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DISCUSSION #2
APRIL 22

COVID 19

LIBERAL VIEWS AND RESPONSES FROM DEMOCRACIES



WEDNESDAY WEBINAR SERIES BY CIVIC IDEA
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH FNF — SOUTH CAUCASUS

APRIL - MAY' 2020

WEBINAR #2



IVANNA KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE

CHAIR, PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON
UKRAINE'S INTEGRATION INTO THE EU



KEIT PENTUS-ROSIMANNUS,
MEMBER OF ESTONIAN PARLIAMENT,
FORMER ESTONIAN MFA



KERSTIN LUNDGEN,
DEPUTY SPEAKER OF THE RIKSDAG



GIORGI KANASHVILI
SENIOR POLICY ADVISER AT CIVIC IDEA



ARE RUSSIA AND CHINA CAPITALIZING ON COVID 19 CRISIS ?

22 APRIL, TBILISI 12:00 LOCAL TIME

LANGUAGE - ENGLISH



EMIL KIRJAS
FORMER SECRETARY-GENERAL OF
LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL



TINATIN KHIDASHELI
HEAD OF CIVIC IDEA ,
FORMER GEORGIAN MOD



ANDREY PIVOVAROV,
OPEN RUSSIA

DISCUSSION # 2

COVID 19 - RESPONSES FROM DEMOCRACIES. ARE RUSSIA AND CHINA CAPITALIZING ON COVID 19 CRISIS?

SPEAKERS:

Tinatin Khidasheli-
Head of Civic IDEA, Former MOD

Giorgi Kanashvili-
Senior Policy Advisor at Civic IDEA

Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze-
Chair, Parliamentary Committee on Ukraine's
Integration into the EU

Keit Pentus-Rosimannus-
Member of Estonian Parliament, Former Estonian MFA

Kerstin Lundgen-
Deputy Speaker of the Riksdag

Emil Kirjas- Former Secretary-
General of Liberal International

Andrey Pivovarov-
Open Russia



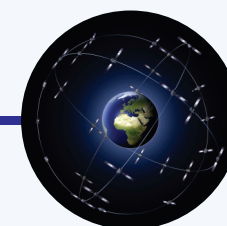
While the western societies are still fighting a fierce battle against the coronavirus crisis, their counterparts, authoritarian states seek to take an advantage from and capitalize on the existing problems, appealing themselves as the exemplary handlers of the crisis. They constantly interfere in the various developments occurring in the West, explaining importance of intention with the best interests of protection or for doing good for the people.

Truth of the matter is that, the authoritarian regimes try to win the hearts and minds of western nations affected by the crisis through various tangible and intangible machinations. They not only spread propaganda, but are engaged in massive use of soft power tools of Public Health diplomacy, resource allocation for the affected countries, etc. In order to understand whether the democratic states are ready to identify the external threats, we need to first look at their anti-crisis internal policies called-up against the pandemic.

RESPONSES OF DEMOCRACIES TO CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

Different democracies have taken a wide range of distinctive measures against the coronavirus pandemic as their societies have developed diverse approaches towards the emerging threat.

The examples of **Sweden** and **Estonia** are remarkable, as the transparent measures were introduced quickly and efficiently. They have not set strict lockdown rules because of people acting

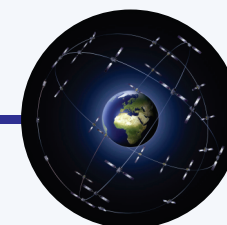


with a high sense of common responsibility and following the rules of social distancing. The hospitals were well-equipped and ready to meet the crisis. Elderly people are being kept safe at homes. They have celebrated both protestant and orthodox Easters, but the churches kept the government guidelines and services were broadcasted online. Since the public gatherings are prohibited, educational institutions either announced holidays or moved to remote teaching. It is important to mention that Estonia was already well-aware and well-prepared on a digital level prior to the coronavirus outbreak, hence switching to online space was not much of a problem for them and they quickly adapted to the new reality.

In Sweden, the government pays special attention to the houses for elderly, where the virus has been massively spread. Foreigners are not currently allowed in Estonia, nevertheless, the borders are open for Estonian citizens abroad, provided that they will stay in quarantine within 14 days of their arrival. As for the legislative body of the government, both parliaments effectively switched to online platforms. They use Skype as the most reliable application for digital meetings. They are regularly debating on the economic and social measures to alleviate the results caused by the crisis.

"So far we are managing to keep our model working quite well as has been seen and Norway and Denmark are also opening up... they were using Sweden as an example."-

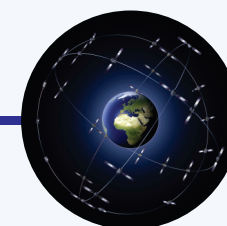
Kerstin Lundgren.



In Sweden, political parties agreed on minimizing the size of parliament for physical meetings. Therefore, out of 345 MPs, only 55 attend the parliament voting inside the building and that is still keeping the proportional system valid. In Estonia, the parliament successfully adopted the first crisis package aiming to support the small businesses. These countries realize the consequences of the altered world; thus trying to effectively adapt to the new reality and share their successful experience with the partner states.

