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# THE EXIT STRATEGY IN THE BATTLE AGAINST THE CORONA VIRUS EPIDEMIC IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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**Abstract:** *Uncertainty is widespread during any outbreak of infectious diseases. The corona virus appeared in China at the beginning of 2020 and very quickly spread to all countries in the world in a pandemic scale. Most countries have declared an epidemic of a contagious disease and are trying to counter the plague in the best way they can. While policymakers have tried to balance the health and economy effects of a pandemic, decentralized decision-making, deep uncertainty, and a lack of widespread use of comprehensive decision support methods can lead to the choice of a fragile or ineffective strategy. This paper is an attempt to describe in the most general terms the current aspects of the fight against the corona virus epidemic in the Republic of Serbia. First of all, it refers to the political, economic, health-security and social aspects. The general conclusion is that the Republic of Serbia manages to mitigate the effects of corona virus from all the above aspects. It is doing that effectively and efficiently, better than many countries in the world, including much more developed countries than Serbia itself.*

**Key words:** *corona virus, pandemic, epidemic, battle against COVID-19 pandemic.*

## INTRODUCTION

Last year, which was a leap year, was announced in the world as the Olympic year. However, from the very beginning of the year, instead of the Olympic torch, the corona virus, which first appeared in China, began to be transmitted around the world. The speed of coronavirus transmission was so great that the World Health Organization declared a pandemic on March 11, 2020. In parallel or after that date, numerous countries declared an epidemic.

The pandemic and epidemic of corona virus (COVID-19), apart from health, have manifested their effect in all spheres of human activity, and especially in the economy, trade, tourism, traffic, sports and culture. The Olympic Games have been canceled (prolonged), the economy on a global and individual level has recorded a drastic decline unprecedented in human history, natural population movements have been reduced to a minimum, tourism has suffered unprecedented losses, and the most important cultural events have been canceled. The world stopped. To ensure long-term success in the fight against the pandemic, local policymakers must consider the trade-offs on which reopening decisions are based, while taking into account deep uncertainties.

The Republic of Serbia, without a special analysis, like most countries in the world, was unprepared for the unprecedented scale of the COVID-19 pandemic and epidemic. However, the relative delay in the appearance of the corona virus in Serbia and, above all, the synergistic and decisive strategic approach of the authorities in Serbia, helped our country in taking the first blow of the pandemic and epidemic. Serbia deals with it relatively effectively, even though the end is yet no where in sight. A clear recipe that local policymakers need to adopt under a set of observed conditions is to take into account the effects of the biological, behavioral, and

technological uncertainties regarding the pandemic. More than a year from the outbreak of the pandemic, many factors and constraints remain unknown and beyond the control of policymakers, including the behavioral response to vaccination. We will try to prove this claim from the political, economic, health-security and social aspect.

## 1. THE POLITICAL ASPECT OF THE BATTLE AGAINST THE CORONA VIRUS

Politics is not everything, but it is present everywhere. The influence of politics on the processes and the totality of events in the country is dominant. In approaching the definition of state functions, theorists differ in terms of their number and type. The synthetics are of the opinion that there is only one state function, while the rest are activities. The analysts, on the other hand, are of the opinion that the state has a larger number of functions (Forca, 2019). Regardless of the approach to the functions of the state, politics comes first. In that sense, academician Radomir Lukić claims: „The state political function is the direction of social development towards a certain path and in such a way that its activity is set as a goal to bring society to its intended state or to contribute to its coming to that state“ (Lukić, 1979). From another and historical aspect, the state undoubtedly has a protective function. This function, primarily, referred to the protection of the territory and the population from negative external influences. However, in modern conditions, the protective function of the state takes on an integral character, where protection from external and internal threats is combined. Some authors believe that the state as such was established as a creation by which a society opposes all forms and sources of external or internal threats (Gaćinović, 2020: 285).

In accordance with the above, we consider the political aspect of opposing the corona virus, in a general sense, as the influence of the policy and political system of the Republic of Serbia in the domain of the protective function of the state. This influence extends to various sectors, such as economic, social, security, but we will, approximately, observe it only from the political point of view. Therefore, we will observe the political aspect of opposing the corona virus through key measures and activities of the political system from the moment of recognizing the dangers of the corona virus to the present day. In doing so, we will focus only on key measures and activities (Table 1).

