph_montenegro.pdf (accessed on 30.05.2020)

³⁶ The Economist, *Opposition criticises government's heavy-handed response*, <http://country.eiu.com/Montenegro/ArticleList/Updates/Politics> (accessed on 30.05.2020)

3. Kosovo: In between health and political crisis.

Edon Baliqi

During its 12-year journey as an independent country, this year Kosovo was faced with a health crisis due to pandemic but also a political crisis which can be considered as one of the deepest crises that Kosovar politics has experienced. During the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to the government having to face a difficult situation given that the health system is quite vulnerable, it also faced an institutional crisis over who should govern the country, a crisis which was solved by Constitutional Court who decided that a new government can be formed without snap election³⁷.

On March 13, 2020, the then Prime Minister Albin Kurti had for the first time a face-to-face meeting with his biggest political opponent, President Hashim Thaci, but that meeting was interrupted because during the meeting, the National Institute for Public Health in Kosovo (NIPH) released the results of the analysis and it was announced that two people were infected with COVID-19. The news was made public by the Prime Minister during a press conference together with the Minister of Health, Arben Vitia³⁸. During the conference, the Prime Minister announced that he would respect the guidelines of the NIPH and decided to close all economic activities, including schools and all bars and restaurants. In addition to the total closure, the government has decided to provide student dormitories with a 2-week quarantine service for all persons coming from abroad.

While Kosovo was in total lockdown, where people could only leave at a set time during the day and the number of infected had reached 31, on March 22, 2020, the first death was reported. He was an 82-year-old man who also had chronic illness, cardio and pulmonary³⁹.

While the Kosovo Parliament had already voted to overthrow the government and the current government was merely a government in office, it happened that Kurti himself entered into self-isolation. It was already confirmed that a person from the Prime Minister's staff had had contact with him, which forced Kurti to enter self-isolation.⁴⁰, but that a day later it was confirmed that his staff member was not infected and Kurti returned to his office.

³⁷ Xh. Bami, *Kosovo Court Says Govt Can be Formed Without Elections*, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/29/new-kosovo-govt-can-be-formed-without-elections-court-rules/> (Accessed: 09.06.2020)

³⁸ Xh. Bami, *Kosovo Confirms First Two Coronavirus Cases*, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/13/kosovo-confirms-first-two-coronavirus-cases/> (Accessed: 10.06.2020)

³⁹ F. Bytyci, *Kosovo authorities reports first death from coronavirus*, <https://fr.reuters.com/article/idUSL8N2BF0C4> (Accessed: 09.06.2020)

⁴⁰ IntelliNews, *Kosovo's PM self-isolates after being in contact with suspected coronavirus case*, <https://www.intellinews.com/kosovo-s-pm-self-isolates-after-being-in-contact-with-suspected-coronavirus-case-182933/> (Accessed: 10.06.2020).

On April 13, 2020, NIPH confirmed that 79 new cases had been confirmed within 24 hours. For a small country like Kosovo, the statistics were frightening. But after more than a month, on May 24, Kosovo seemed to have managed to control the situation properly and for the first time it was announced that there was no new case for 24 hours.⁴¹ This seems to have brought great optimism as the measures were easing. Apparently, the premature release had a negative effect. The number of infected people only increased, where only on June 7, 40 new cases were confirmed for 24 hours. The increase in the number of new cases is seen as a challenge for the new government led by Abdullah Hoti.



Kosovo still remains in danger of an explosion and the danger still lies there with 1298 infected in total, 913 recovered and 31 deaths. While institutions are now facing both health and political crises, it remains unclear what the future holds for Kosovo, given US pressure that already exists for a swift political agreement with Serbia, which Mr. Kurti himself accused the United States of plotting against his government, which was not interested in a speedy solution, but claimed that the agreement with Serbia was not important when it would take place but also what it would contain⁴².

4. A bumpy ride ahead for Bosnia and Herzegovina in the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Tamara Naidoo

Remembered as the site of Europe's bloodiest war since WWII, the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) find themselves twenty-five years after the Dayton peace accords fighting a new threat, the COVID-19 pandemic. On the 5th of March BiH recorded its first case of COVID-19 located in the second largest city and *de facto* capital of Republika Srpska entity, Banja Luka. By the 17th of March, the government declared a state of emergency, closing schools and non-essential business, prohibiting large gatherings, banning minors under 18 years old and the elderly over 65 years from leaving their homes, in addition closing its borders and installing a national curfew between 20h00 and 5h00 the following day.⁴³ With a population of 3,835,586 people, as of the 27nd of May 2,416 were infected with COVID-19 and 149 lives lost. International experts praised BiH for its swift implementation of nation-wide preventative measures towards the COVID-19 pandemic and Bosnian citizens have in turn dutifully followed

⁴¹ BallkanForum (2020) *THE BALKAN CORONAVIRUS DIARY*, Belgrade, Serbia.

⁴² Sh. Walker, *Kosovan acting PM accuses Trump envoy of meddling*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/20/kosovan-acting-pm-accuses-trump-envoy-of-meddling> (Accessed 10.06.2020); P. Wintour, *EU running scared from fascism, says Kosovo's likely new PM*, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/21/kosovo-likely-new-leader-albin-kurti-condemns-eu-balkans-policy?utm_term=Autofeed&CMP=twit_b-gdnnews&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1571632285 (Accessed: 10.06.2020).

⁴³ UN News, *Corruption, political blockages, threaten international efforts to help Bosnia and Herzegovina weather coronavirus*, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1063432> (accessed: 24.05.2020).

government's lockdown instructions, albeit some criticism from local and international sources on firstly, the governments stern control of movement within the country, secondly, state inefficiency in the economy and thirdly, structural challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 outbreak .



Bosnian Debate on Appropriate Lockdown Measures

BiH has its fair share of successes and challenges in navigating its managements of the spread of COVID-19. In terms of the movement of people and the age-based lockdown, disgruntled members of the public resorted to taking the government to the Constitutional Court. Bosnian authorities lost with the Bosnian Constitutional Court ruling in favour of complainants on April 22nd that officials did not prove children and the elderly carried a higher risk of contracting or transmitting the infection. The Bosnian court ruled that the age-based lockdown was in fact discriminatory and had to be lifted in the time period determined by government⁴⁴. On the other hand, the government was seen early in April to have some success with screening returning citizens for the virus and facilitate quarantine at border crossings. Success was however marred by complaints around a 30 hour waiting period to access screening as well as a lack of information about the government's COVID-19 plans between national and domestic implementation levels. Moreover, a fire from an undetermined cause, destroyed three triage tents at the Maljevac Bosnia-Croatia border crossing and at the Izacic border, a returnee documented appalling conditions without electricity or water⁴⁵. Another significant angle on international travellers is the migratory route through BiH from Greece to other parts of Europe. Even though the government halted foreigners entering the country, at the beginning of the virus outbreak in BiH an estimated 8,000 migrants and refugees were stranded in the country, their movements halted by the lockdown. To enhance available facilities for homeless migrants, the government together with international non-governmental organisations swiftly arranged a 1,000-bed camp. The new camp is lauded for providing hygiene kits, screenings for Covid-19 and quarantine spaces.⁴⁶ More problematic are the two older camps of Bira and Mira, consisting of tents and containers inside former factories, reportedly with poor hygiene conditions, no light and limited access to humanitarian support.

⁴⁴R. Synovitz, *Coronavirus In Court: Bosnia's Age-Based Lockdowns Are Ruled Discriminatory*, <https://www.rferl.org/a/coronavirus-in-court-bosnia-s-age-based-lockdowns-are-ruled-discriminatory/30574453.html> (accessed: 24.05.2020).

⁴⁵ Aljazeera, *Bosnian returnees face delays, confusion over COVID-19 quarantine*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/bosnian-returnees-face-delays-confusion-covid-19-quarantine-200416155422443.html> (accessed: 24.05.2020).

⁴⁶ IOM Bosnia and Herzegovina, *COVID-19 Emergency Shelter Provided for Homeless Migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, <https://www.iom.int/news/covid-19-emergency-shelter-provided-homeless-migrants-bosnia-and-herzegovina> (accessed: 24.05.2020).

With the COVID-19 economic shutdown, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecast BiH's growth to shrink by 5% in 2020 before recovering to 3.5 per cent growth in 2021. The effects of global economic slowdown were felt first by the BiH industrial sector when China and Italy came to a halt, countries belonging to the BiH's largest export markets. As it was, the country was not prepared by the economic strain caused by the pandemic, having lost 50,000 workers annually to western economies, the Republika Srpska in a debt spiral and the Bosnian-Croat Federation keeping afloat on its pension fund at the end of 2019. The European Commission allocated 250 million euros in financial assistance while the IMF noting the urgency of the BiH's need to balance its payments approved an emergency support package of 361 million US dollars.⁴⁷ Despite this lifeline to the BiH economy, a lack of coordination between the different levels of government in addition to fierce disagreement on how to spend the money led to delay of almost a month in operationalising the funds.⁴⁸ Although this decentralised system helped prevent the spread of the virus since Bosnians are tied to localised economies and political structures, the COVID-19 crisis exacerbates greater structural weaknesses in transparent regulatory controls leading to reports on opportunistic behaviour. In one instance, an investigation opened into a raspberry farm that was granted a government contract to import 100 ventilators for US\$55,000 each from China, a high sum compared to the \$7,000 - \$30,000 they would ordinarily be worth on the international market.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the overall success in managing the COVID-19 infection rate led to a loosening of the restrictive measures throughout the BiH, with age-based lockdowns reduced in the last week of April and the Serb Republic allowing wholesale trade businesses and retail shops as well as hair-dressing and cosmetic salons to reopen from the 11th of May, provided that owners disinfect stringently. Large gatherings are still not allowed and all citizens are required to use a mask.⁵⁰

Encouragement from the International Community

With the special role awarded to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to monitor BiH, the greatest concern expressed surrounded the introduction of punitive measures for spreading 'fake news' in the media and social networks across the country. The OSCE warned that such regulations censoring the press endanger public trust in public institutions, when instead journalists should be able to report freely alongside clear government

⁴⁸ D. Kovacevic, *Bosnian Political Wrangling Delays Use of IMF Coronavirus Cash*, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/12/bosnian-political-wrangling-delays-use-of-imf-coronavirus-cash/> (accessed: 24.05.2020).

⁴⁹ OCCRP, *Bosnian Raspberry Farm Granted Contract to buy Ventilators*, <https://www.occrp.org/en/daily/12216-bosnian-raspberry-farm-granted-contract-to-buy-ventilators> (accessed: 24.05.2020).

⁵⁰ Sito-Sucic, D. . *Bosnia reports sharp rise in coronavirus cases after relaxing lockdown*, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-bosnia-cases/bosnia-reports-sharp-rise-in-coronavirus-cases-after-relaxing-lockdown-idUSKBN22B2DB> (accessed: 25.05.2020).

communication strategy on COVID-19.⁵¹ The issue on fake news is overshadowed by the news that the October municipal elections is postponed to November, 2020. Noting that this is the first major political process to be affected by consequences of the COVID-19 crisis, it signifies that the BiH will remain a special interest to the international community as Bosnians bear out the bumpy ride through the pandemic over and above managing deep-seated structural issues in domestic affairs.⁵²

5. North Macedonia towards Covid- 19.

Camille Vern

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the state of North Macedonia, with a population of 2 mill⁵³, struggles with a political crisis and defends strict rules to contain the pandemic.

