

## GOVERNMENT ACTIVISM DURING A PANDEMIC

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### **Abstract**

*The COVID-19 pandemic can be described in modern history as a milestone in social development. It evokes strong emotions, fear, helplessness and a desire to survive. It changes our priorities, attitudes and behavior. It recalls the essence of the existence of the individual, society and the State. It shows what its citizens mean to the State and what their State means to the citizens. It helps identify the most vulnerable and strong points of all involved. The author of the article will try to summarize the situation and point out the State and its steps in the fight against the spread of COVID-19. For this purpose, the author decided to use available online resources from domestic and foreign environments. He processed the obtained data mainly through the use of analysis, deduction and statistical recalculations. Based on the results and monitoring of the situation, it outlined possible solutions and recommendations leading to the alleviation of the undesirable situation.*

### **Key words:**

*citizens, COVID-19, government, measure, pandemic*

**JEL Classification:** H83, H75, I00

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### **Introduction**

No one knows the future, but the current situation we are in does not look good. Its atypicality is noticeable from several sides. Instability and imbalances in economic and economic-social relations, deteriorating care and access to education, social and health care, declining incomes and rising deaths are the results of the COVID-19 pandemic. A pandemic that affects all of us, that is - citizens, States and the world. There is nothing to left, but to think about possible scenarios of development, assign certain probabilities to them and make decisions based on them. The State, as an authority, representative and precondition for collective protection, must act with particular responsibility for a given problem. The result of its activity should therefore be to find innovative solutions that can

minimize damage and maximize benefits. Times new roman (10)

### **Literature overview**

The COVID-19 pandemic represents the biggest global crisis not only in the field of public health in the last century (WHO, 2020, OECD, 2020a; World Bank, 2020). "COVID-19 is now the most severe health crisis since the Spanish Flu in 1918. The COVID-19 pandemic is wreaking havoc on the global economy, unleashing the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression" (UN, 2020). Director of the International Monetary Fund: "this is the only crisis that has managed to stop the world economy" Georgiev (2020). In addition, free movement or the current way of life have been rapidly tightened. Thanks to pandemic, we live in chaos, uncertainty and fear (Fig. 1.).

Fig. 1. Map of COVID-19 cases in time

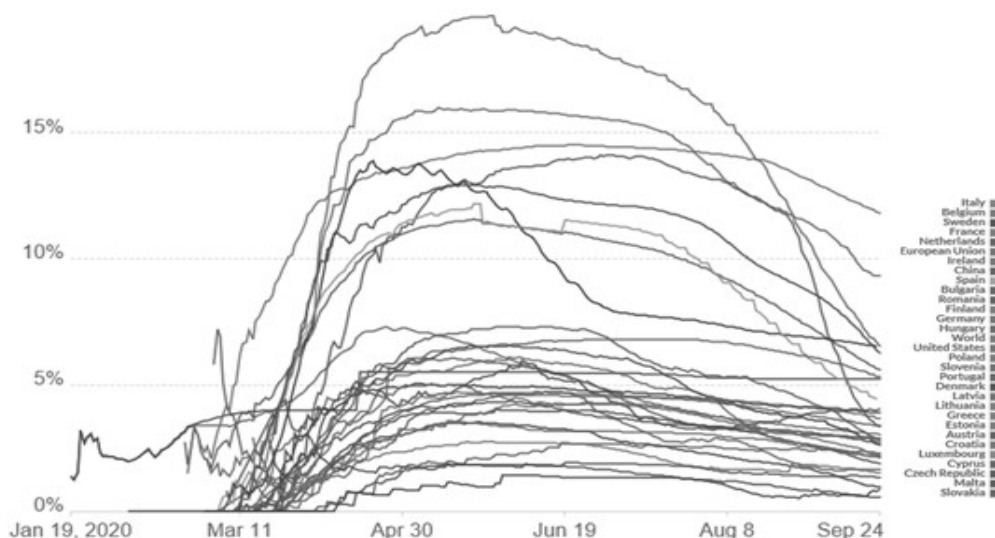


Source: John Hopkins University and Medicine, 2020

Pandemic can therefore be described not only as the biggest economic, but also the financial and social shock of the 21st century. Since its outbreak, almost one million people have died

worldwide (Worldometer, 2020; Ritchie et al, 2020, Graph 1), and 1.6 billion people have lost jobs as a result of the pandemic (Kretchmer, 2020, OECD, 2020b).