**Table 1.** *Key measures and activities of the political system in combating coronavirus*

| No. | ACTIVITY - MEASURE                                  | TIME                             | NOTE  |
|-----|---|----------------------------------|---|
| 1.  | Formation of crisis headquarters                    | 13.03.2020                       | Two crisis headquarters                           |
| 2.  | Establishing the strategy                           | Before the epidemic was declared | Focused on the state of emergency period          |
| 3.  | Declaring a state of emergency                      | 15.03.2020.                      | The state of emergency was lifted on May 6, 2020  |
| 4.  | Continuous foreign policy activities                | During the state of emergency    | Continued after the state of emergency was lifted |
| 5.  | Strengthening the capacity of the healthcare system | During epidemic                  | Special issue                                     |
| 6.  | Economic activities                                 | During epidemic                  | Special issue                                     |
| 7.  | Social policy activities                            | During epidemic                  | Special issue                                     |

Source: The authors

1) At the session held on March 13, 2020, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted new measures aimed at suppressing and preventing the spread of coronavirus in our country. In order to ensure timely and harmonized action and undertaking activities of competent bodies, organizations and services, as well as other entities related to the control of infectious diseases COVID-19, the *Crisis headquarters for the control of infectious diseases COVID-19* was established. The Prime Minister of Serbia, Ana Brnabić, the Minister of Health, Zlatibor Lončar, the Director of the Republic Health Insurance Fund, Sanja Radojević Škodrić, and the Provincial Secretary for Health, Zoran Gojković, have been appointed as the co-leaders of the Crisis headquarters. The members of this body are the directors of relevant institutes and clinics, as well as representatives of other relevant bodies. At the session, the *Crisis headquarters was formed to eliminate the occurrence and prevent possible harmful consequences of the infectious disease COVID-19 on the economy*. The co-heads of this crisis headquarters are the President of the Republic of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić, the Minister of Finance Siniša Mali, the President of the Serbian Chamber of Commerce Marko Čadež and the Governor of the National Bank of

Serbia Jorgovanka Tabaković (<https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/450999/obrazovan-krizni-stab-za-suzbijanje-covid-19.php>, 2020).

2) The key aspect of political action in the initial phase of the fight against the corona virus epidemic is the establishment of a national strategy (Table 2). The practical statement of this strategy is formulated as: *Prevention of exponential spread of corona virus and creation of conditions for the healthcare system to optimally resist infection* (prevention of the Spanish and British model, author's note) (Forca, Dostić, 2020).

**Table 2.** National strategy in the battle against the corona virus

| PHASE   | MEASURES AND ACTIVITIES  |
|---|--|
| <b>PHASE ONE: PREPARATIONS FOR THE EPIDEMIC</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- planning the resources of health institutions and determining covid clinics</li> <li>- redistribution of specialized equipment by hospitals</li> <li>- providing 6,000 to 10,000 beds</li> <li>- establishing a contact center</li> <li>- providing the required number of tests</li> <li>- certain economic issues</li> </ul>    |
| <b>PHASE TWO: PREVENTING THE EXPONENTIAL SPREAD OF INFECTION</b>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- restriction of freedom of movement and assembly</li> <li>- closing of the state border</li> <li>- construction of information system COVID-19</li> <li>- ONLINE teaching in schools and colleges</li> <li>- collecting aid, donations and purchasing equipment and medicines</li> <li>- opening of temporary hospitals</li> </ul> |
| <b>PHASE THREE: ATTACK ON THE CORONA VIRUS</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- study of numerous foreign scientific studies</li> <li>- expert consultations</li> <li>- expansion of traditional methods of treatment</li> <li>- introduction of new drugs and methods of treatment</li> </ul>  |
| <b>PHASE FOUR: PREPARATIONS FOR COMPLETE REDUCTION OF THE EPIDEMIC AND POSSIBLE SECOND WAVE</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- relaxation of distancing measures</li> <li>- phased return to "normal state"</li> <li>- preparation of an epidemiological study and determination of collective immunity</li> <li>- domestic production of medicines and equipment</li> <li>- certain economic measures</li> </ul>  |

Source: The authors based on the statement of the Prime Minister in the National Assembly 28.04.2020

The Prime Minister of Serbia, logically, focused on the stated general goal of the strategy on the health system and protection of the health of the population, as follows:

From the very beginning, we set two basic goals in this fight. **First**, to protect our health system, to protect it so that at all times there is enough capacity, resources, protective equipment, medicines, personnel, doctors, medical teams, to have everything we need at all times, to protect them in order to they fought for people's lives because we saw that this is where the biggest problem in the whole world was, and that is that because of the exponential growth you have a health system that practically falls, that is non-existent and then you have a huge mortality rate, a system that doesn't may face the fight against COVID-19. **The second main goal** was to protect elderly fellow citizens, the most endangered category of the population, from this virus, ie all those older than 65, as well as the chronically ill (National Assembly, April 28, 2020).