The first case of COVID-19 was confirmed on the 26th of February 2020. A woman arriving from Italy was tested positive as she was seeking medical attention.⁵⁴ Since then, around 1,900 cases have been reported, a few hundred tests are carried out every day. At the time of the writing of this chapter, 111 deaths have been reported. The number of recoveries accounts for approximately 1,400 patients. The peak of the epidemic seems to have been in the midst of April and the highest death rate has been of 6 persons per day.⁵⁵

The government of North Macedonia has recognized the threat of the virus early on and has installed thermal-scanning cameras at the international airport of Skopje in the end of January. Passengers arriving from China and other big cross-roads of air traffic, like Dubai and Istanbul, were checked thoroughly.⁵⁶ In

⁵¹ Radio Free Europe, *OSCE concerned about Measures Against 'Fake News' in Bosnia*, <https://www.rferl.org/a/osce-concerned-about-measures-against-fake-news-in-bosnia/30507012.html> (accessed: 24.05.2020).

⁵² N. Dervisbegovic, *Budget Delays Force Bosnia to Postpone Local Elections*, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/23/budget-delays-force-bosnia-to-postpone-local-elections/> (accessed: 27.05.2020).

⁵³ UN DATA: North Macedonia. <http://data.un.org/en/iso/mk.html> (accessed: 21.05.2020)

⁵⁴ Aljazeera: Coronavirus spreads in the Middle East and beyond. 27.02.2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/china-coronavirus-outbreak-latest-updates-200226003835539.html> (accessed on 19.05.2020)

⁵⁵ WHO COVID-19: North Macedonia. <https://covid19.who.int/region/euro/country/mk> (accessed on 21.05.2020); Corona.help: North Macedonia Stats. <https://corona.help/country/north-macedonia> (accessed on 21st of May 2020); BIRN: Balkans Not Ready to Declare Victory Over COVID-19. BalkanInsight.com. 21.05.2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/21/balkans-not-ready-to-declare-victory-over-covid-19/> (accessed: 21.05.2020)

⁵⁶ BIRN: Balkan Countries Take Precautions Amid Fear of Coronavirus. BalkanInsight.com. 28.01.2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/01/28/balkan-countries-take-precautions-amid-fear-of-coronavirus/> (accessed: 21.05.2020)

the meantime, Skopje International Airport has been closed, a national curfew was installed and public transportation was stopped. A state of emergency was declared on the 18th of March⁵⁷ – currently extended until the end of May 2020.⁵⁸ 95% of all busses connecting cities have stopped commuting and only a few trains continue to link Skopje to other big cities. Face covering is required in indoor spaces and in open spaces, where the two meters of distance can not be maintained. The cities of Kumanovo, Prilep and Tetovo are under special lockdown and each household has to declare a person leaving the house for groceries. Foreign citizens can not enter the territory of North Macedonia, while those still inside the country have seen their permit of stay in the country extended during the state of emergency⁵⁹.

The Justice system is also playing its part in the fight against the spread of COVID-19, imposing strict punishment to citizens who do not abide to the rules. There is a “possibility of up to one year in jail for not abiding by the rules on protection from infectious diseases.”⁶⁰ Fines go from 2000 to 3000 Euros and courts are advised to speed up the procedures in order to discourage offenders. People are asked to write statements of self-isolation, if they have been in contact with an infected person or have violated the restrictions. Justice Minister, Renata Deskoska, has threatened to install stricter laws if the daily numbers of arrest, breaching the curfew, do not go down.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Magleshov, Vasko: North Macedonia Registers Increase in Coronavirus Rule-Breakers. BalkanInsight.com. 20.05.2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/20/north-macedonia-registers-increase-in-coronavirus-rule-breakers/> (accessed:20.05.2020)

⁵⁸ Bne Intellinews: North Macedonia extends state of emergency for two weeks. 17.05.2020 <https://www.intellinews.com/north-macedonia-extends-state-of-emergency-for-two-weeks-183392/> (accessed on 18.05.2020)

⁵⁹ GOV.UK: Foreign Travel advice: North Macedonia. Updated on 15.05.2020. <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/north-macedonia> (accessed on 18.05.2020); META.MK: Trains in Macedonia travel to some destinations, the buses are still halted. 20.05.2020 <https://meta.mk/en/trains-in-macedonia-partially-transit-while-buses-are-still-not-operational/> (accessed on 21.05.2020); BalkanInsight: Central, Eastern European Countries Maintain Tough Travel Restrictions. 11.05.2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/11/central-eastern-european-countries-maintain-tough-travel-restrictions/> (accessed on 20.05.2020); META MK: Macedonian Ministry of Interior extends all permits and visas for foreigners. 18.05.2020 <https://meta.mk/en/macedonian-ministry-of-interior-extends-all-permits-and-visas-for-foreigners/> (accessed on 18.05.2020)

⁶⁰ Magleshov, Vasko: North Macedonia Registers Increase in Coronavirus Rule-Breakers. BalkanInsight.com. 20.05.2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/20/north-macedonia-registers-increase-in-coronavirus-rule-breakers/> (accessed on 20.05.2020)

⁶¹ Magleshov, Vasko: North Macedonia Registers Increase in Coronavirus Rule-Breakers. BalkanInsight.com. 20.05.2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/20/north-macedonia-registers-increase-in-coronavirus-rule-breakers/> (accessed on 20.05.2020)

At the end of April, the government of Prime Minister, Oliver Spasovski, declared that the country should be brought “back to normal”⁶² in phases, starting in May. Some steps have already been taken. The daily curfew was moved from 4pm in the afternoon to 7pm in the evenings and still lasts until 5am.⁶³ After a report of 40 new infections in one day on the 21st of May, these steps seem in danger. The Health Minister, Venko Filipche, has proposed a curfew from Saturday, 7pm to Tuesday, 5am for the weekend of the 23rd of May, followed by national holidays, to hinder infections during family reunions. He promised the announced easing measures would come after the weekend: restaurants and bars should reopen and the curfew would be reevaluated⁶⁴. The Minister of Education, Arber Ademi, pledged to reopen Primary and Secondary Schools on the 10th of June, ending online schooling, and High School students meant to graduate this year will not be impacted by the fact that they could not take part in final exams. Kindergarten staff is also being tested, in the perspective of reopening childcare facilities⁶⁵.

Like other Balkan states, North Macedonia is hit by the economic impact of the global pandemic. Small businesses suffer the most, while supermarkets and pharmacies have made more profit than usual. The state of emergency has led to more online-shopping and more usage of delivery services. But in general, the national economy suffers. Relying heavily on imports and exports, the country’s livestock could be affected by closed frontiers all over Europe. The head of the Economic Chamber, Branki Azeski is cited: “Our economy facing its biggest challenge ever”.⁶⁶ 9000 new unemployed registrations are reported for March and

⁶² Stojanovic, Milica and Barberá, Marcel Gascón et al.: Balkan Countries Start to Lift Some Coronavirus Restrictions. 21.05.2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/04/21/balkan-countries-start-to-lift-some-coronavirus-restrictions/> (accessed on 21.05.2020)

⁶³ Stojanovic, Milica and Barberá, Marcel Gascón et al.: Balkan Countries Start to Lift Some Coronavirus Restrictions. 21.04.2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/04/21/balkan-countries-start-to-lift-some-coronavirus-restrictions/> (accessed on 21.05.2020); GOV.UK: Foreign Travel advice: North Macedonia. Updated on 15.05.2020. <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/north-macedonia> (accessed on 18.05.2020)

⁶⁴ BIRN: Balkans Not Ready to Declare Victory Over COVID-19. BalkanInsight.com. 21.05.2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/21/balkans-not-ready-to-declare-victory-over-covid-19/> (accessed on 21.05.2020); Altipamarkova, Bisera: Committee for Infectious Diseases proposes lockdown during holiday weekend. MIA.MK. 20.05.2020. <https://mia.mk/committee-for-infectious-diseases-proposes-lockdown-during-holiday-weekend-upd/?lang=en> (accessed on 21.05.2020)

⁶⁵ Government of the Republic of North Macedonia Website: Ademi: Students will study from home until 10 June, graduates are exempted from taking the graduation exam. 14.05.2020. <https://vlada.mk/node/21397?ln=en-gb> (accessed on 18.05.2020); MIA.MK: One staffer tests positive for COVID-19 as kindergarten screening continues. 19.05.2020. <https://mia.mk/one-staffer-tests-positive-for-covid-19-as-kindergarten-screening-continues/?lang=en> (accessed on 20.05.2020)

⁶⁶ Janev, Aleksandar: North Macedonia’s Businesses Fear Pandemic’s Economic Shockwaves. BalkanInsight.com. 18.05.2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/18/north-macedonias-businesses-fear-pandemics-economic-shockwaves/> (accessed on 21.05.2020)

April, but these figures are questioned⁶⁷. The government is trying to provide a safety net to the country's economy, allocating more than 6,5 billion denars for dealing with the crisis. Businesses can apply for funds to pay the salaries of their employees, if they continue to employ them for two more months after getting access to the funds⁶⁸.

In addition to the hardships created by the pandemic, the North Macedonian state was already going through difficult phase. After Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev, resigned in January 2020, the country is led by a caretaker government that was supposed to organize new elections in April. Due to the pandemic, the elections have to be postponed, which leads to discussions between the Social Democrats who want to hold elections as soon as possible, while the conservative opposition (VMRO-DPMNE) voices concerns⁶⁹. In a climate of corruption trials and the retrieval of an Anti-Discrimination Law by a decision of the Constitutional Court because of procedural omissions⁷⁰, the announcement that the EU would start accession talks with North Macedonia comes as a welcomed light at the end of the tunnel⁷¹.

6. The Coronavirus Pandemic in the Republic of Serbia.

Ruzan Amirkhanyan

General statistics on tested/infected/death rates in Serbia

The Coronavirus outbreak, which has affected more than 200 countries and territories, did not bypass the Republic of Serbia. The first case in Serbia was

⁶⁷ BIRN: Coronavirus Causes Massive Layoffs Across the Balkans. BalkanInsight.com. 04.05.2020.

<https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/04/coronavirus-causes-massive-layoffs-across-the-balkans/> (accessed on 21.05.2020)

⁶⁸ Government of the Republic of North Macedonia Website: From the 39th Government session: More than 6,5 billion denars from the Budget have been allocated for implementation of economic measures adopted to deal with the crisis. 14.05.2020 <https://vlada.mk/node/21394?ln=en-gb> (accessed on 18.05.2020)

⁶⁹ Marusic, Sinisa Jakov: North Macedonia Parties Deadlocked Over Date of Elections. BalkanInsight.com. 20.05.2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/20/north-macedonia-parties-deadlocked-over-date-of-elections/> (accessed: 21.05.2020)

⁷⁰ passed and celebrated last year as a great victory for human rights defenders and the LGBT community

⁷¹ Schenker, Harald: North Macedonia Flounders in Pandemic's Political Limbo. BalkanInsight.com. 21.05.2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/21/north-macedonia-flounders-in-pandemics-political-limbo/#> (accessed on 21.05.2020); Marusic, Sinisa Jakov: North Macedonia Activists Protest as Court Scraps Anti-Discrimination Law. BalkanInsight.com. 18.05.2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/18/north-macedonia-activists-protest-as-court-scraps-anti-discrimination-law/> (accessed: 21.05.2020); Stone, Jon: EU agrees to open accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia. Independent.co. 24.03.2020. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/eu-accession-talks-albania-north-macedonia-news-a9422851.html> (accessed: 21.05.2020)

reported on 6 March 2020 and was confirmed by Minister of Health Zlatibor Lončar.⁷² As of 4 June 2020, 261,266 individuals were tested. There have been 11,571 confirmed cases, 6,910 recoveries and 246 deaths.⁷³ Total cases per million reached 1323.

Governmental Measures against Covid-19

On 15 March, already having 48 cases⁷⁴, the President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić declared a state of emergency⁷⁵. Serbia closed its borders to all foreigners that do not live in Serbia⁷⁶ and Serbian citizens entering the country were required to self-quarantine for 28 days, or face criminal charges of three years in prison.⁷⁷

Following the next days in March, more restrictions were introduced, including the curfew, which was tightened several times. Universities, schools, kindergartens, cafes, bars and shopping malls were closed, public transportation was shut down. The maximum number of people gathering decreased to two people. In addition, the elderly at the age of 65 and above were forbidden to leave the house, which was one of the strictest measures through-out Europe⁷⁸.