DELAY IN DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES: THE CASE OF NORTH MACEDONIA

Following the coronavirus pandemic, the democratic processes, including the parliamentary, presidential or local elections, have been postponed worldwide. North Macedonia experiencing the huge Euro-Atlantic shifts through becoming the 30th member of the NATO is not an exception. The government decided to postpone the April snap-elections because of the state of emergency called up by the global pandemic. The political parties found themselves in a very peculiar situation with the dissolved parliament, adding further difficulties to the legality of declaration of the state of emergency. Moreover, instead of effectively addressing the crisis, the latter became part of political speculations coming from different party leaders. In overall, this occasion significantly altered the democratic processes within the state.

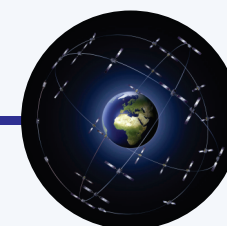


Furthermore, unlike Sweden and Estonia, North Macedonians in the south are not distinguished with a high sense of social responsibility meaning that they did not respect the enforced regulations. Therefore, the government had to act severely by imposing a tough curfew. What is impressive from the story of pandemic, is that despite the lockdown, breaches in the legislative apparatus and limited application of rights and freedoms, Macedonian people regained trust towards their state institutions. It was also triggered by the fact that Macedonia joined the NATO exactly during the pandemic and lockdowns did not stop member state parliaments from ratifying accession protocols. Simultaneously, it was precisely during the coronavirus crises that EU opened accession talks for both North Macedonia and Albania congested months ago.

“We were the example which demonstrated to the world that the Euro-Atlantic alliance is actually functioning, and there will be time when Georgia will come on board as well”-

Emil Kirjas.

Together with that, this occasion proves that the Western alliances keep effectively operating during the hard times. This statement refers to the EU as well, which did not forget its western Balkan neighbors providing them with the aid of 60 million Euros and enforcing their healthcare regulations and crisis management system on them as well. We can compare the EU crisis management to the airplane rules when in case of emergency, they placed the masks on their faces first and then on their babies (its partners and accession candidates).



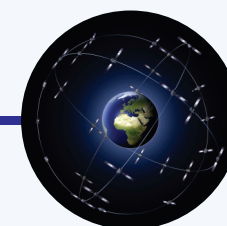
RUSSIA AND ITS MANIPULATIONS IN THE POST-SOVIET SPHERE DURING THE COVID 19 CRISIS

Russia being the main obstacle of North Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic success, as well as any expansion of NATO, is very inefficient and non-transparent in its internal crisis management. During the past several decades, the government used to convince its people in the excellency of their medical system. Though, the reality showed the opposite especially in the cities outside of Moscow lacking the medical staff and equipment (masks and lung respiration apparatus) to cope with the sanitary problems. One of the problems with Russia is the fact that government did not even announced an official state of emergency, they've just instructed people to stay home on their account and that was it. No responsibility shared by the state or ruling elite.

"In this situation all the people who have cafes, have restaurants and all the other small businesses will have problems and they ask the government for help"-

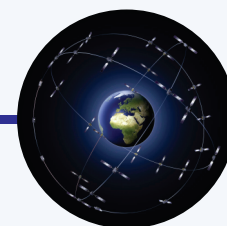
Andrey Pivovarov.

However, small businesses already suffer from the crisis while the government has not allocated its budget for their assistance except the ones owned by themselves or their trusted individuals. Furthermore, the declines in the oil prices cause the inflation of Russian currency and thus have extremely negative impacts on the Russian economy. Since the population is not content with the current situation, the government slowly loses its supporters as Russian people feel the results of



the COVID-19 crisis and question their actions. It is crucial to highlight that the first time Russian population actually started to pose questions to the government about the resources, economic packages and post-coronavirus circumstances. It could become a good start for the new wave of the open and truly democratic society in Russia. Despite the internal challenges, the Russian government finds time for the illegal hybrid and conventional machinations directed against its neighbors. For instance, in Ukraine which also represents an orthodox country, many people stayed at home and watched online translation of the church messes during the Easter night. However, while other churches operated online, the biggest Russian orthodox church has encouraged people to come and physically attend the mess. Controversy to their colleagues in Russia asking people to stay safe at home and watch online translation, they thoughtfully aimed to worsen the crisis in Ukraine through putting the lives of the Ukrainian citizens in danger.