All the mentioned measures and activities of the state bodies, according to the stated phases of the realization of the strategy, were realized during the state of emergency, but also after its lift. Considering that the fight against the corona virus is still ongoing, in the following text, concrete indicators of the stated strategy will be presented, as well as new measures and activities that are successively determined and implemented by state bodies.

3). The state of emergency in the Republic of Serbia was declared on March 15, 2020. The legal basis for the introduction of the state of emergency is the *Constitution of the Republic of Serbia*, which regulates: „When a public danger threatens the survival of the state or citizens, the National Assembly declares the state of emergency“ (The Constitution, article 200, paragraph 1). The President of the Republic, the President of the National Assembly and the Prime Minister passed the *Decision on declaring a state of emergency in the Republic of Serbia* (Official Gazette of the RS, No. 29/2020). In the part of the internal public, the debate on the manner of declaring a state of emergency was unnecessarily started because it was not declared by the National Assembly, to the extent that a procedure was initiated before the Constitutional Court. In this paper, we will not deal with the wider controversy of declaring a state of emergency, because it was introduced in accordance with the Constitution, which states that a state of emergency is declared by the President, the President of the National Assembly and the Prime Minister when the National Assembly is unable to meet (The Constitution, Article 200, paragraph 4). On the

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other hand, the necessary conditions for declaring a state of emergency have been met. First, that there is a public danger was determined by the Government, which on March 10, 2020, declared an epidemic of corona virus in the Republic of Serbia (Official Gazette of RS, No. 38/2020). Second, on March 14, 2020, the Minister of Defense submitted to the President of the Republic an assessment of the threat from the corona virus. Finally, the following facts speak about the correctness of the manner of declaring a state of emergency on March 15, 2020. First, at the first session after the state of emergency (on April 29, 2020), the National Assembly passed a *Decision confirming the Decision on declaring a state of emergency* (Official Gazette of the RS, No. 62/20). Secondly, the Constitutional Court issued a *Decision* rejecting the initiative to initiate proceedings before the Constitutional Court regarding the constitutionality of declaring a state of emergency on March 15, 2020 (Golić, Zarubica, 2020: 38).

1) The state of emergency is particularly characteristic from several aspects, of which the following stand out: 1) prescribing measures derogating from the human and minority rights guaranteed by the Constitution (The Constitution, Article 200, paragraph 3), 2) as a basis for actions of defense subjects in emergency situations conditions (Law on Defense, Art. 92). Measures during a state of emergency are adopted by the National Assembly or the Government with the co-signature of the President of the Republic, if the National Assembly is not able to meet. The measures adopted by the Government during the state of emergency will be discussed in other matters.

The state of emergency in the Republic of Serbia caused by the corona virus epidemic was lifted by the Decision of the National Assembly of 6 May 2020 (Official Gazette of the RS, No. 65/2020).

4) The foreign policy activities of the Republic of Serbia were not interrupted during the corona virus epidemic; they only changed their shape and form. For this paper, the international engagement of the President of the Republic and the executive power is of special importance in 5) strengthening the capacity of the healthcare system of the Republic of Serbia. This strengthening of the capacity of the health system will be described in more detail in a special issue, and here only the general aspect is emphasized, which refers to: obtaining the necessary medicines and medical equipment; advising medical professionals and obtaining a coronavirus vaccine. During the pandemic and the corona virus epidemic so far, Serbia has shown a high level of solidarity, primarily with the surrounding countries. In that sense, Serbia donated medicines and medical equipment, and later made a certain number of vaccines available to some neighboring countries. Some of the countries rejected the offered donation of Serbia. Serbia paid special attention to helping Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo and Metohija. The provisional authorities in Kosovo and Metohija opposed the assistance that Serbia provides to Serbs.

6) and 7) The engagement of the political system of the Republic of Serbia, in addition to the health sphere, is especially important in the domain of economic and social measures during and after the state of emergency, which is especially addressed in special issues of this text. At this point, we only note that only during the state of emergency, the Government, with the co-signature of the President of the Republic, passed 44 decrees regulating various issues, which were confirmed by the National Assembly at its first session after the state of emergency on April 29, 2020 (Official Gazette of RS, No. 62/2020). Also, considering that the epidemic of corona virus did not pass, after the state of emergency, numerous measures were adopted within the competence of the executive power of the Republic of Serbia.