On the mid-April, the restrictions were gradually lifted. Eventually, on May 6 Serbia lifted the state of emergency.⁷⁹ All COVID-19 related entry restrictions were lifted for both Serbian and foreign citizens and for residents of all ages.⁸⁰ The government of Serbia also abolished self-isolation requirements upon entry.⁸¹ Serbia also re-establish several flights to European cities and re-opened its

⁷² M. Stojanovic, "Serbia Confirms First Case of Coronavirus", "BalkanInsight", Belgrade, March 6, 2020. Available at:

<https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/06/serbia-confirms-first-case-of-coronavirus/>, (accessed: 2nd of June, 2020).

⁷³ The Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia, Official Website for Coronavirus news. Available at: <https://covid19.rs/>. (accessed: 4th of June 2020).

⁷⁴ *Coronavirus statistics in Serbia*, "Worldometers" statistical platform: Available at: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/serbia/>, (accessed: 2nd of June 2020).

⁷⁵ "State of emergency declared throughout Serbia", Official Website of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 2020. Available at: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/151398/state-of-emergency-declared-throughout-serbia.php>, (accessed: 2nd of June, 2020).

⁷⁶ "Serbia closes borders due to coronavirus", Official Website of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 2020. Available at: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/151410/serbia-closes-borders-due-to-coronavirus.php>, Last Accessed: 2nd of June, 2020.

⁷⁷ "Coronavirus: Covid-19 Information", Official Website of US Embassy In Serbia, Available at: <https://rs.usembassy.gov/serbia-covid-19-information/>, (accessed: 4th of June 2020).

⁷⁸ A. Vasovic, "Serbia imposes night curfew, orders elderly indoors", "Reuters", March 2020. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/serbia-imposes-night-curfew-orders-elderly-indoors>, (accessed: 3rd of June 2020).

⁷⁹ "Serbia lifts state of emergency", Official Website of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 2020. Available at: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/155727/serbia-lifts-state-of-emergency.php>, Last Accessed: 3rd of June 2020.

⁸⁰ "Serbia abolishes travel restrictions related to COVID-19", "Xinhua.net", May 2020. Available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/22/c_139076646.htm. (accessed: 3rd of June, 2020).

⁸¹ "Coronavirus: Covid-19 Information", Official Website of US Embassy In Serbia.

borders with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and N. Macedonia as well as Bulgaria, Greece and Romania on June 1⁸².

Serbia also initiated economic measures to help citizens beat the economic hardness, including “direct payments to businesses and individuals, deferral of tax payments, loans, guarantee schemes, debt moratoriums, compliance deferral, interest rate decrease and relaxation of bond issuance procedures for large businesses”.⁸³

Moreover, President Aleksandar Vučić announced, that Parliamentary elections will be held on June 21.⁸⁴

Economic and regional impact of Covid-19

Covid-19 pandemic had a big economic, political and social impact throughout the whole world, including Serbia. The OECD report⁸⁵ anticipates an economic recession for Serbia in 2020, where according to a survey more than 12% of workers in Serbia have lost their job since the start of pandemic till April.⁸⁶

The impact of the pandemic is contradictory also on relations between Balkan states. While on one hand Belgrade and Sarajevo supported Zagreb after an earthquake on March 22,⁸⁷ on the other hand, the tensions between Montenegro and Serbia are increasing, as Belgrade accused Montenegro of Anti-Serb bias during the pandemic regarding border crossing permissions⁸⁸. Moreover, Croatia opened its borders to 10 European countries, which did not include Serbia.

Disinformation and fake news

When it comes to fake news and disinformation about Covid-19, Serbia is not an exception. However, it is said that the disinformation was caused at the beginning of the spread of the virus, when Serbian Government and medics have not been treating the virus seriously, regarding it as “the most laughable virus”⁸⁹

⁸² “Tackling Coronavirus (Covid-19): Contributing to a Global Effort: The Covid-19 Crisis in Serbia”, “OECD” Report. June 2, 2020. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/south-east-europe/COVID-19-Crisis-in-Serbia.pdf>, (accessed: 4th of June 2020).

⁸³ “Serbia: Government and institution measures in response to COVID-19”, KPMG, 27 May, 2020. Available at: <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/serbia-government-and-institution-measures-in-response-to-covid.html>, Last Accessed: 4th of June 2020.

⁸⁴ S. Bjelotomic, “Election in Serbia on 21 June”, “SerbianMonitor.com” May 5, 2020. Available at: <https://www.serbianmonitor.com/en/election-in-serbia-on-21-june/>, (accessed: 4th of June, 2020).

⁸⁵ “Tackling Coronavirus (Covid-19): Contributing to a Global Effort: The Covid-19 Crisis in Serbia”, “OECD” Report.

⁸⁶ “Coronavirus Causes Massive Layoffs Across the Balkans”, “BalkanInsight” May 4, 2020. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/04/coronavirus-causes-massive-layoffs-across-the-balkans/>, (accessed: 4th of June, 2020).

⁸⁷ N. Pejić, “Coronavirus in the Balkans: Can disasters defeat hatred?”, “Deutsche Welle (DW)”, March 26, 2020. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-in-the-balkans-can-disasters-defeat-hatred/a-52928009>, Last Accessed: 4th of June, 2020.

⁸⁸ S. Kajosevic, “Montenegro Accused of Anti-Serb Bias for Continued Border Closure”, “BalkanInsight”, Podgorica, May 26, 2020. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/26/montenegro-accused-of-anti-serb-bias-for-continued-border-closure/>. Last Accessed: 4th of June, 2020.

⁸⁹ M. Stojanović, “Serbia: Coronavirus and the media”, “European Journalism Observatory (EJO)”, 13 May, 2020. Available at: <https://en.ejo.ch/media-politics/serbia-coronavirus-and-the-media>, (accessed: 4th of June 2020).

and by making several false statements, such as “Number of ventilators is a state secret in all countries”⁹⁰ when journalists were trying to get the information about the latter.

However, the conspiracy theory about 5G was also trending in Serbia.⁹¹

Along with other states around the world, Serbia was also hit by the coronavirus, to which it responded very quickly, even though officials are said to have not been treating the danger of the virus seriously at the beginning. It can be assumed, that Serbia was successful in his measures against the spread of the virus as the number of infected is decreasing daily. However, the economic and social impact of the virus on Serbia will long be present.

7. Bulgaria towards COVID-19

Janez Gabrovšek

Government Precautions

Bulgaria has detected its first four cases on March, 8th 2019. Due to the exponential grow in cases in the following days, the government has declared the state of emergency with the “State of Emergency Measures Act” on May, 13th by which the first measures were put in place to stop the spread of the virus. Those included the prohibitions of mass gatherings of people and closure of educational institutions, theatres, cinemas, bars, restaurants, night clubs, shopping centres etc., while the social distancing in other places became the required norm. All sport events were suspended and the entry to the country was limited to some nationals from the countries of high risk who had to - from now on - undergo a compulsory quarantine of 14 days. Additionally, on March 17th the international trains were suspended and strict measures were set for the air travel. The prohibition to enter for nationals of the countries’ of high risks were gradually added according to their epidemiological picture. On March 30th the wearing of masks in public compulsory by the government’s measure which was later lifted on May 1st except in case of public transportation and hospitals ⁹².

The government adopted a set of measures to help the economy and people in the time of the crisis such as the 60/40 measure for business owners, State-

⁹⁰ “Six false statements by Serbian government officials on COVID-19”, “GlobalVoices.org”, April, 2020. Available at: <https://globalvoices.org/2020/04/22/six-false-statements-by-serbian-government-officials-on-covid-19/>, (accessed: 4th of June 2020).

⁹¹ “Conspiracy Theories From The Parliament Of Serbia”, “Digital Forensic Center (DFC)” May 5, 2020. Available at: <https://dfcme.me/en/conspiracy-theories-from-the-parliament-of-serbia/>, Last Accessed: 4th of June, 2020.

⁹² FairWear. Covid-19 impact and responses: Bulgaria, <https://www.fairwear.org/covid-19-dossier/covid-19-guidance-for-production-countries/covid-19-impact-and-responses-bulgaria/> (accessed 19.06.2020)

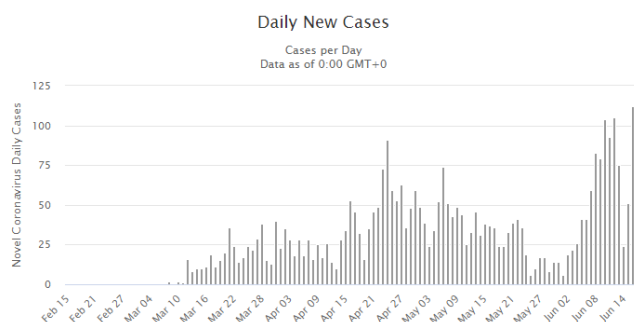
backed interest-free loans program

for individuals, Working capital loans for SMEs, Grants for small and micro-enterprises, Moratorium on loan repayments.

Due to the decrease in new cases, the state emergency was put to an end on May 14th and immediately “replaced” by the declaration of “emergency epidemic situation” which kept some restrictions in place such as the compulsory quarantine for all arriving foreign nationals with some exceptions⁹³. The border restrictions started to be lifted and most of the public facilities were reopened on June 1st. However, the infection’s rate has since started to once again increase and the emergency epidemic situation remains declared until the end of June.

Statistics

On May, 18th there were 3,542 recorded cases in Bulgaria. 184 have died, while 1,880 have recovered from the disease. That accounts to 26 deaths per million inhabitants which puts Bulgaria on the encouraging low 36th place among the 48 European states by this criteria. However, the country is experiencing the high increase in new cases over the last week. Due to the second wave of infected the country ranks substantially higher in Europe in terms of the current active cases⁹⁴.



Graph 1: The reported daily cases in Bulgaria (till June 18th)

Effects of COVID-19 and government precautions on the country’s stability and prospects

The government measures have undoubtedly managed to curb the first wave of the epidemic. From the peak of 91 newly detected cases on April 24th, there have been only 6 new cases recorded on the May 25th and June 2nd. However, since

⁹³ The Sofia Globe staff. *COVID 19: Chief State Health Inspector wants epidemic declaration extended*, <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=e3d0d4d4-be28-43ab-b7f7-ef31245c9bad> (accessed 19.06.2020)

⁹⁴ Worldometer. *Bulgaria*, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/bulgaria/> (accessed 19.06.2020)

then the cases have been once again exponentially rising, reaching 116 new cases on June 16th⁹⁵.

Since the measures have been put in place and due to the situation on the world market the unemployment rate has increased substantially. The service sector contributed to the most job losses, especially in tourism services. By the European Commission projections, the unemployment rate is expected to jump to 7% in 2020, after having reached historic lows of 4.2% in 2019.⁹⁶ There were 90,405 newly unemployed by April 28th since the introduction of the national emergency. The household consumption is expected to fall by 6% while GDP will shrink by more than 7% and investments by 18%.

The COVID-19 crisis also triggered some political clashes in the parliament over the government actions due to the growing negative socio-economic impact of the pandemic. The opposition made strong accusations towards the government such as the nepotism and the discrimination of Roma during the pandemic⁹⁷. However, there weren't any revolts in form of protests or other major street actions such as in many other countries. There has also not been any major noteworthy misinformation in the country while the government's measures enjoyed the general support from the public. The uncertainty remains, however, as the epidemiological picture of Bulgaria has once again began to worsen and the country is expected to be hit hard by the upcoming economic crisis.

