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IMPACT OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC ON MOLDAVIAN SOCIETY

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1. Introduction

This paper contains an analysis of the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on Moldovan society depending on the evolution of the pandemic and other factors: political, informational, religious, etc. Contains information heard or read from a variety of sources, mass media, web, publications, interviews, and others.

In order to better understand the context of the evolution of the Covid19 pandemic in the Republic of Moldova and its impact on Moldovan society, I decided to briefly describe the Republic of Moldova as a country. Moldova is a parliamentary republic with a president as head of state and a prime minister as head of government.

Moldova, officially the Republic of Moldova, is a landlocked country in Eastern Europe. It is bordered by Romania to the west and Ukraine to the north, east, and south. The capital city is Chişinău. The official language of Moldova is Romanian.[1]

According to the 2014 general census, Moldova's population is approximately 2.9 million. Moldovans make up 75.1% of the total population. 7.0% self - identified as Romanians. Ukrainians account for 6.6%, Gagauz for 4.6 %, Russians for 4.1%, Bulgarians for 1.9%, Jews 0.11%, Roma 0.3% and other nationalities 0.5%, among them Belarusians, Poles, Armenians, Germans, and Tatars. Ethnic communities are not territorially divided and are interspersed across Moldova, except for the Gagauz people, who live in the South of Moldova. The data on Moldova does not include the Transnistrian region, over which fighting occurred in the early 1990s and which remains outside of the control of the central government.[2]

For the 2004 census, Orthodox Christians, who make up 93.3% of Moldova's population, More than 2.0% of the population is Protestant including a growing number of Jehovah's Witnesses, 0.9% belongs to other religions, 1.0% is non-religious, 0.4% is atheist, and 2.2% did not answer the religion question at the census.[1]

Emigration is a mass phenomenon in Moldova and has a major impact on the country's demographics and economy. The Moldovan Intelligence and Security Service has estimated that 600,000 to one million Moldovan citizens (almost 25% of the population) are working abroad.[2]

2. The evolution of the Covid 19 pandemic in RM and the challenges related to false news

The virus was confirmed to have reached in Republic of Moldova on 7 March 2020, when a Moldovan woman that returned from Italy was tested positive for the novel coronavirus. As the number of infected people started to rise during the next days, on 17 March 2020, the Parliament declared a state of emergency for the entire territory of the Republic of Moldova for a period of 60 days (17 March - 15 May 2020). On 15 May 2020, in the last day of the state of emergency declared by the Parliament on 17 March 2020, the Extraordinary National Commission of Public Health declared the state of emergency in public health for the entire territory of Moldova for the period of



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16 May to 30 June 2020. On 9 June 2020, the total number of confirmed cases surpassed 10,000. On 1 September 2020, the number of deaths surpassed 1,000.[1]

This period was characterized by a series of statements and actions by politicians, religious figures, as well as many rumors that questioned the seriousness of the situation caused by the Covid 19 pandemic, such as:

In its address, the Metropolitan Church of Moldova called on the country's leadership to defend Moldovans from what they called the international criminal Bill Gates, who would pursue the microchipping of Moldovans with the anti-COVID-19 vaccine. The metropolitan is citing an alleged request by an Italian MP for the arrest of Bill Gates, who he claims is accused of being a criminal against humanity - and has caused vaccines to kill 500,000 children in India, and claims the idea of genocide to reduce the planet's population. All this being intensely propagated so far in the public space, through fake news platforms and propaganda tools;[4]

The Metropolitan Church of Moldova mentioned that Bill Gates is considered primarily responsible for creating microchipping technology through a vaccine that introduces nanoparticles into the body that react to waves transmitted by 5G technology and allow the system to control humans remotely.[4]

Some voices said that The Metropolitan Church of Moldova fed the fakes related to COVID and claimed in the midst of a false hysteria, created and maintained by the Russian anti-Western propaganda machine and fake news sites.[4]

On the other hand, the head of the Department of Control and Legal Assistance within the National Agency for Regulation in Electronic Communications and Information Technology (ANRCETI), claimed that the hysteria related to 5G antennas and harassment of the population is false, especially since there is no such antenna in Moldova.[4]

In turn, the head of the National Public Health Agency of Moldova, described the information about the connection between 5G technology, coronavirus and chip implantation as stupid.[4]

„It's a virus invented to kill the elderly, there are already hundreds of dead in Moldovan hospitals, garlic gets rid of the virus” are just some of the news that crept into the virtual environment from discussions in the kitchen. Because of fear, many people were inclined to believe this fake news, and some media portals rated it by distributing such news, instilling fear in people.[4]

Manipulation campaigns about Covid-19 included a wide format of communication channels and messages to reach the widest possible audience, through news, blogging, comments on articles or posts on social networks, false profiles of alleged influencers, reports TV, documentaries, Facebook posts, YouTube videos and more.