## 2. ECONOMIC ASPECT

The previous text states that the Government and the President of the Republic adopted measures during and after the state of emergency, which referred to the state of the country's economy, in the broadest sense of the word, ie the economic aspect of mitigating the consequences of the pandemic and corona virus epidemic. This paper emphasizes the measures for stabilization of the economy of the Republic of Serbia, which were adopted by the end of 2020 and which were announced by the President of the Republic and the Government for the next period.

During the state of emergency, the Government of Serbia passed decrees for the consolidation of the country's economy, which had four aspects. **First**, the tax policy measures that referred to the postponement of the payment of taxes and contributions during the state of emergency, and the exemption from the payment of VAT on donations to health institutions. **Second**, there was direct assistance to the private sector, ie the payment of three minimum wages to micro-small and medium-sized enterprises and the payment of 50% of the minimum wage to large enterprises for

employees whose work has been suspended. **The third** aspect is the preservation of liquidity through the Development Fund Program and guarantee schemes. Finally, **the fourth** aspect is the support to the citizens, ie the payment of 100 euros (dinar equivalent) for each adult citizen of Serbia who applies for such an offer from the Government. This fourth aspect, of course, also touches the social sphere, and here it stands out as a contribution to strengthening consumption, which is an economic measure. The fact is that these aspects of the Government's measures amounted to 5.1 billion euros, which is about 11% of GNI. Thus, Serbia ranks among the few countries in the world that have allocated more than 10% of GNI to mitigate the effects of the coronavirus, and those countries are: the United States, China, Australia, Great Britain, France and Germany (National Assembly, April 29, 2020).

. Since the second wave of the corona virus epidemic occurred in the second half of the year, the Government intervened again with its measures (July-August 2020), in terms of paying two more minimum wages to micro, small and medium enterprises and taking some more measures. Thus, in January 2021, the National Bank of the Republic of Serbia published the document *Macroeconomic Trends in Serbia for 2020*, ie for the period of the corona virus epidemic. This document provides key aspects of economic measures during 2020 (Table 3), as well as the effects that we present below.

([https://www.nbs.rs/export/sites/NBS\\_site/documents/finansijska-stabilnost/prezentacije/prezentacija\\_invest.pdf](https://www.nbs.rs/export/sites/NBS_site/documents/finansijska-stabilnost/prezentacije/prezentacija_invest.pdf), 2021).

**Table 3.** *The Program of economic measures to reduce the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and support the Serbian economy*

| GROUP  | MEASURES  |
|--|---|
| First: Tax policy measures                               | 1. Postponement of payment of taxes on salaries and contributions for the private sector (during the state of emergency), with subsequent repayment of the incurred obligation in installments (starting at the earliest from 2021)<br>2. Postponement of payment of profit tax advance in 2020.<br>3. Exemption of donors from the obligation to pay VAT |
| Second: Direct assistance to the private sector          | 4. Payment of aid in the amount of 3 minimum wages to entrepreneurs who are taxed at a flat rate and pay real income tax, such as imicro, small and medium enterprises in the private sector<br>5. Payment of assistance to large companies in the private sector in the amount of 50% of the net minimum wage for employees were laid off                |
| Third: Liquidity conservation measures                   | 6. Financial support to the economy through the Development Fund of the Republic of Serbia<br>7. Guarantee scheme for economic support  |
| Fourth: Other measures                                   | 8. Moratorium on dividend payment until the end of 2020, except for public companies<br>9. Measures to increase salaries and other direct financial assistance<br>10. Direct assistance to all adult citizens of Serbia in the amount of 100 euros (in dinnars)   |
| Fifth: Additional package of measures (July-August 2020) | 1. Payment of aid in the amount of 60% of the minimum wage to entrepreneurs, micro, small and medium enterprises<br>2. Postponement of payment of taxes and contributions for one month<br>3. Direct support to the hotel sector - 350 € per bed, 150 € per person  |

Source: National Bank of Serbia, January 2021

From the mentioned document of the National Bank of Serbia, we will single out and only exhaustively list the economic indicators of the Government's measures and their effects;

- In 2020, Serbia set aside 5.8 billion euros (12.5% of GDP) to mitigate the effects of the coronavirus and minimize the economic downturn;
- According to the preliminary assessment of the NBS, in 2020, Serbia recorded a decline in GDP of 1.1%, which is the best result in Europe. Our projection for 2021 is GDP growth of 6.0% with symmetrical risks;
- Inflation in December 2020 amounted to 1.3% mg., while the average year-on-year inflation in 2020 amounted to 1.6%;
- Unemployment rate in T3 2020. It was maintained at a single-digit level (9.0%), with a significant increase in the participation rate and employment;
- The results are confirmed by the retained credit rating in 2020 (Fitch and S&P), despite the global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The PCI arrangement with the IMF