Prospects and conclusion

Bulgaria has proved itself as one of the most successful European countries to handle the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic in the first wave of infections. However, by the latest prospects the second wave of infections is already on the rise and it is uncertain how the country will deal with the worsened epidemiological situation, as well as the bad economic prospects. If the current trend continues, the emergency epidemic situation is expected to be extended to the following months and additional anti COVID-19 restrictions will be forced to be once again put in place. The development of events in the following months will be crucial for the prospects of the country.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁶ European Commission. *Bulgaria Forecast Spring 2020*, https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/forecasts/2020/spring/ecfin_forecast_spring_2020_bg_en.pdf (accessed 19.06.2020)

⁹⁷ Todorov, Svetoslav. *Bulgaria's Marginalised Roma Feel Singled Out in Pandemic*, Balkan Insight, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/04/22/bulgarias-marginalised-roma-feel-singled-out-in-pandemic/> (accessed 19.06.2020)

8. Romania towards Covid -19

Alex Van de Kerkhof

When COVID-19 became a serious problem on the European continent, the government of Romania tried to act quickly to protect the country as much as possible against the spread of the new coronavirus. The virus first arrived in the European country on the 26th of February 2020⁹⁸. Initially, the spread of the virus did not go very fast which meant that there was not a severe impact on Romania. However due to the further increase of cases throughout March and the worsening of the situation in other countries on the continent like Italy and Spain, the Romanian government took measurement to fight the epidemic. As of June 4 2020, Romania counted 19.669 confirmed case, 1288 deaths and 13.919 recovered from the virus⁹⁹. In this short overview, the measurement of the government will be discussed together with the impact of the virus on the Romanian society.

Measurement against COVID-19

The worries about the coronavirus due to increased infection rate, led the President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis to declare a state of emergency starting on March 16 which enforced a lockdown in the country¹⁰⁰. This state of emergency offered the government the possibility to gather sufficient resources for the health care system to provide sufficient medical equipment. It also made it possible to limit the movement of citizens and close down public places like schools, restaurants and hotels. Iohannis however made clear that the measurements would be taken in accordance with the ongoing situation. These decisions are made together with the evaluation of the Committee for emergency situations. Schools for instances remained closed throughout the entire period of the state of emergency¹⁰¹ while, despite severe limitations which made it obliged to have official permission, international flights to Romania remained possible from certain countries. People who entered the country need to go into self-quarantine for 14 days¹⁰². In Romania itself, citizens were not allowed to leave their hometown except if they had good a reason and permission, like work. The

⁹⁸ World Health organisations (WHO), *Romania*, (accessed: 04.06.2020)

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*

¹⁰⁰ A. Grigoras, *State Of Emergency In Force In Romania*, <https://www.romaniajournal.ro/politics/state-of-emergency-in-force-in-romania> (accessed: 08.06.2020).

¹⁰¹ D. Salceanu, *Education Minister: Schools Remain Closed In Romania Till After Easter*, <https://www.romaniajournal.ro/society-people/education-minister-schools-remain-closed-in-romania-till-after-easter/> (accessed: 08.06.2020)

¹⁰² Romanian insider, *Romania keeps most international flights suspended as it replaces state of emergency with state of alert*, <https://www.romania-insider.com/romania-state-alert-may-15-flights-suspended> (accessed: 08.06.2020)

state of emergency lasted until May 15 when the president announced that the state of emergency would be replaced by a state of alert which is still in place and will remain until at least mid-July. In this state of alert relaxation of the measurements became possible¹⁰³. Though, in the new state of alert it was made mandatory to wear protective mask when visiting enclosed commercial spaces or traveling with public transport. Until today the government is lifting measures step by step, yet president Iohannis made it clear that he would not hesitate to reinstate measure or even the state of emergency if the infection rate would get worse again.

Impact of COVID-19 on Romanian society

The corona virus, like in many countries, had a big impact on the Romanian society. To begin with in line with the worldwide trend, the Romanian economy has dropped significantly. The government announced that it would take several measurements in order to help companies and businesses to survive the crisis. Prime minister Ludovic Orban declared that Romania for instance will guarantee loans for investments. In addition, he ensured that the government will be ready to pay workers when they were put on technical unemployment due to the coronavirus¹⁰⁴. The European Commission also approved the Romanian plan of around 3.3 billion Euro which should support small and medium sized enterprises throughout the country¹⁰⁵. Political wise the corona pandemic also exposed some of the problems which are going on in the country. To begin with although most of the citizens agree with the measures that were taken, there has been irritation over the control of these measurements. Several lawyers and human rights activists complained that the police used their new power over the crisis and exaggerated in handing out fines¹⁰⁶. There was also outrage with Prime minister Orban after he was photographed with other official without wearing a face masks¹⁰⁷. The Robert Schuman foundation¹⁰⁸ also pointed out that the crisis

¹⁰³ A.Grigoaras, *President: State Of Emergency Not To Be Extended. Hair Salons, Dental Offices And Museums To Open As Of May 15*, <https://www.romaniajournal.ro/society-people/president-state-of-emergency-not-to-be-extended-hair-salons-dental-offices-and-museums-to-open-as-of-may-15/>, (accessed: 08.06.2020)

¹⁰⁴ Romanian Insider, *Romania's PM announces first measures to help the economy deal with Covid-19 effects* <https://www.romania-insider.com/coronavirus-romania-government-economic-measures>, (accessed 10.06.2020)

¹⁰⁵ European Commission, *State aid: Commission approves €3.3 billion Romanian scheme to support SMEs in coronavirus outbreak* https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_649, (accessed 10.06.2020)

¹⁰⁶ M. G. Barberá, *Romania Police Accused of Abuse As COVID-19 Fines Soar* <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/04/23/romania-police-accused-of-abuse-as-covid-19-fines-soar/> (accessed 10.06.2020)

¹⁰⁷ Euractive, *Romania's Orban breaches own coronavirus rules, pays fine*, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/romanias-orban-breaches-own-coronavirus-rules-pays-fine/>, (accessed 10.06.2020)

¹⁰⁸ R. Magdin, *Covide-19 in Romania, an exacerbation of structural problems*, https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/doc/divers/Covid-19_Romania.pdf, (accessed 10.06.2020)

showed that the health care system in Romania is in a bad position due to corruption, bad management and lack of necessary equipment. The Corona virus also started a new debate around the Romanian diaspora. President Iohannis urged Romanians in foreign countries to not come back for holidays to visit family because it would cause the further spreading of the virus. However, a lot of Romanians who worked in Western Europe and lost their job over the coronavirus returned to their home country. A lot of Romanians believe that they are the cause of the spreading of the virus. The Robert Shuman foundations also points out that it may be hard for those Romanian workers to head back to their old jobs and it is not sure that Romania can integrate their diaspora into the labour market and economy¹⁰⁹. Lastly Romania also had to deal with a lot of disinformation. The government had to shut down several websites which spread fake news regarding the measures of the government. Many believe that this is orchestrated by so called online trolls from Russia¹¹⁰.

The Covid-19 pandemic started slowly in Romania. However during March and especially April, Romania saw a rise in the numbers of infected people. The way the government acted was backed by the majority of the population. The coronavirus did however open old and new discussion, especially regarding the bad state of the healthcare system and how Romania should cope with the large return of the Romanian diaspora from abroad.

9. Albania Towards Covid-19

Laura Donath

The COVID-19 pandemic was reported to have entered Albania on 8 March 2020, a father and the son who had come from Florence, Italy¹¹¹. The Albanian media had followed the case of Albanian students residing in China that were trying to return home. When the epidemic started infesting nearby Italy, where an estimated 400,000 Albanians reside, the media began to raise questions over how the virus could be stopped from entering Albania. From the point when Albania's "patient zero" was identified, the government established one of Europe's most severe lockdown systems, triggered by the country's close proximity to Italy, which was the pandemic's European epicenter at the time, and the weak condition of Albania's public health facilities¹¹². The first death case in Albania was confirmed on March 11, when a 73-year-old woman who had been

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*

¹¹⁰ Warsaw institute, *The struggle with coronavirus and Russian disinformation in Romania*, <https://warsawinstitute.org/struggle-coronavirus-russian-disinformation-romania/> (accessed 10.06.2020)

¹¹¹ Facebook.com, *Ministria e Shëndetësisë dhe Mbrojtjes Sociale*, <https://www.facebook.com/MinistriaeShendetesisedheMbrojtjesSociale/posts/2594099987367729> (accessed: 19.05.2020).

¹¹² V. Sulçe, *Albania: Coronavirus and the media*, <https://en.ejo.ch/ethics-quality/albania-coronavirus-and-the-media> (accessed: 20.05.2020).

hospitalized in the coastal town of Durrës passed away due to cardiac and pulmonary complications¹¹³. As of May 19, Albania has 948 confirmed total cases, zero confirmed new cases, 31 recorded deaths, zero total new deaths and 1 day since the last reported case¹¹⁴. Most of the confirmed cases are in the capital city of Tirana, followed by the regions of Durrës, Shkodra, Fier, Elbasan and Korça¹¹⁵.

Precautions and Foreign Policy Steps

Within rapid succession Albania has been struck by two destructive shocks in the last months: the November 2019 earthquake and the Spring 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. When dealing with the destruction after the earthquake, the government already got to test the new Ministry of Health Emergency Plan, which was completed in October 2019. The plan was further adapted after the earthquake to make current preparedness efforts more effective. Based on a thorough review of all response areas including surge capacity at hospitals and interactions between emergency services and the health system, Albania has taken several proactive steps in case of the very different risks caused by the COVID-19 virus being potentially imported. The preparatory effort included revisions to national recommendations for clinics on COVID-19 virus specimen selection and laboratory processing, analysis of interaction tracking protocols and secure collection and shipping of specimens, evaluation of inventory and use of personal protective equipment, improvement of data management processes, as well as testing a global protocol to gather first-case information in an epidemic.¹¹⁶

On March 15, the Albanian government declared all its land borders closed until further notice and adopted an emergency law which allowed for people to be fined for various infringements of measures to contain coronavirus spread. Schools, bars and restaurants were closed, leaving only supermarkets and pharmacies open. Public transport was suspended and residents had to register for special permission to use their own cars.¹¹⁷ Restrictions included the prohibition of social, cultural or political gatherings, either indoors or outdoors, the prohibition on tv networks involving more than two people in their talk shows in the same room, fines for food and medicine dealers if prices grow unacceptably or a possible three year ban for car drivers if they violate movement restrictions. The maximum penalties, up to 10 million leks (83,000 euros), would be levied on companies traded in food or drugs without compliance with health laws intended

¹¹³ Tirana Times, *Coronavirus, Albania in lockdown*, <https://www.tiranatimes.com/?p=144535> (accessed: 20.05.2020).

¹¹⁴ WHO, *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), Situation Report– 120*, https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200519-covid-19-sitrep-120.pdf?sfvrsn=515cabfb_2 (accessed: 20.05.2020).

¹¹⁵ Eadrc Request For International Assistance Covid-19, *The Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre*, March 2020.

¹¹⁶ World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): European Region focusing on readiness*, <http://www.euro.who.int/en/countries/albania/news/news/2020/2/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-european-region-focusing-on-readiness> (accessed: 20.05.2020).

¹¹⁷ V. Sulçe, *op.cit.*

to counter pathogens¹¹⁸. The police and army have been patrolling the streets, monitoring compliance with the new rules. Therefore police in Albania are using drones in the capital, Tirana, and other cities to enforce the nation's strict lockdown rules to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In case the drones encounter a pedestrian, they play a recorded warning that the police are about to arrive and they should keep their distance¹¹⁹.