Currently, the situation is not catastrophic in Ukraine, but the future stays ambiguous because of the harmful manipulations done by the Russian church. Hereby, let us extend the discussion about Ukraine coping with crisis. Unlike the neighboring countries, Ukraine has not done testing of the population. COVID-19 pandemic burst while the country was in the middle of passing the fundamental reforms abandoning the old system without having the specific image of the new one. Additionally, it coincided with huge governmental changes. Rada is sitting on discussion of new cabinet members as we speak. Since the new government is slowly adapting to the processes, it



becomes challenging for people to perceive transparency and develop trust in their actions. However, parliament succeeded in adjusting to online meetings, except several obligatory sessions held in the building but with the protection of all the sanitary requirements (gloves, medical glasses and masks). As for the conflict regions, there is no sign of humanitarian ceasefire, meaning that despite the total shutdown the conventional battlefield is still on-going there.

“Every couple of days, we do have those who died in action, we do have those who were wounded in action and so the conflict is going on”-

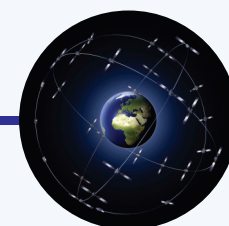
Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze.

COVID-19 crisis did not interrupt Russians from continuing the illegal borderization of the Tskhinvali region in Georgia.

“Tensions could be growing also in North Caucasus, even in little Ingushetia, where they have more confirmed coronavirus cases than we have in Georgia. We will see the worsening of the situation in the North Caucasus”-

Giorgi Kanashvili.

Russians also actively support the occupied region of Abkhazia with the technical issues and Lavrov keeps talking about the open discussions associated with the trade relations with Georgia. Most importantly Russians have opened the talks about the Lugar Lab that has frequently become



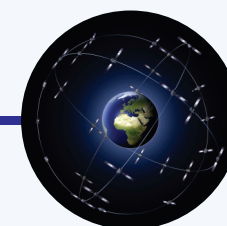
the victim of Russian propaganda mechanism. For years, Minister Lavrov, his spokesperson Marya Zakharova and other Russian politicians used to initiate briefings about it being disastrous and creating deadly viruses and spreading them all over the world.

“Two days ago, Ms. Maria Zakharova once again blessed us by her press conference about Lugar Laboratory, talking about its danger and American conspiracy to be planned by Georgia”-

Tinatin Khidasheli.

Hence, in spite of the diverse internal obstacles, the neighborhood remains as the main instigator of Russia's offensive foreign policy goals. On the contrary, coronavirus is effectively used by them to continue their unlawful actions while other authorities are being busy with the pandemic.

In addition, Russia is displaying the EU and the US as non-efficient actors in this public health warfare. They claim to send the Russian doctors, Russian military (for surveillance) and the sanitary equipment to the suffered countries while exploiting the differences, blaming the EU and the US in inactivity. Another great example is associated with Estonia when the latter ordered the medical equipment from the Chinese company that was delivered in Estonia by a Russian plane. While this occasion had nothing to do with the Russian government's aid policies, they managed to disguise this private dealing to their merits. Twisting the narrative is not their only objective, their propaganda mechanism started to create new pages (such as “for the future”) targeting their measures taken in Estonia.

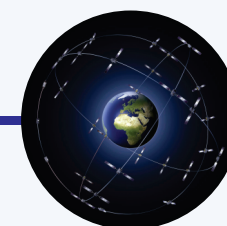


"These examples have sharpened the attention (towards Russia) in the EU and wider, and there is the understanding that for answering or targeting this kind of measures/problems, the support and the unity needs to be wider... we need to support and share experiences"-

Keit Pentus-Rosimannus.

Thus, traditionally their unambiguous goal is breaking the unity of the Western alliances through diminishing the trust in their institutions. In reality, while China and Russia invest millions of dollars in their propaganda machinery, the western alliances allocate the funding not only to member states but also outside of their borders, in Eastern Neighborhood, in Western Balkans and even on the African continent. While the team Europe is being so generous in terms of the budget investment, showing its support and distributing the money to the states inside and outside the EU, will we ever be seeing Russia realizing the same and concentrating its resources for the genuine help without any self-interests involved?

The west needs to keep the open eye on Russia's and China's actions, maintain objectivity and make clear distinction over orchestrators of hybrid warfare actions.



TUNE IN ON APRIL 29TH AT THE SAME TIME, FOR THE III WEBINAR ON RESPONSES FROM DEMOCRACIES, WITH MORE SPEAKERS AND INTERESTING DISCUSSION



FILIP LIROUŠ
SINOLOGIST, RESEARCHER AT SINOPSIS,
PRAGUE



EKA AKOBIA
DEAN OF SCHOOL OF GOVERNANCE
AT CAUCASUS UNIVERSITY, GEORGIA



MARTIN HALA
DIRECTOR OF SINOPSIS.CZ



FRANÇOIS GODEMENT,
EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
DIRECTOR, ASIA AND CHINA PROGRAMME

WEBINAR #3

*COVID 19 - Responses from Democracies:
France, Germany. What about China?*



TINATIN KHIDASHELI
HEAD OF CIVIC IDEA
FORMER MOD OF GEORGIA



29TH OF APRIL,
AT 12:00 TBILISI TIME



DIDI KIRSTEN TATLOW
SENIOR FELLOW, GERMAN COUNCIL
ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, BERLIN