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was successfully completed in late 2020;

- The inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI), for the first 11 months of 2020 is gross 2.3 billion euros, is the largest in the region and reached record levels of about 8% of GDP;
- The average net salary in the period January - October 2020 amounted to 59,370 dinars (511 euros) and increased by 9.4%;
- During the eleven months of 2020, the public debt increased to 56.8% (from 52.0% at the end of 2019). According to the Revised Budget for 2020, public debt will remain below 60% of GDP in 2020, and will return to a declining trajectory from next year;
- In November 2020, Serbia issued a 10Y Eurobond in the amount of 1.2 billion dollars at a coupon rate of 2.125% and a yield rate of 2.35%, which is the lowest price of financing in dollars so far.
- In 2020, S&P and Fitch reaffirmed Serbia's rating at BB +, despite the global crisis caused by the pandemic, emphasizing the increased resilience of Serbia as a result of responsible economic policy in previous years and adequate response of economic policy makers in Serbia to the crisis.

Undoubtedly, from the summary of economic measures during the coronavirus epidemic in 2020, it can be concluded that there is a rational, efficient, effective and fruitful operation of the country's political system, which unequivocally reduced harmful consequences and prevented drastic economic decline. To this should be added a new package of measures in 2021, announced by the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance, which will amount to around 2.5 billion euros.

The new € 2.5 billion package for 2021, in principle, includes the following:

- Three times 50% of the minimum wage for entrepreneurs, for all employees (1,550,000 people) will start in April, and a decision will soon be made for large companies,
- The transport sector will receive 600 euros per bus
- All adult citizens (who apply for it) will receive 60 euros (30 euros in May and 30 euros in November), and pensioners another 50 euros (110 euros in total).

### **3. SAFETY - HEALTH ASPECT**

A special aspect of measures and activities of state bodies during the corona virus epidemic was manifested in the field of health, ie health protection and engagement of security forces (Army and Police) in support of the health system, which we call the health security aspect. This aspect was particularly pronounced during the state of emergency, and continued after it was lifted, with a reduction of the involvement of the Army and Police. In accordance with the above, we will observe this aspect through two factors: 1) measures for strengthening the healthcare system and protecting the health of citizens and 2) engaging the Army and Police in supporting the healthcare system.

#### **The measures to strengthen the healthcare system and protect the health of citizens**

It has already been pointed out that this aspect was the key to the strategy of the Republic of Serbia in counteracting the COVID-19 pandemic and epidemic. Regarding this issue, we herewith highlight more detailed indicators of this statement, through several groups of indicators.

The first group of indicators refers to the procurement of medicines and health equipment immediately before and during the state of emergency. The basic data on this aspect are given in the exposition of the Prime Minister submitted at the first meeting of the National Assembly on 28.04.2020, of which we single out the following (National Assembly, 28.04.2020):

- The Republic of Serbia started the purchase and procurement of medical equipment and medicines even before the declaration of the state of emergency, mainly from China and Russia, the EU and other countries;
- The EU approved a package of 93 million euros in aid, of which 15 million in direct health care and 78 million for economic recovery, and during the state of emergency it financed 15 flights from China through which aid was delivered;
- A total of 3,967 respirators are planned to be procured, and on April 28, 2020, Serbia has 743;
- Domestic capacities for testing or processing PCR tests have been raised 14 times, so

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that on April 28, 2020, 5,000 of these tests can be processed daily, plus 1,000 to 1,500 rapid tests;

- Procurement of 127,934,000 masks was contracted, and by April 28, 2020 32,503,000 were delivered;
- Procurement of 3,363,000 medical suits was contracted, and by April 28, 2020 730,000 were delivered;
- Procurement of 39,000 gloves was contracted, and 28,000 were delivered;
- On April 3 and 4, 11 planes with medical aid arrived from the Russian Federation, and on March 29, a plane with 10 tons of aid arrived from the United Arab Emirates. Aid planes also arrived from Turkey, Hungary, the United States, Norway and other countries;
- Thanks to the Brazilian company EMS, which is the owner of „Galenika“, the drug „chloroquine“ was fully provided, by April 28, 2020 there was enough for 42,000 patients.