On March 23rd 2020, the Albanian Government declared the state of natural disaster emergency due to the outbreak of COVID-19, followed by a request for international assistance from the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) on March 27 asking for supplies like disposable clothes, Multi parameter monitors, intensive care ventilators, Sanitizing Liquids or Oxygen flow meters. In general, Albania has two dedicated hospitals, "COVID 1" and "COVID 2", to treat patients with COVID-19 with a capacity of around 480 beds and has dedicated one area for quarantine with 120 beds. Moreover, the country has rehabilitated another building transforming it into a quarantine center with 100 more beds.¹²⁰ Albania has a capacity of 500 COVID-19 tests per day with so far more than 10 000 people being tested. Hospitals were able to continue conducting scheduled operations on May 18 due to the drop in the number of new patients, and the "COVID 2" hospital was able to return to its normal activities.

¹²¹ In line with the declaration of an emergency state, about 600 prisoners with a low risk for society and those who suffering from diseases that could put them at mortal risk if infected by COVID-19 have been released from prison and sent home on a special permit for about three months¹²². After introducing a mandatory curfew from 17:30 to 05:00 on April 13¹²³, parliament approved tough new measures on April 16 that have been described as disproportionate and unconstitutional by government critics. These included changes to the criminal code and allowed prison terms of up to eight years to be imposed on carriers of infectious diseases who fail to comply with the rules of quarantine or isolation and who infect others¹²⁴.

Effective from April 20, the government allowed about 600 business operations to reopen, saying that after the first case the low number of deaths and infections warranted a gradual restart of the economy. The list of enterprises that could

¹¹⁸ G. Erebara, *Albania Adopts Punitive Fines for Breaching Coronavirus Restrictions*, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/16/albania-mounts-millionaire-fines-against-covid-19/> (accessed: 22.05.2020).

¹¹⁹ VOA News, *Albanian Police Use Drones to Enforce Lockdown*, <https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/albanian-police-use-drones-enforce-lockdown> (accessed: 21.05.2020).

¹²⁰ Eadrcc Request For International Assistance Covid-19, *The Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre*, March 2020.

¹²¹ OECD, *The COVID-19 Crisis in Albania*, <http://www.oecd.org/south-east-europe/COVID-19-Crisis-in-Albania.pdf> (accessed: 21.05.2020).

¹²² G. Erebara, *Albania to Free 600 Prisoners as Pandemic Precaution*, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/24/albania-to-free-600-prisoners-as-pandemic-precaution/> (accessed: 22.05.2020).

¹²³ OECD, *op.cit.*

¹²⁴ V. Sulçe, *Albania: Coronavirus and the media*, <https://en.ejo.ch/ethics-quality/albania-coronavirus-and-the-media> (accessed: 20.05.2020).

restart work included farming, fishing, food and fish processing, as well as various retailers. Moreover, the loosened restrictions allowed bars and restaurants to deliver take-out food or for customers to collect it.¹²⁵ On April 27, the reopening of the economy was expanded so that around 27,589 employees were able to return to their jobs. Driving schools, hairdressers, barbershops, dental clinics and shops in shopping malls were permitted to reopen operation on May 11. Bars and restaurants resumed activities only on the outside of their premises on May 18. Also opened on May 18 were libraries, art galleries and historic sites, and individual sports activity resumed in open areas. Moreover, citizens may move freely during weekdays until 21:00, including by car, without an authorization. During the weekend, mobility remains more limited, with travel by car fully prohibited. Schools resumed only for secondary school graduates taking university admission exams and will resume with fewer students per class for universities during the summer. Kindergartens and day-care centers will be reopened on June 1. Nevertheless, gatherings of more than five people remain banned. Albania adopted a summer season policy containing steps such as rigorous temperature tests for all beach-goers, an anti-COVID-19 advisor supervising personnel safety steps, mandatory masks and worker gloves, which will also be accessible to all visitors. Regarding border measures, before the end of May, the country plans to open borders with all neighboring countries. Currently, all Albanian border crossings are closed (with few exceptions, such as goods transport or diplomatic corps), international airports are closed and travelers returning to Albania from COVID-19 affected areas are subject to a mandatory 14-day period of self-isolation.¹²⁶

Government Support and International Support

The Albanian government has taken several measures to support the economy, businesses and the population. Among other things, 100 million US \$ for the takeover of employee salaries from companies that have difficulty paying employee salaries; the permanent cancellation of late payment interest for active debtors who are currently energy consumers, family members or small businesses, with a financial impact of up to 150 million US \$; the provision of credit for the working capital of the tourism sector and for the active processing of exporting companies and the postponement of the deadline for profit tax.¹²⁷ For the population, the government offers unemployment measures, support for vulnerable groups and support for education. Unemployment benefits doubled during the pandemic, and as of April 20, 176,000 families (including corporate and tourism workers) have received financial support. The amount for people in need of social assistance was also doubled during the pandemic, and rent payments for small businesses, families and students were postponed to April

¹²⁵ B. Koleka, *Albania re-opens some businesses as seeks to limit coronavirus hit to economy*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-albania/albania-re-opens-some-businesses-as-seeks-to-limit-coronavirus-hit-to-economy-idUSKBN2200VB> (accessed: 22.05.2020).

¹²⁶ OECD, *The COVID-19 Crisis in Albania*, <http://www.oecd.org/south-east-europe/COVID-19-Crisis-in-Albania.pdf> (accessed: 21.05.2020).

¹²⁷ World Bank, *Western Balkans Regular Economic Report No. 17*, Spring 2020

and May. For primary and secondary school students, the government has developed a number of television courses that are broadcast on national television channels. Online lectures will continue through online platforms such as Google Classroom, Zoom and Edmodo until the end of May. The Prime Minister declared on April 1 that the frontline physicians, nurses and health staff would receive an additional bonus of 1 000 EUR and that support staff (including ambulance drivers) would benefit from an additional bonus of 500 EUR.

Albania will receive additional funding from international organizations, such as the European Union (EU), UNDP and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and from other countries, including Turkey, USA, China, Switzerland, Norway and Hungary. Out of the EU's financial assistance package Albania will receive 4 million EUR of immediate support for the health sector and 46.7 million EUR of support for the social and economic recovery. Moreover, Albania will receive 180 million US \$ out of the macro-financial assistance (MFA) package and 190.5 million US \$ in financial assistance from the IMF.¹²⁸

Socio-Economic Consequences

The November 2019 earthquake had already hit hard on Albania's economy and society at large. The earthquake measured 6.3 on the Richter scale, caused 51 deaths and displaced 17,000 people who had lost their homes. Loss of physical assets and damages were estimated at 7.5% of the GDP. The destruction totaled to around 26.4% of the total fixed capital formation in 2018. The industries most impacted include tourism, production and trade, as well as education, health and other public infrastructure-related buildings. Growth slowed from 4.1% in 2018 to an estimated 2.2% in 2019 due to the dramatic decline in consumption and investment. In addition, the dependence on tourism, the close ties to the badly affected Italian economy and the limited financial space of Albania make the economy particularly vulnerable to the COVID-19 crisis¹²⁹. Therefore, a decline in real GDP of 5% is to be expected in 2020 compared to the estimated growth of 2.2% in 2019. The first phase of the lockdown will cost the economy tax revenues of EUR 16 million, according to the Ministry of Finance and Economy. The Prime Minister announced that tax loss would amount to more than half a billion euros with travel, transportation and commerce being the most affected sectors. The recession has also triggered the elimination of 50,000 jobs¹³⁰.

Furthermore, the pandemic consequences will most likely trigger an economic recession that is heavily dependent on EU trade and investments. Between January 1 and March 31, the spread of government bonds increased by about 25%, indicating a deterioration in investor confidence and a higher perceived risk to Albanian government debt. Also, since the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis,

¹²⁸ OECD, *op.cit.*

¹²⁹ World Bank, *Western Balkans Regular Economic Report No. 17*, Spring 2020

¹³⁰ OECD, *The COVID-19 Crisis in Albania*, <http://www.oecd.org/south-east-europe/COVID-19-Crisis-in-Albania.pdf> (accessed: 21.05.2020).

Albanian currency ALL has depreciated by almost 7%. This may influence the willingness of businesses to make foreign currency denominated payments, which is a concern due to the high proportion of foreign currency denominated loans. Meanwhile, the currency's devaluation against EUR and the sharp rise in food prices led to an increase in CPI inflation in Albania from 1.4% in 2019 to 2.1% in March 2020. Furthermore, the unemployment rate (12.3% in 2018) and labour market conditions could deteriorate as a large proportion of the working population lives abroad (around 30% of the population)¹³¹.

10. Greece in times of pandemic, a success story?

Franziska Habermeier

With regard to undertaken precautions in the face of the ongoing pandemic, Greece at times is referred to as a *success story*¹³² in media coverage. Indeed, Greece has implemented wide – ranging measurements to respond to the spread of Covid – 19 by introducing severe restrictions within a short time period, leading to relatively low rates of death and infection as compared to other European countries. As of June 1st, Greece has 2.915 reported cases and 175 deaths related to Covid – 19¹³³, whereby 1.374 infected patients are recovered by now¹³⁴. Greece, slowly recovering from a decade – long suffering related to the consequences deriving from the financial crisis of 2009, sees itself confronted with a newly emerging threat towards which the country was not prepared to very well. However, throughout the course of the precedent months, Greece surprised with comprehensive strategies, being one of the least affected countries in the region as well as among the EU member states¹³⁵. In the following, the government's responses towards the pandemic will be discussed, as well as consequences related to the economic, social and political sphere.

Government's Precautions: Course of Development

As early as of February 26th, Greece reported its first case of Covid – 19, as a Greek woman returned from northern Italy. The case has been intensively monitored as individuals, having been in close contact with the infected patient,

¹³¹ OECD, *op.cit.*

¹³² Perrigo B., Hincks J.: *Greece has an elderly population and a fragile economy: how has it escaped the worst of the coronavirus so far?* <https://time.com/5824836/greece-coronavirus/> (accessed on 30.05.20) / Hatzigeorgiou M., Raj M.: *Why is Greece an outlier in EU's Covid – 19 response?* <https://euobserver.com/opinion/148397> (accessed on 30.05.20)

¹³³ WHO: *Covid – 19 situation in the WHO*, <https://who.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/ead3c6475654481ca51c248d52ab9c61> (accessed: 01.06.20)

¹³⁴ Visalist: *Greece Coronavirus stats tracker*, <https://visalist.io/emergency/coronavirus/greece-country> (accessed: 01.06.20)

¹³⁵ Gill O.: *How Greece's crisis is helping it bend the Covid – 19 curve*, <https://www.dw.com/en/how-greeces-crisis-is-helping-it-bend-the-covid-19-curve/a-53280532> (accessed on 30.05.20)

have been isolated immediately¹³⁶. Greece, being aware that its health system would not be prepared for a large – scale outbreak of the disease, as the country experienced shortages of 50% in the health budget and a 40% reduction in hospital spending due to the country's ongoing economic crisis¹³⁷, the government did not lose time before taking action. Greek authorities were amongst those reacting fastest towards the spread of the virus as compared to other countries in the region and within the European Union, which is particularly visible as, for instance, Greece decided to cancel carnival even before one death case has been reported¹³⁸. Moreover, even though the country might still be hampered, Greek authorities have demonstrated a high level of flexibility as they managed to digitalize public services within a short time period¹³⁹. The Ministry of Health has called for doctors and nurses currently not working to volunteer in order to support medical staff across the country and organized trainings for such volunteers. The Ministry further urged individuals with symptoms to self – isolate and to avoid public spaces¹⁴⁰. Greece received support from China and the United Arab Emirates with regard to protective masks, uniforms, tens of thousands of pieces of protective gear and imported chloroquine from India¹⁴¹. Private and public companies supported the country with more than 10 million EUR to purchase needed medical items¹⁴².