Graph 1. Case fatality rate of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic



Source: ECDC, 2020b

Governments are aware of this situation and they are consciously taking unprecedented action (UNFPA, 2020; Eggers et al, 2020, ECDC, 2020a; Table 1.). The same statement is true for the EU and its Member States. They work together to strengthen national healthcare systems, take measures to mitigate the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, support the reconstruction and repatriation of citizens (almost 0.5 million Europeans). These and many other

acts test the collective responsiveness and attitudes of the involved. As stated by Josep Borrell, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2020) "A global pandemic can only be solved globally, with united, swift and decisive global action." Osterhaus virologist tells Science magazine "What would be necessary is that we define one central policy in Europe. The problem is, who is going to do that? The European Union has little

power to coordinate health measures. ” (Kupferschmidt, 2020).

*Table 1. The most common restrictions*

Measure	Specification
Cancellations of mass crowds	Specific events or the size of the meeting
Closure of public areas	Full closure of public areas etc.
Closure of educational institutions	Nurseries, primary schools, secondary schools and higher education
‘Stay-at-Home’ recommendations	The elderly, people with underlying health conditions but also the general population
Use of protective masks in public areas or public transport	Exception: people with health illnesses

Source: own research based on the documents of ECDC, 2020a

As stated in the United Nation briefing report (1 May 2020) "Since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic on 11 March 2020, nearly 80 percent of the global population has come under stay-home orders, lockdowns and quarantines, inflicting increasingly severe direct and indirect economic impacts. The global financial crisis disproportionately hurt lower income households in economies, as millions lost jobs and their most important asset, the homes. Labour-intensive service sector jobs are most directly hit by lockdowns. Retail trade, restaurants, sports, recreations and transportation became the first casualties, as the pandemic containment measures largely shut down economic activities in these sectors, which employ millions of low-skilled workers. "

It is important for States and communities to lend a helping hand to their people. We cite the European Union as an example. The EU is helping Europe and Europeans cope with the crisis as well as its devastating economic consequences through a number of measures (Table 2.). It is releasing billions of euros to address the issue in its entirety. It points to the

need to support health, education, the economy and the economic sector. „The European Commission has a new aid package, awarded nearly € 166 million, via the European Innovation Council (EIC), to 36 companies for fight with the coronavirus pandemic. More than € 148 million will be granted to another 36 companies to contribute in recovery plan for Europe, bringing the total investment from Horizon 2020 to € 314 million. It also contributes € 1.5 million to UNICEF COVID-19 response for vulnerable children and families in Syria.” (EC, 2020a. EC, 2020b, Unicef, 2020).

Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Stella Kyriakides, said: “Today we propose to our Member States a well-coordinated, predictable and transparent approach to travel restrictions, always placing the protection of public health first. We must avoid further disruption of already fragile economies and additional uncertainty for citizens who have made huge sacrifices. They expect this from us after many months living with COVID-19.”

*Table 2. Key actions of the EU*

<b>Defeat a Global Pandemic</b>	<b>Recovery the economic „Next Generation EU“</b>
Slowing the spread of the virus	Providing massive economic stimulus
Providing medical equipment	Supporting EU health systems and infrastructures „EU4Health programme“
Promoting research for a vaccine	Protecting small and medium-sized businesses
Repatriating EU citizens	Mitigating unemployment risks „Support mitigating Unemployment Risks in Emergency (SURE)“ Supporting the tourism industry
Boosting European solidarity	Banking package to support households and businesses
Supporting the economy	Supporting agriculture and fisheries
Protecting jobs	Helping countries fund their crisis response
Helping the EU’s recovery	Helping countries fund their crisis response
Supporting partners around the globe	Relaxing state aid rules
Fighting COVID-19 disinformation	Protecting weakened European businesses from foreign competitors

*Source: own research based on the documents of European Council, 2020; European Parliament, 2020*