The second aspect of this issue is strengthening the capacity of the health system to accommodate patients. In that sense, and in order to provide 6,000 to 10,000 beds, during the state of emergency, the existing healthcare facilities were adjusted for the needs of covid patients (Military Hospital in Karaburma). Certain hospitals turned part of their capacities or complete resources into covid hospitals, and established sub-capacities. These sub-capacities, or temporary covid hospitals, were operated at the following locations (Forca, Dostić, 2020):

- four halls at the Belgrade Fair,
- „Stark Arena“, Belgrade,
- Sports Hall „Aleksandar Nikolic“, New Belgrade,
- Sports Hall „Ranko Žeravica“, Belgrade,
- hall at the Novi Sad Fair,
- two halls in the Sports Hall „Chair“ in Nis,
- school and student dormitory in Nis,
- temporary hospitals in Čačak, Valjevo and Guča,
- spas „Merkur“ in Vrnjačka Banja and „Radon“ in Niška Banja and others.

Since the second wave of corona virus occurred in the second half of the year, activities and measures to strengthen the capacity of the healthcare system continued, as well as the procurement of vaccines and immunization of citizens with the aim of achieving collective national immunity. In accordance with the above, the following aspects are singled out:

- 1)** Construction of two completely new covid hospitals in Batajnica and Krusevac. The construction of the hospitals began in August last year and was completed in just four months. It is planned to invest around 60 million euros in the construction of hospitals and another 30 million euros for equipment. Covid Hospital in Batajnica has 930 beds, of which 680 in semi-intensive and 250 in intensive care, and the hospital employs about 1,500 medical workers, with complete and state-of-the-art equipment for such purposes (<https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/503117/pocinje-sa-radom-kovid-bolnica-u-batajnici.php>, 2020). The hospital in Krusevac has 493 beds, of which 150 are in intensive care. There are 150 monitors and 150 respirators, "high flow" (<https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/507568/otvorena-kovid-bolnica-u-krusevcu.php>, 2020). The latest comparable data available to Eurostat show that the number of Serbian public health beds is above the European average - the European average is 541 beds, while in Serbia there are 567 per 100,000 inhabitants, which is the highest in the region. (<https://www.bbc.com/serbian/cyr/srbija-55150392>, 2020).
- 2)** Due to the large increase in the number of patients in the second half of last year, the following hospitals were returned to the covid system: Zemun Hospital, KBC Zvezdara, KBC Dragiša Mišović, KBC Bežanijska kosa, Clinic for Burns, Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery KCS in Zvečanska, Clinic for Pulmonology and Clinic for Thoracic Surgery of the Clinical Center of Serbia, Niska Banja, Selters and Koviljaca Spas, Military Hospital in Nis, General Hospital in Pirot. A temporary covid hospital has been set up in the Stark Arena, and these days the Nis Chair, the Čačak Blue Hall in Atenica, the Novi Sad Military Hospital in Petrovaradin, and the Šumadija Fair in Kragujevac are also serving the same purpose. (<https://www.bbc.com/serbian/cyr/srbija-55150392>, 2020)

3) Serbia, together with very few countries in the world, planned the procurement in a timely manner and was among the first to start immunization (vaccination) of citizens. Data on the number of vaccines in use, as well as the number of vaccinated citizens change from day to day. In that sense, on June 9, 2021, the situation is as follows (<https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/srbija-55796006>, 2021):

- Four types of vaccines are currently in use in Serbia: 1) American *Faser*, 2) Russian *Sputnik V*, 3) Chinese *Sinofarm* and 4) British *AstraZeneca*. Vaccination and revaccination are planned for all three types of these vaccines. According to certain information, Serbia ordered about 11 million vaccines of various types, including vaccines other than the three mentioned, but it is estimated that this number will be difficult (impossible) to achieve;
- By June 9, 2021, about 4.8 million people were vaccinated and about 2.4 million people were revaccinated;
- Serbia had long been the only country in the Western Balkans where vaccination of the population has begun. Also, Serbia occupies the second place in Europe in terms of the number of vaccinated per 100,000 inhabitants (only Great Britain is ahead), and the ninth place in the world.

Although the numbers are a variable category, it should be noted that on June 9, 2021, a total of 714,054 people fell ill in Serbia, of which 6,930 died. The mortality rate is 0.95%. By the same date, 174,802,240 people became ill in the world, and 3,764,250 people died. The mortality rate is 2.15%. For comparison, Table 4 provides data for the most developed countries and countries in our region.