At the beginning of March, Greek authorities decided to close educational institutes and to ban public gatherings, including church visits, sports venues, museums and the like. The government implemented further restrictions, such as the border closing towards Albania and North Macedonia and suspended flights from and to northern Italy and Spain. Most of those restrictions were meant to last for a particular amount of time, usually two weeks, but due to the fast spread of the disease on the global and regional level, Greece decided to extend already established restrictions. Regardless their nationality, travelers were supposed to be in quarantine for fourteen days upon their arrival in order to

¹³⁶ Maltezou R., Georgiopolous, Kambas M., Jones G., Donovan K.: *Greece confirms first coronavirus case, a woman back from Milan*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-health-greece/greece-confirms-first-coronavirus-case-a-woman-back-from-milan-idUSKCN20K1IA> (accessed on 30.05.20)

¹³⁷ Hatzigeorgiou M., Raj M.: *Why is Greece an outlier in EU's Covid – 19 response?* <https://euobserver.com/opinion/148397> (accessed on 30.05.20)

¹³⁸ Perrigo B., Hincks J.

¹³⁹ Gill. O.

¹⁴⁰ Fotiadis A.: *Greece Ramps up Restrictions but Faces Criticism over Coronavirus Response*, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/25/greece-ramps-up-restrictions-but-faces-criticism-over-coronavirus-response/> (accessed on 30.05.20)/ Petrou Z.: *Greece takes precautions against coronavirus spread*, <https://balkan.eu.com/greece-takes-precautions-against-coronavirus-spread/> (accessed on 30.05.20)

¹⁴¹ Fotiadis A.: *Doctors, Nurses Question Greek Government's Coronavirus Responses*, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/04/06/doctors-nurses-question-greek-governments-coronavirus-response/> (accessed: 30.05.20)

¹⁴² Fotiadis A.: *Greece Ramps up Restrictions but Faces Criticism over Coronavirus Response*.

minimize the spread of the virus within Greece. Later the same month, Greek authorities announced the closing of all shops, apart from fundamental ones, such as supermarkets, pharmacies, banks or gas stations¹⁴³. On March 23th, the government announced the nationwide lockdown, whereby all residents have been requested to limit their movements to an absolute minimal level, thus, only individuals going to and from work as well as individuals being in need of grocery shopping were allowed to move and further had to carry movement certificates with them. International flights have been largely suspended, with some exceptions, as they were perceived crucial to maintain ties with Brussels.

At the beginning of April, the Migration Ministry informed about Covid – 19 cases in a refugee camp in Ritsona, where currently more than 2.300 people are hosted. As a result of 20 confirmed cases, the camp has been placed under quarantine for two weeks. Only a few days later another refugee camp in the city of Malakasa, likewise located on the mainland, reported cases, leading to the very same consequences. Government officials announced to heighten security presence in both camps to assure that hygiene and security measurements will be taken seriously. On April 4th, the government informed the public that already established restrictions will remain in place at least until the April 27th. With some exceptions, such as cargo, humanitarian or repatriation flights, international flights remained suspended, likewise, the entry – ban on non – EU citizens has been further extended until mid of May. The Greek government conducted regional approaches by implementing measurements with regard to regional developments and needs, such as in the case of Kranidi, a city in which 150 people were tested positive, leading to a curfew during nighttime for two weeks.

At the beginning of May, the government introduced the gradual ease of restrictions, meaning that individuals were no longer supposed to carry a movement certificate with them. Furthermore, some sectors of economy, such as hairdressers or bookshops, were permitted to operate again. With regard to the public sphere, preventive measurements have been undertaken, such as wearing a mask in supermarkets or public transports. Other shops' reopening followed on May 11th, whereas cafés, bars and restaurants followed on June 1th. Some travel restrictions particularly with neighboring countries, such as Bulgaria and Serbia, have been eased, in case travelers have profound reasons for traveling and fill out a health declaration. Likewise, ferry services were resumed on the same date. Moreover, the government announced the reopening of the tourism sector, a goal the government aims to implement mid of June¹⁴⁴. As Greece is highly dependent

¹⁴³ Garda World: *News Alerts: Greece*, https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts?search_api_fulltext=Greece&field_news_alert_categories=All&field_news_alert_crit=All&items_per_page=20 (accessed :30.05.20)

¹⁴⁴ Garda World.

on tourism as the sector provides one out of four jobs and is contributing one fifth of the country's overall economic performance¹⁴⁵, Greece is eager to open its borders and touristic spaces for travelers as soon as possible to support the hampered economy. Accordingly, Greece aims to conduct international flights from July 1st on, whereby individuals entering the country will be supposed to undergo Covid – 19 sample tests upon their arrival and must stick to national health protocols, however, a fourteen – days quarantine will no longer be requested. The entry – ban for non – EU citizens is currently estimated to remain in place until mid of June, with some exceptions, such as traveling members of government delegations that are allowed to enter the country before that date. Since May 25th, cafés and restaurants are allowed to reopen as Greek authorities aim to offer more opportunities for business activity, although health and hygiene rules and standards have to be installed, such as social distancing, providing space for guests in the outdoor areas of cafés and restaurants and employees are being encouraged to wear facemasks¹⁴⁶. Greece did not introduce the state of emergency at any time since the outbreak of the disease¹⁴⁷.

Political, Economic and Social Consequences

Reasons why the government's restrictions have been relatively successful to reduce the spread of the virus can be attributed to several aspects. First and foremost, authorities conducted extensive media campaigns to create awareness among residents by encouraging individuals to stay at home and further implemented relatively high fines in case rules would be broken¹⁴⁸. The civil society reacted positively towards the partially severe restrictions, which some refer to the fact that the population is used to a more or less permanent state of crisis due to the ongoing economic challenges the country faces in which sacrifices from the civil society have become natural in the sense that they are being necessary for the nation's well – being¹⁴⁹. In Greece, respect and well – being of the elderly is a main pillar of society, reinforced by the fact that most people live close to elderly family members which is why the population might be more willing to adapt to strict policies as compared to other societies¹⁵⁰. Being in good health is moreover considered to be a cultural value for Greeks rendering

¹⁴⁵ Carassava A.: *Greece want to open up for tourism, but could it be too soon?*

<https://www.dw.com/en/greece-wants-to-open-up-for-tourism-but-could-it-be-too-soon/a-53268309> (accessed on 30.05.20)

¹⁴⁶ Garda World.

¹⁴⁷ Zbytnewska K.: *Coronavirus: Which European Countries introduced the state of emergency?*

<https://www.euractiv.pl/section/bezpieczenstwo-i-obrona/news/coronavirus-which-countries-state-of-emergency-europe/> (accessed on 30.05.20)

¹⁴⁸ Gill O.

¹⁴⁹ Psaropoulos J.: *How Greece flattened the coronavirus curve,*

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/greece-flattened-coronavirus-curve-200407191043404.html> (accessed: 30.05.20)

¹⁵⁰ Gill O.

the issue a non – contested one within the population¹⁵¹. Additionally, Greeks are aware that the health sector is largely affected by the ongoing economic crisis, which is why the population might perceive an increased feeling of responsibility to stick to established restrictions. Greek authorities have remained highly transparent throughout the course of events, leading to 86% approval with regard to the partial lockdown and an increased trust towards the government. The implementation of financial support towards individuals and companies being economically affected by the Covid – 19 crisis further strengthened the population's trust in its leadership¹⁵². Finally, Greek authorities continuously emphasized the importance of regional cooperation and solidarity, referring whether to the European Union or Western Balkans, by considering those relations as crucial during times of crisis¹⁵³.

The unemployment rate in Greece is with 16.4% the highest among all EU member states and is expected to increase up to 26% due to the pandemic, whereby the OECD even estimates that unemployment might increase up to 35%. The IMF estimates a GDP drop of at least 10%¹⁵⁴. In order to address economic consequences related to the spread of the disease, Greek authorities have established a number of economic policies to provide the population and economic sectors with financial support or by easing loans¹⁵⁵. Moreover, the country will benefit, among others, from the European Investment Bank's grant of 2 billion EUR or the European Commission's raise of 500 billion EUR which are aimed to support member states¹⁵⁶. Greek authorities established specific rules with regard to rent and residency, for instance, landlords are not entitled to terminate rental agreements in case tenants cannot provide the full rent as they are economically affected by the pandemic¹⁵⁷. Finally, the EU decided to mobilize 3.3 billion EUR to support Western Balkans recovering from the crisis¹⁵⁸.

Misinformation, such as claims deriving from the Greek Orthodox Church that the virus could not be transmitted by communion wine, have been challenged by health experts to undermine their impact¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵¹ Perrigo B., Hincks J.

¹⁵² Hatzigeorgiou M., Raj M.

¹⁵³ Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *2nd Thessaloniki 2020 Ministerial Forum – Joint Ministerial Statement on Covid – 19 Pandemic*, <https://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/statements-speeches/2nd-thessaloniki-2020-ministerial-forum-joint-ministerial-statement-on-covid-19-pandemic.html> (accessed:30.05.20)

¹⁵⁴ Gill O. / Carassava A.

¹⁵⁵ Smith L. Karlsson J.: *Covid – 19 Government Support Measures*, LexMundi (2020), pp. 58 – 61.

¹⁵⁶ Ibidem, p. 58, 59. / Euractiv: *EU to unveil trillion – euro plan for post – coronavirus recovery*, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/eu-to-unveil-massive-stimulus-plan-for-post-coronavirus-recovery/> (accessed: 30.05.20)

¹⁵⁷ Smith L., Karlsson J., p. 62.

¹⁵⁸ Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹⁵⁹ Perrigo B., Hincks J.

Criticism towards the government derives, for instance, from the medical staff. Since the spread of the disease in Greece, hospital staff across the country complained about receiving defective masks¹⁶⁰. Others fear that the relatively low number of confirmed cases is a reflection of the state's strategy to carry out tests on only the most acute cases, which contradicts WHO recommendations¹⁶¹.

With regard to the social sphere, recent incidents give concern that the country's security apparatus is contributing to ongoing conflicts. As restrictions are loosened, people start gathering again, which led in some cases to police raids. As particularly one of those raids was, according to eyewitnesses, conducted in a violent way, debates about the relations between the state and the civil society are getting louder. Under the banner of social distancing, health and hygiene rules, the police aimed to dissolve the gathering of a group by using teargas as the conflict escalated. Similar incidents are taking place on a relative regular basis since the country shifted into an economic crisis. Some suggest that the government uses security forces to promote gentrification and to control the social sphere¹⁶².

Another crucial and highly controversial aspect to highlight is related to refugees and migrants. About 34.875 migrants and asylum seekers are hosted in the camps on Greek islands. International organizations claim that Greek authorities have not done enough to address overcrowding and that, besides some recent developments, fundamental factors – especially with regard to the current circumstances – such as access to adequate water and sanitation remain limited. However, so far, no cases on Greek islands' camps have been reported. Greece will be provided with financial means deriving from the EU¹⁶³ and UNHCR¹⁶⁴ to cope with increased responsibility in the light of the pandemic. Recently, some minor refugees have been resettled in some EU member states and more are to be followed¹⁶⁵. Additionally, Greece relocated refugees from the islands to the mainland, hosting them in closed hotels and other accommodations to reduce the pressure on the highly overcrowded camps on the islands, however, numbers remain low as only 2.380 refugees have benefitted from those measurements.

¹⁶⁰ Fotiadis A.: *Doctors, Nurses Question Greek Government's Coronavirus Responses*.

¹⁶¹ Fotiadis A.: *Greece Ramps up Restrictions but Faces Criticism over Coronavirus Response*.

¹⁶² Athanasiadis I.: *In Pandemic – Era Greece, Fighting for Control of the Square*, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/14/in-pandemic-era-greece-fighting-for-control-of-the-square/> (accessed: 30.05.20)

¹⁶³ Human Rights Watch: *Greece: Island Camps Not Prepared for Covid – 19*, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/22/greece-island-camps-not-prepared-covid-19> (accessed on 30.05.20)

¹⁶⁴ UNHR The Refugee Agency: *Greece – UNHCR Response to Covid – 19 and other acute Needs*, UNHCR (2020).