### Goal and Methodology

The main goal of the article is to acquaint the reader with the situation and solutions to the issue of the spread of COVID-19 in the world and at home. To find out the current state of development of this pandemic in individual States and to point out the role of communities in the fight against it. At the same time, our goal is to highlight the role and procedure of the government, as well as to draw attention to the need for state preparedness. To meet these goals, we decided to use the method of analysis and synthesis. We used mapping the situation by searching and retrieving data from public online sources. Subsequently, we used methods of mathematical-statistical recalculations, which clarified the developmental side of the spread of COVID-19. At the end, we used a deduction, based on the facts obtained in processing our observations and drawing recommendations.

### Findings related to Slovakia's response to the global pandemic COVID-19

The development of the situation in Slovakia is closely connected with the existence of policy heterogeneity, which characterizes our country. The Slovak Republic was caught by this issue at the time of the new government (ŠÚ SR, 2020, ÚV SR, 2020). This has greatly complicated the situation and increased our citizens' concerns for their health and lives (Actly Agency, 2020). Fortunately, the black scenario has not been confirmed (Congress, 2020). On the contrary, the actions and activities of the new government have put us at the forefront of the success in the fight against this virus. Slovakia was among the first countries to introduce radical measures against the spread of coronavirus. State authorities in the fight against the spread of COVID-19 acted quickly, unambiguously and without any hesitation (Bloomberg, 2020). Right at the beginning, the Government of the Slovak Republic declared an abnormal situation in the

Slovak Republic (Act No. 42/1994 Coll.) Valid from 12 March 2020 (Resolution No. 111/2020) due to the spread of COVID-19, subsequently declared a state of emergency (Act No. 42/1994 Coll.) valid from 16 March 2020 (Resolution No. 114/2020, Resolution No. 115, Resolution No.

116, Coll. 45/2020 Coll.). In addition, the new government has managed to implement several other measures so that the growth of citizens' confidence in the given steps is positively received (Table 3.).

Table 3. Government measures in the time of COVID-19

<b>Government measures</b>	<b>Specific assistance to citizens</b>
Border closure – „traffic light“	Financial contributions
Obligation to wear a face mask and keep a social distance	Postponement of filing a tax return forms
Limitations in mass public activities	Flexible suspension of Trades
Mandatory quarantine	Postponement of social and health contributions
Recommendation of using eEnvironment	Possibility to request a deferral of loan repayments
Closure of educational institutions	Entitlement to sickness and nursing at the time of the pandemic
Regulations in the field of retail operations, catering providers, swimming pools, service providers	New special provisions in the Labor Code in the event of an emergency, emergency or state of emergency
Regulations in the field of operation of social and medical facilities	Temporary protection of entrepreneurs from bankruptcies, executions and creditors
Regulations for establishments, plants and workplaces	Provision of bank guarantees under the program - SIH anti-corona guarantee
"Stay at home" recommendation	Rental protection
Assistance to employees, companies and other	

Source: own research based on the documents of ÚV SR, 2020, MIRRai SR, 2020

It is thanks to these quick steps that our government has managed to come to the forefront, among the safest countries in Europe (The Guardian, 2020). Bloomberg (2020) and

Schernhammer (2020) highlight citizens and their efforts to comply with quarantine measures and to monitor the contacts of each new case (Table 4.).