**Table 4. Consequences of the corona virus pandemic**

| COUNTRY           | BECAME ILL | DIED    | DEATH RATE<br>(in %) |
|-------------------|------------|---------|----------------------|
| USA               | 34,242,866 | 613,052 | 1,79                 |
| India             | 29,089,069 | 353,557 | 1,21                 |
| Brasil            | 17,038,260 | 477,307 | 2,80                 |
| Russia            | 5,156,250  | 124,895 | 2,42                 |
| Great Britain     | 4,528,442  | 127,854 | 2,82                 |
| France            | 5,719,937  | 110,137 | 1,92                 |
| Spain             | 3,711,027  | 80,309  | 2,16                 |
| Italy             | 4,235,592  | 126,690 | 2,99                 |
| Hungary           | 806,385    | 29,889  | 3,70                 |
| Romania           | 1,079,154  | 31,155  | 2,88                 |
| Bulgaria          | 419,859    | 17,860  | 4,25                 |
| North Macedonia   | 155,441    | 5,462   | 3,51                 |
| Albania           | 132,397    | 2,452   | 1,85                 |
| Montenegro        | 99,848     | 1,596   | 1,59                 |
| Bosnia & Herzegov | 204,455    | 9,460   | 4,62                 |
| Croatia           | 357,786    | 8,096   | 2,26                 |

Source: Calculation by the authors

From the data listed in the previous table, it is possible to draw various quantitative conclusions. The fact is that the mortality rate from corona virus, of these countries, is the lowest in Serbia (0.95%) and the highest in Bosnia and Herzegovina (4.62) and Bulgaria (4.25%). About 50% of the countries listed in the previous table have a mortality rate higher than the world average (2.15%). If we look at the number of deaths per capita, the data for the Republic of Serbia would also be more favorable in relation to the countries listed in the table. Although it is dubious to bid on human victims, the figures in the previous table, at least quantitatively, may indicate the success of a country's healthcare system in the fight against the corona virus.

The fact is that the healthcare system of the Republic of Serbia, especially during the second wave of the epidemic (second half of the year), was exposed to the strain of resources and personnel to the limits of the maximum. The number of infected people who were hospitalized at the same time in health institutions threatened to exceed the number of 10,000 people. The most critical month in 2020 was November, when a large number of patients was recorded in Serbia,

but also in the region and the world. In such conditions, health workers gave their best to provide assistance to all patients. Unfortunately, in that effort, several thousand health workers became ill, and a number of them died.

### **Engaging the Army and Police in supporting the healthcare system**

The engagement of the Army and the Police, in itself, is not the topic of this paper. However, the state of emergency is declared, among other things, in order to provide a legal basis for the mobilization of the subjects of the security system, especially the Army and the Police. Hence, in this paper, only the basic tasks on which the Army and the Police were engaged are given, mainly during the state of emergency.

The data on the engagement of the Army during the state of emergency was presented by the then Minister of Defense, on May 10, 2020, while informing the media. The military was given two basic tasks: 1) to provide assistance to civilian healthcare and 2) to maintain its own operational capability. Only some key activities and some indicators of Army engagement are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** *Engagement of the Army during the state of emergency*

| PROVIDING SUPPORT TO CIVIL HEALTHCARE   | MAINTENANCE OF OPERATIONAL CAPACITY  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Security of health institutions (51 facilities in 24 municipalities) with daily engagement of about 1,500 members.</li> <li>• Equipping 9 temporary hospitals in 5 cities with 5,122 beds.</li> <li>• Equipping 18 facilities for the reception of Serbian citizens from abroad and accommodation in quarantine.</li> <li>• Making the MMA, MH Nis, MH Novi Sad available to civil health.</li> <li>• Production of ambulances, masks, gloves, visors, disinfectant solutions, alcohol and disinfection of buildings and premises.</li> <li>• Security of 153 social protection institutions in 50 cities and municipalities.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control of the land security zone towards Kosovo and Metohija, airspace security, intelligence and counterintelligence work.</li> <li>• Providing centers for migrants where 8,000 people are accommodated.</li> <li>• Other regular tasks.□</li> </ul> |

Source: Calculation by the authors based on [www.mod.gov.rs](http://www.mod.gov.rs) (10. 05. 2021).

### **In the performance of the stated tasks, 300 members of the Army fell ill, of which three died.**

In accordance with the Law, in addition to their regular tasks (especially border security and the fight against crime), the police performed tasks during the state of emergency, in particular: 1) control whether citizens respect measures to prevent the spread of the virus - ie quarantine measures and self-isolation, 2) control of respect for curfew, 3) assistance, together with the competent city services, to the population who cannot leave their homes due to the declared state of emergency, in order to deliver the necessary necessities (especially to persons over 65) and 4) cooperation with the Army in securing and controlling the reception centers where migrants are accommodated (Forca, Dostić, 2020).