¹⁶⁵ Papadimas L., Jones G.: *Greece transfers first group of young refugees to EU countries*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-greece-unaccompanied/greece-transfers-first-group-of-young-refugees-to-eu-countries-idUSKCN21X1L9> (accessed on 30.05.20)

Apparently, containers for isolation have been implemented, but, so far, they are not in use. Camp residents have to adhere to quite strict measurements, as possibilities entering and especially leaving the camps are restricted. Informal schooling is suspended and only those providing essential services are allowed to enter, however, numbers of aid workers have been reduced for protection reasons¹⁶⁶. Greece, being immediate neighbor to Turkey, faces the consequences of ongoing conflicts between Turkey and the EU at first hand. The prime minister, however, assures that he would not let Turkey threaten his country and made the controversial decision to pull refugees back as Turkey announced to open its borders, an action that has been largely welcomed within the EU referring to Greece as their *European Shield*¹⁶⁷. Moreover, Greek authorities have introduced timebound preventative measures which include the suspension of asylum services and the regulated movement of asylum – seekers in and out of the reception centers¹⁶⁸.

Greece responded fast and comprehensive towards the pandemic, as authorities were aware of limited means to adequately respond to the disease since the country is hampered through its ongoing economic crisis. Greek authorities remained transparent towards the population and strengthened a feeling of collective responsibility that led to the success of the undertaken restrictions. So far, Greece achieved to cope with Covid – 19, as infection and death rates remain relatively low, however, criticism towards Greek authorities' strategy towards testing raises questions about recorded cases. With regard to asylum seekers and refugees within the country, Greece tried to ameliorate conditions, however, those efforts remain limited which has, considering the country's overall economic performance, to be understood as a result of a lack of capacities. Authorities aim to reopen the tourism sector to reduce economic strains related to the pandemic, however, those aims seem to be highly passionate and could bear risks, such as an unexpected spread of the disease through a hasty return towards relatively normal conditions. Additionally, the government has to address social difficulties, such as the relations between the security apparatus and the civil society. So far, Greeks largely adhere to government's authority, further escalation between security forces and the population might cause discrepancies that could lead to severe social and political challenges in the long – term. Greece will suffer from further economic challenges, which have to be addressed in the frame of the EU membership, as Greece will need collective support to recover from the current pandemic.

¹⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch. / Fotiadis A.: *Greece Ramps up Restrictions but Faces Criticism over Coronavirus Response*.

¹⁶⁷ Psaropoulos J.

¹⁶⁸ UNHR The Refugee Agency.

11. COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey

Javid Safarov

The pandemic in Turkey is part of the current worldwide pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) that claimed the lives of thousands around the globe. As of 4 June 2020, the total number of confirmed total cases in the country is 167,410 of which 131,778 have recovered and 4,630 have died, with 2,209,583 coronavirus tests having been done.¹⁶⁹

Government Response

Turkey started its battle against coronavirus much earlier than March 10, 2020 when the first case was confirmed inside the country. Turkey's main framework of the fight against coronavirus strategy is based on the National Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Plan prepared in 2019¹⁷⁰. In line with this plan, on 10 January 2020, while not many countries took any measures, the Ministry of Health set up the Coronavirus Scientific Advisory Board. It consists of 31 members, namely experts and academics specialized in fields such as chest diseases, infectious diseases, clinical microbiology, etc. The board sets out guidelines for the treatment by medicals and measures to be followed by the public and updates them with regard to the disease's course throughout the country.¹⁷¹

Turkey has taken measures in major travel, health, economic and educational areas, with giving special attention to ensuring social consciousnesses of measures directed to the social distance by strengthening the public communication channels. Turkey was one of the first countries imposing travel restrictions. Although there was no confirmed case, Turkey began to take actions at airports, such as installing thermal cameras at the airports from January 24,¹⁷² stopped all the flights from China as of February 5.¹⁷³ Having seen increasing confirmed cases and the virus spreading in Turkey, on 27 March, President Erdogan announced that all international flights were terminated.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ Haber Turk, *4 Haziran Koronavirüs tablosu! Koronavirüsten bugün kaç kişi öldü? Corona virüsü vaka sayısı Türkiye*, <https://www.haberturk.com/4-haziran-koronavirus-tablosu-koronavirusten-bugun-kac-kisi-oldu-corona-virusu-vaka-sayisi-turkiye-2702104> (accessed 04.06.2020)

¹⁷⁰ T.C. Sağlık Bakanlığı Halk Sağlığı Genel Müdürlüğü, *Pandemik İnfluenza Ulusal Hazırlık Planı*, https://grip.gov.tr/depo/saglik-calisanlari/ulusal_pandemi_plani.pdf (accessed: 04.06.2020)

¹⁷¹ Hürriyet, *Bilim Kurulu nedir? Sağlık Bakanlığı Bilim Kurulu üyeleri kimlerdir?*, Hürriyet . <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/bilim-kurulu-nedir-saglik-bakanligi-bilim-kurulu-uyeleri-kimlerdir-41478813> (Accessed: 04.06.2020)

¹⁷² Daily Sabah, *China virus sends shockwaves across travel sector, including in Turkey*, <https://www.dailysabah.com/tourism/2020/01/28/china-virus-sends-shockwaves-across-travel-sector-including-in-turkey> (Accessed: 04.06.2020)

¹⁷³ Hürriyet Daily News, *Turkey stops all flights from China as part of coronavirus measures*, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-to-suspend-flights-from-china-until-end-of-month-151705> (Accessed: 04.06.2020)

¹⁷⁴ Hürriyet, *Son dakika haberi: Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan yeni corona virüs önlemlerini tek tek açıkladı!*, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/son-dakika-haberi-cumhurbaskani-erdogan-aciklama-yapacak-41479930> (Accessed on: 04.06.2020)

In this process, as a part of action plan in the field of health, reference hospitals were determined, and isolation rooms were established in these hospitals. Masks, disinfectants, and kits that might be needed at the beginning of the process were supplied. Thanks to the local diagnostic kit developed for coronavirus, the virus can be detected within 90 minutes. As for education, all schools and universities were closed starting from 16 March 2020, and it was decided to continue with remote education only. The remote classes for primary, secondary, and high schools have been provided since 23 March 2020 through TRT EBA TV, a channel created with the collaboration of TRT and the Ministry of Education¹⁷⁵. When it comes to economic measures, a 100 billion TRY economic measures package was announced, which includes important steps such as increasing pensions, providing a total of 2 billion TRY aid to families in need, raising the lowest pension to 1,500 TRY, and paying the holiday bonuses early¹⁷⁶. Within the scope of social distance measures, all sports leagues were postponed and thirty metropolitan cities as well as Zonguldak were banned from entry and exit on April 4. What is more, all activities that need to be carried out collectively were stopped, with prayer gatherings in mosques being forbidden. For the isolation of individuals in the risky group, as of March 21, people over the age of 65 as well as those with chronic illness, have been imposed a total curfew. Later, on April 3, the curfew was extended to people younger than 20 years old¹⁷⁷.

In his press statement, President Erdogan asserted that the number of active cases is now decreasing, so is the number of patients in need of intensive care and the number of patients recovering is increasing exponentially. Explaining that the normalization process will happen gradually, the regulations were announced regarding the gradual easing of the restrictions to be imposed through several steps in May, June and July¹⁷⁸. On 1 June, domestic flights were resumed and most public spaces, including restaurants, swimming pools, beaches, parks, libraries and museums were opened¹⁷⁹.

Disinformation and fake news

The current coronavirus outbreak has certainly caused the viral spread of misinformation, that poses a challenge to containment efforts. In this sense, Turkish authorities had identified at least 93 suspects, 19 of whom were detained for creating panic and fear in society by using fake images and audio files in social media and targeting officials with unfounded and provocative statements by suggesting that the virus had widely spread in Turkey and that officials had

¹⁷⁵ H. Duran, *Devletlerin Koronavirüsle Karşılaştırmalı Mücadele Stratejileri*, “SETA Analiz” 2020 no.317, pp.20-21

¹⁷⁶ Sputnik Türkiye, *Erdoğan koronavirüse karşı 100 milyar TL'lik destek paketini açıkladı: En düşük emekli maaşı 1500 TL oluyor*, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/202003181041634224-erdogan-koronaviruse-karsi-100-milyar-tl-destek-paketini-acikladi-en-dusuk-emekli-maasi-1500-tl/> (Accessed on: 04.06.2020)

¹⁷⁷ H. Duran, *Devletlerin Koronavirüsle Karşılaştırmalı Mücadele Stratejileri*, pp.21-22

¹⁷⁸ Anadolu Agency, *Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Normal hayata dönüşü kademe kademe başlatacağız*, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-normal-hayata-donusu-kademe-kademe-baslatacagiz/1828617> (Accessed on: 04.06.2020)

¹⁷⁹ Aljazeera, *Turkey reopens most public places after coronavirus lockdown*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/06/turkey-reopens-public-places-coronavirus-lockdown-200601143056501.html> (Accessed on: 04.06.2020)

taken insufficient measures.¹⁸⁰ Some foreign newspapers considered these actions to be censorship, with asserting that illiberal leaders see fake news bans as convenient tools to cover up criticism just as eagerly as misinformation.¹⁸¹

Impacts of Covid-19

Like the global, Turkey's economy is also affected by the outbreak in a negative way. Due to the pandemic, a decrease in growth rate, increase in unemployment rate, deterioration in balance of payments and budget balance, and difficulties in foreign financing are being experienced¹⁸². As for the social impacts, the proportion of domestic violence in Turkey increased by 38.2% in March.¹⁸³ In terms of political scene, the government's slogan, #WeAreAllWeNeed, underlines the theme of nationalist self-reliance. Official and semi-official outlets are filled with stories of Turkey making its own ventilators, stockpiling its own medicines, and showing best practices for the rest of the world while providing medical aid to less fortunate countries, like the UK, USA, Italy, Spain and Balkans.¹⁸⁴

Croatia – appear soon

Opening borders

The beginning of June brought a slow lifting of restrictions in all the countries concerned, including border controls. On July 1 the Western Balkan¹⁸⁵ countries travellers was the first third-country citizens eligible to travel to the Schengen Area. According to the European Commission recommendation, restrictions depends on epidemiological situation which is similar or better than that of the EU. The temporary restrictions were prolonged on non-essential travel into the EU until 30 June 2020¹⁸⁶. As at 17 June 2020, the situation regarding the crossing of borders in the Balkan countries is as follows:

1.Slovenia reopened borders to citizens from 18 countries on May 15, such as: Austria, Croatia and Hungary.

¹⁸⁰ Anadolu Agency, *Koronavirüsle ilgili provokatif paylaşımlara gözaltı*, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/koronavirusle-ilgili-provokatif-paylasimlara-gozalti/1768324> (Accessed on: 04.06.2020)

¹⁸¹ J. Mchangama, S. McLaughlin, *Coronavirus Has Started a Censorship Pandemic*, The Foreign Policy, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/01/coronavirus-censorship-pandemic-disinformation-fake-news-speech-freedom/> (Accessed on: 04.06.2020).

¹⁸² İ. Demir, *Kovid-19 (Koronavirüs) Salgınının Seyri ve Türkiye Ekonomisi*, "ULİSA12" 2020, no.1, p.3

¹⁸³ O. Erem, *Koronavirüs günlerinde ev içi şiddet artıyor: Kadınlar şiddetten korunmak için neler yapabilir?*, BBC Türkçe, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-52208017> (Accessed on: 04.06.2020)

¹⁸⁴ BBC Türkçe, *Koronavirüs: Türkiye hangi ülkeye ne kadar yardım gönderdi?*, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-52459231> (accessed: 04.06.2020)

¹⁸⁵ Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

¹⁸⁶ *Schengenvisa.info*, *EU Opens Its Borders for Western Balkan Citizens on July 1*, 11.06.2020, <https://www.schengenvisa.info/news/eu-opens-its-borders-for-western-balkan-citizens-on-july-1/> (accessed: 17.06.2020).