Table 4. Development of the COVID-19 situation in Slovakia

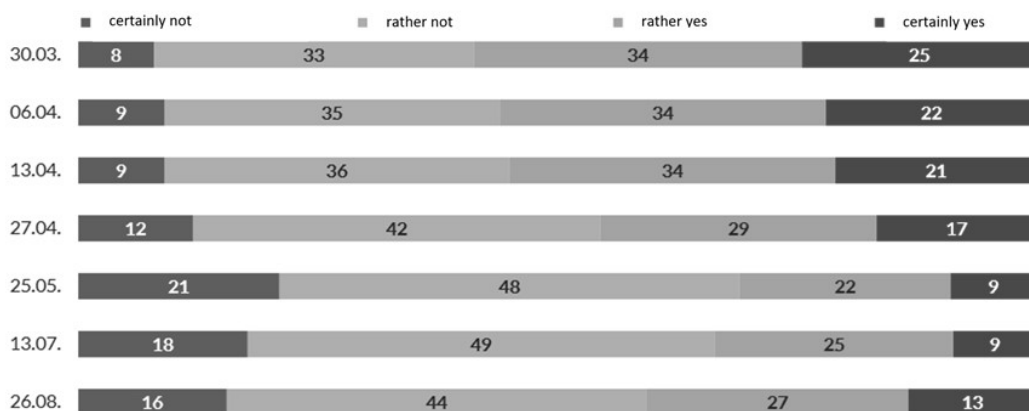
	Examined		Positive testing			Cured patients		
	total	% growth	total	% ratio	% growth	total	% ratio	% growth
January	3	-	0	0,000	-	0	0,000	-
February	13	333,333	0	0,000	-	0	0,000	-
March	9097	69876, 92	400	4,397	-	3	0,750	-
April	91072	901,121	1403	1,541	250,75	558	39,772	18500
May	172875	80 822	1522	0 880	8 482	1368	80 881	145 16

Source: own research based on the documents of Korona, 2020

The State was not ready for the first wave of the pandemic, but we managed it very well. Slovakia has chosen a strategy of hard fighting. The closure of borders, the repatriation of citizens of the state, compulsory quarantine, the closure of

schools and shops, the ban on public events or the mandatory wearing of face masks can be considered correct, but for several reasons not fully completed (Graph 2.).

Graph 2. Feeling threatened by COVID-19



Source: Actly, 2020

State officials are trying to use a significant improvement in the epidemiological situation to prepare us for a possible second wave of the pandemic. As Krajniak (2020) states, "our aim is to eliminate the shortcomings and missing crisis manuals, which will serve as an aid in any unpredictable situation in the future."

For these reasons, it is important to implement a radical shift in all spheres and areas of social existence. The State must radically support and develop the issue of eEnvironment. This applies in particular to the provision of services guaranteed by the State (eGovernment, eHealth,

eEducation). It is also necessary to increase assistance to citizens (contributions, guarantees, claims, technical and material assistance) and to prevent the spread of misinformation. Adjust the perception and application of the principles of democracy (freedom of movement, contact, rights and obligations) so that it benefits collectively. If the State does not act as a guarantor of the functionality of these systems, there may be an increased threat to citizens from a financial and social point of view. These elements should therefore be the main topics of negotiations of individual departmental representatives. At the

same time, it is important for the State to enforce these acts on EU soil as well.

### Conclusion

History has never been friendly to us. Moments of happiness and joy were always replaced by a hard and ruthless blow of fate. Freedom is replaced by oppression; growth is replaced by fall. History is full of examples that work within certain cycles and rules. It is no different today. Pandemics have been, are and will be. However, a multi-round process of its attack must be taken into account. The first is sudden, unexpected and does great damage. However, the second is the one that is crucial and usually the most destructive. Therefore, it is necessary to constantly monitor the situation, test the readiness of the system, act in the interests of the team and the participation of all stakeholders to eliminate the undesirable situation right now. For this reason, the government of the Slovak Republic, the EU and the rest of the developed world are working on setting up modified systems and strategies designed to combat the spread of COVID-19. Their aim is to protect the health of

citizens and the existence of the State. By applying new trends, technologies and knowledge, they try to achieve this goal. Therefore, we would like to appeal to develop and support this issue. We see space mainly in the support of IT and eEnvironment (households, companies, the State). Also in preventing the spread of disinformation and assistance to citizens without any discriminatory elements (age, gender, education, financial security, etc.). It is essential that the younger, middle and older generation have guaranteed guarantees, which can only be given by the State demonstrating respect for citizens and their lives (health care, education, financial security, etc.). At the same time, it is important to adopt a single EU framework of measures that have emerged as most effective, even at the expense of economic loss. The unity of good practice must be paramount. The basis of everything is therefore a trust, mutual assistance and respect for each other (participation of the general professional and lay public, self-government, the State). The cornerstones of this project are healthy and solid, so it is necessary to approach the completion of the entire complex responsibly.

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