2020). During the state of emergency, the police prosecuted 7,863 people (6,800 adults under the age of 65 and 1,063 people over the age of 65) for disrespecting the ban on movement during the „curfew“. Also, the Police is engaged in securing 18 border crossings; 318,000 people living and working abroad entered the country from March 5 to April 20. Further, the Police joined the Army in controlling the Asylum Centers. In order to prevent unauthorized border crossing, the Police, in accordance with the Regulation on Measures of Emergency, Article 3b, ordered the temporary occupation of land owned by legal and natural persons along the border line to Northern Macedonia and Bulgaria. During the state of emergency (until April 22, 2020), 180 members of the police became ill, of which seven died (Forca, Dostić, 2020).

## **4. SOCIAL ASPECT**

There is limited scientific understanding of epidemiological processes, public health and economic goals may be different, unclear, conflicting or not stated at all, and the potential effects

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of possible interventions are uncertain given the new circumstances. As illustrated by COVID-19 virus outbreaks and pandemics, the complexity of the epidemic motivates quantitative modeling, but the abundance of models often provides conflicting predictions, projections, and recommendations for interventions. This poses a challenge for decision makers. To support sound, evidence-based decision-making, we believe it is crucial to develop an effective framework for joint modeling and for synthesizing the results and recommendations from ensemble modeling efforts (Shea K, et al.2020).

There exists an extremely extensive and diverse set of social policy measures that the state government has taken and is taking during the epidemic of the corona virus. All these we call social aspect of confronting the COVID-19 epidemic. These measures affected the entire population, and were determined separately for certain state and social bodies, organizations and institutions, legal and natural persons. Hence, these measures were the most susceptible to criticism from the citizens themselves. In general, the social aspect of corona virus resistance can be analyzed during and after a state of emergency.

During the state of emergency, non-medical measures were taken to suppress the spread of the virus, on the one hand, and to ensure the normal functioning of all functions of the state and society, on the other hand. These measures include: restriction of movement and the so-called curfew; ensuring the enrollment of children in kindergarten and school (through the service: e-Government, e-Kindergarten, e-Enrollment); realization of secondary schools' graduation; transition to online teaching through various platforms (RTS3, RTS „Planet“) and other Internet models; recommendation to work from home, wherever possible; recommendation to citizens regarding self-isolation measures and prevention of mass gatherings of citizens; limiting food price increases and sanctioning those who do not comply with these measures; providing sufficient masks and gloves; the export of medicines and medical equipment is prohibited; the operation of cafes, restaurants and other catering facilities is limited; borders were closed and travel is restricted.

After the state of emergency was lifted, non-medical measures took on a situation-by-situation aspect. Although a state of emergency has not been reintroduced, a situation of emergency has been imposed in the regions, municipalities and cities.

It can be stated that social life, as well as all citizen services in the course of the fight against the coronavirus so far, was in line with the basic goal of protecting the health and lives of citizens and that it took place without major disturbances. The fact that the population did not lack basic foodstuffs and other necessities in any period of the epidemic should be especially emphasized.

## CONCLUSION

The corona virus pandemic and epidemic are still ongoing, and the reduction in infection and mortality is not decreasing. Although the process of immunization with various vaccines has begun, the ultimate goal - victory over the virus - has not been achieved, nor is it in sight, at least in the near future.

The Republic of Serbia, as well as other countries in the world, was not ready to effectively resist the rapidly spreading infection. The favorable circumstance for Serbia was that it had a period of three months until the first appearance of the infection in the country, and that it decisively and efficiently dealt with the virus through the state authorities. We still do not know all the details regarding the battle against the virus.

The measures taken by the authorities during the pandemic preserved the healthcare system of the country, which over time increasingly developed the necessary capacities to battle the epidemic and pandemic in an organized manner. Without false modesty, and in accordance with the stated results, it can be concluded that Serbia has effectively resisted the infection. This battle against the corona virus is evident in health sphere, but also in other spheres, especially economic and social.

In order for the state's health measures to have the best possible result in opposing the corona virus, discipline and responsibility of every citizen in maintaining general measures are necessary: distance, hygiene and wearing masks. In that way, the conditions will be created for the corona virus to be suppressed to a minimum, and thus conditions will be created for opening the economy and performing all social activities, in the broadest sense of the word.

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