2. From 15 June Montenegro and Italy citizens are allowed to cross borders. Quarantine for 14 days is provided for those who come from high risk countries. Montenegro allowed the entry without quarantine, if the travellers come from the country with a rate of transmission of Covid-19 less than 25 per 100,000 inhabitants.
3. In BiH borders are open just to citizens of neighbouring countries such as: Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia. Diplomats, residents and freight drivers are exceptions.
4. Also Serbia opened their borders from 1st June 2020.
5. In Romania travellers from Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Croatia, Switzerland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary can cross the border without quarantine. Those coming from EU/EEA/Schengen countries not listed above must still self-isolate for 14 days.
6. Greece on 31 May 2020 presented three parts plan to open borders, which entails three different phases. Travels from EU countries resumed to a limited extent on June 15.
7. Also Turkey has opened its borders with the health checks to foreign citizens.
8. Bulgaria opened its borders on 1 June to EU countries, the UK, San Marino, Andorra, Monaco, Vatican, Serbia and North Macedonia citizens. Travellers from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro are also allowed. Tourists from Belgium, Portugal, Sweden, and the UK are obligated to self-isolate for 14 days. Travellers from other countries must submit a declaration that they were informed about the epidemic situation.
9. Croatia opened its borders in mid-May without restriction to travellers from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, Germany and Slovakia. The re-opening of borders for EU and UK citizens took place on 15 June 2020. There is no quarantine obligation¹⁸⁷.

¹⁸⁷ Euronews, *Which European countries have opened their borders ahead of the summer holiday season?*, 17.06.2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/06/15/which-european-countries-have-opened-their-borders-ahead-of-the-summer-holiday-season> (accessed: 17.06.2020).

CONCLUSION



	COUNTRY	Beginning of Covid-19	Government's precautions	Sickness rate / death rate / recovery rate (on 04.06.2020)	Challenges (economic, political, cultural)	Loosening of restrictions/predictions	Main documents, strategies related to- Covid19
1.	Slovenia	4 March 2020	Testing (since January), 14-day quarantine people entering the country, closure of all public spaces and non-essential shops, mandatory face masks indoor public places, public transport cancelled, Slovenian-Italian border closed	Infections: 1,479 recovered 1,358 Deaths: 106 Current infections: 10 (on 4.06)	high unemployment rate, demonstrations against restrictions + new government, new government was formed when the pandemic started	Easing lockdown as of 30 April As of 15 May, Slovenia declared end of epidemic, but still has certain restrictions in place Borders reopened 1 June Schools partially reopened, just like most shops and hairdressers and beauty salons (April / b	
2.	Montenegro	17.03.2020	Emergency status, nation-wide curfew, obligatory wearing of masks, 14-day quarantine, ban of public gatherings	Sickness rate: 342 Death rate: 9 Recovery rate: 315	Economic recession, high unemployment rate, political instability	Opening of hotels, bars, restaurants, cafes and shopping malls on May 18, curfew was eased in mid-May, reopening of beaches, opening of borders as of June 1	Ministry of Economy: Business and employee support program European Council: Macro-financial assistance in the form of loans European Commission: Support package with bilateral assistance
3.	Kosovo	13.03.2020	Testing since early February. After first case, total lockdown of the country. 14 days in quarantine for citizens who came from abroad.	1298 confirmed cases 913 recovered 31 deaths	Kurti government fell after Parliament's vote. New government was formed with Mr.Hoti as PM. Challenge remains the agreement between Kosovo and Serbia. Kurti's party has warned for protests	Nation-wide lockdown was lifted in phases. Now Kosovo has entered third phase. Borders with it's neighbors are open while international flights expected to be open from 15 th of June.	Decision to "Overcome fiscal rules". Government program for economic recovery to use 1 bilion euro from state resources. Budget deficit in order to guarantee financial stability.

4.	BiH	05.03.2020	Quarantine 14 days, testing age-based ban on movement, curfew, migrant camps on lockdown, borders closed, mandatory face mask, punitive measures for spreading fake news, no large gatherings	Infection: 2 606 Recovered: 1 968 Deaths: 159	Constitutional court case on age-based movement ban, people in quarantine reported lack of information from authorities, certain migrant facilities reportedly lacked resources, delay in governments deciding how to spend IMF money, corruption in procurement of PPE, lack of preparation for upcoming elections	Federation BH 24 April RS 10 May	
5.	North Macedonia	26.02.2020	Curfew, testing, strong judicial persecution	2392 confirmed cases, 141 deaths. Recovery rate 65%, death rate 6%. (data from WHO, corona.help [accessed on 4 th of June])	Caretaker government that should last until elections mid-April is now in charge until elections can take place and has to deal with economic and social consequences of the pandemic.	The nationwide curfew was lifted on the 27 th of May. Starting from the 28 th , cafés and restaurants could open their outside areas to costumers. Schools are scheduled to reopen on 10 th of June.	
6.	Serbia	06.03.2020	Curfew, testing, mandatory quarantine, closed malls, schools, universities, bars, closed borders.	Tested: 261,266 Confirmed Total: 11,571 Recovered: 6,910 Deaths: 246 Per Million: 1323	Increase of unemployment, mistrust to government, social tentions, economic instability, reporting Human Rights violations	Restriction lifting since Mid-April. State of Emergency lifted on May 6.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Tax, economic relief measures (COVID-19) · Program of Financial Support through the Development Fund · Decree on Fiscal Benefits and Direct Aid to Companies in the Private Sector and Monetary Aid to Citizens Aimed at Reducing Economic Consequences due to COVID 19 · Decision on Temporary Prohibition

							<p>Against Exports of Basic Products of Importance for the Population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Decision on Prohibition Against Exports of Medicines · Decision on closure of the border crossing
7.	Romania	26.02.2020	<p>First state of emergency limiting movement of citizens, closure of public spaces like schools, restaurants and hotels. 14-day self-quarantine From May 15, state of alert, obligation to cover mouth and nose when people are in public spaces and traveling by public transportation. Measures from state of emergency still in place but gradually lifted.</p>	<p>Confirmed cases: 19.669 Deaths: 1288 Recovered: 13.919</p>	<p>Condition of the Healthcare system, return of a large part of the Romanian diaspora. Irritation over disproportional fines from the police. Exposure to fake news.</p>	<p>Since the implementation of the state of alert, measurements against covid-19 have been gradually lifted. On July 15 the next phase of lifting measurements will take place opening malls, kindergartens, outdoor pools and gyms. The state of alert will remain in place until at least mid-July.</p>	<p>Romania will try to help out small and medium sized enterprises by providing them loans for investment. They will pay for technical unemployment.</p>
8.	Albania	08.03.2020	<p>Adaption of new emergency plan after earthquake, Closing of borders, businesses, public institutions, public transport etc., Social Distancing, Curfews Introducing extremely high deterrent penalties Declaration of State of Emergency from March</p>	<p>Confirmed Cases: 1.197 Recovered: 898 Deaths: 33</p>	<p>Double challenge/ already weakened economy because of earlier earthquake, Tourism, Education, Trade, Health and Public Infrastructure as most affected sectors Rise of unemployment rate, weakening of labor market conditions</p>	<p>Ease of restrictions started since April 20, allowing chosen businesses to reopen Further reopening of economy since April 27, allowing numerous employees going back to work Reopening of bars, restaurants, dental clinics etc. from May 11 Loosening of curfew and</p>	<p>Ministry of Health Emergency Plan</p> <p>Changes in Criminal Code for Quarantine Violators, introducing harsh punishments</p> <p>Declaring the state of National emergency, strict measures (quarantine, lockdown, curfew)</p> <p>Banning all drug exports</p> <p>Government spending for support of</p>

			24 to June 23 Economic/Financial support measures for population and businesses		Will most likely trigger economic recession, heavily dependent on EU trade and investments Deterioration in investor confidence and higher perceived risk to government debt, Depreciating of Albanian currency Increase in CPI inflation due to currency's devaluation against EUR and the sharp rise in food prices	reopening of chosen schools and leisure facilities from May 18 On June 1 st , Albania opened land borders with all neighboring countries	economy and population
9.	Greece	26.02.20	Partial lockdown, movement certificate, closing of educational institutes and large parts of economic sectors, ban of public gatherings, high fines in case rules are not respected, extensive media campaigns to create awareness, high level of transparency, establishment of economic/ financial mechanisms to support affected parts of society/economic sectors --> collective feeling of responsibility	Infected: 2. 915 Recovered: 1.374 Deaths: 175	Relations between state (security forces) and civil society) Recovering from ongoing economic crisis, unemployment rate Refugee and migrant situation, including ongoing conflicts with Turkey	Ease of restrictions since May 4 th Aim to reopen tourism sector mid of June	Joint regional agreements for cooperation and solidarity (particularly with Western Balkans and the EU member states)
10.	Turkey	10.03.2020	Setting up Coronavirus Scientific Advisory Board; installation of thermal cameras at the airports;	Confirmed cases: 167,410 Recovered: 131,778	Increase in unemployment; Spread of misinformation;	As of June 1, Domestic flights were resumed and most public spaces, including restaurants,	- National Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Plan -2019-nCoV Disease Guide

			<p>termination of international flights; border closures; closure of all schools and universities; creation of TRT EBA TV for distance learning; a 100 billion TRY economic measures package; increasing minimum pensions; postponing tax liabilities and credits; nationwide curfew for those aged above 65 and below 20; entry ban on 30 metropolitan cities; ban on prayer gatherings in mosques.</p>	Deaths: 4,630	<p>Suppression of criticism-detainees, Increase in domestic violence Conditions of refugee and migrants</p>	<p>swimming pools, beaches, parks, libraries, museums, barbershops, hairdressing and beauty saloons were opened; People over the age of 65 can go out in one day of curfew and for 4 hours; Children up to the age of 20 can go out on with social distancing in force; The appointment, assignment and personnel recruitment activities of the Ministry of National Defense start on 1 June, followed by summons operations on 5 June, and paid military service will resume on 20 June.</p>	
11.	Bulgaria	08.03.2020	<p>13.3. State of emergency declared, closure of schools, restaurants, shopping centres. Social distancing in other public spaces. Suspension of sports. Mandatory quarantine for some nationals. 17.3. Suspension of international trains, strict measures for air travel 30.3. Compulsory mask wearing in public places 6.4.: Ban on all arriving third-country nationals and persons from the countries of high risk or compulsory 14-day</p>	<p>Confirmed cases: 3453 Recovered: 1817 Deaths: 181</p>	<p>90,405 newly unemployed by 28.4. since the introduction of the national emergency. GDP expected to fall by 3.7% in 2020 (Worldbank). Political clashes over the government actions due to the growing negative socio-economic impact of the pandemic (strong accusations by opposition, such as of nepotism, discrimination of</p>	<p>1.5. End of compulsory mask wearing in public places 14.5. National emergency was lifted 22.5. Lift of entry ban for European Union and Schengen area countries as Coronavirus cases started to decrease 1.6. Restaurants, bars and some other places reopened</p>	<p>60/40 measure for business owners, State-backed interest-free loans program for individuals, Working capital loans for SMEs, Grants for small and micro-enterprises, Moratorium on loan repayments.</p>

			quarantine. 15.4. checkpoints limiting movement in and out of the predominantly Roma- populated Sofia neighbourhoods		Roma during the pandemic etc.).		
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THANK YOU for READING ☺