„The new type of coronavirus may pass through us and we may not even notice it”. This is the statement made by the former head of state, Igor Dodon. In this context, the president urges citizens to call the doctor and possibly perform the test only if he has obvious symptoms of illness.[4]

At the same time, at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, there were rumors in the Moldovan society that the authorities were interested in registering as many cases of Covid 19 as possible in order to receive more money from the World Health Organization.[4]

In the same context, there were many cases in which the relatives of some deceased stated that although the relatives died of other diseases, they were promised money to write them in the death certificate of the deceased relatives as the cause of death Coronavirus 19.[4]

On the other hand, doctors said that falsifying infections and deaths is definitely impossible. It is absurd and incomprehensible where such imagination comes to the population.[4]

In this context I could conclude I find the lack of transparency on the part of the authorities to be a major deficiency. People wanted to know as much as possible about the coronavirus, and the fact that they stay home longer should be a reason to inform them more. Authorities need to know



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that rumors are always born out of a lack of information and non-transparent information. Officials only told us about the number of infections and deaths.

The period of awareness of the danger of Covid 19 disease (september 2020 - february 2021)

This period was characterized by a calming of the statements of the church faces related to the origin of the Covid virus 19. This, after the infection and the death of several priests. They gave up statements on conspiracy theories and even some of them urged citizens to get vaccinated

Also, this period coincided with a pre-election and electoral period of the presidential elections, which took place in November 2020. For instance Igor Dodon, the former president of the Republic of Moldova, completely ignored the health protection rules, rarely wore the mask in public and continued to travel frequently to Moldovan localities. Such examples of violations of protection measures against Covid 19 by politicians have been quite numerous.

Some representatives of civil society said, "It does not seem convincing as long as the rulers of the country do not follow any rule, but on the contrary by their example they would rather be interested in a large number of cases.[4]

Despite this, more and more people began to realize the gravity of Covid 19 disease due to the growing number of infections and deaths that somehow had a tangent with them.

As of 29 March 2021, a total of 226,521 confirmed cases, 201,769 recoveries, and 4,827 deaths have been reported in the country.[1]

In this period, the daily number of infections and deaths began to increase sharply.

The whole of Moldovan society seems to have no doubts about gravity of Covid 19 disease, but another dilemma has arisen, if to receive vaccines or not, due to the appearance of several news about some adverse effects of Astra Zeneca vaccine.

3. The impact of Covid 19 pandemic on Moldavian society

The impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on a small and open economy and a fragile local business community as the one in the Republic of Moldova was expected to be significant. Thus, a comprehensive response that leaves no-one behind must start by considering the most acute vulnerabilities of both the vulnerable population and economy. To this end, was identified in scope a list of 7 vulnerable groups and 7 economic sectors as follows.[3]

Vulnerable Groups	Economic Sectors
Children and youth	Wholesale, retail trade (non-food)
Poor households	Transportation and storage
Vulnerable women	HORECA
NEET Youth	Light industry
Elderly population	Health
Returning migrants	Education
Freelancers	Agriculture

Table 1 [3]

I analyzed only the vulnerable groups of the Moldovan society follows:



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- Necessity of children to attend school on-line likely contributed to a further inequality of educational performance between pupils from socially advantaged pupils and socially disadvantaged ones. Despite government and donor efforts, there is still a baseline disparity in availability of equipment, such as tablet/computer/notebook (59.5% of households in 2019) or internet connection (60.8% of households were connected to the internet 2019, while the figure for rural areas was 51.3%).[3]
- Children also have overlapping vulnerabilities, particularly when being part of a poor household. According to 2018 data from the National Statistics Bureau, households with 3+ children have the highest rate of absolute poverty among any group – 42%, a starting point that, by virtue of low resources, limits their ability to adapt to the pandemic.[3]
- Poor households are impacted more by the pandemic crisis since they are left behind and lack necessities in order to properly fight COVID-19 and the related crisis.[3]
- Women have also been directly affected by the pandemic, with the Ministry of Health and Social protection reporting that the number of domestic-violence related calls has increased 30%. [3]
- Youth had have seen their prospects deteriorate as the pandemic effects linger on far beyond the lockdown phase. As the opportunity to migrate is restricted by the economic damage suffered by foreign countries, and remittances will decrease for the same reason, may be constrained to further levels of inactivity. Also, any sustained weakness of the domestic labour market may make it an unattractive option for youth. Thus COVID-19 may likely increase their skill fragmentation and decrease their resources.[3]
- The elderly population is at risk for isolation and loneliness during a time of social distancing policies – a fact especially relevant when considering that 1 in 2 pensioner households is a single-person household. Limitations in accessing the public services, as well as challenges in access to vital goods have topped-up the vulnerabilities of the elderly during the pandemic.[3]
- Returning Migrants have been forced to return home or re-evaluate their work prospects, with informal workers having low legal protection and falling outside of the social safety nets. IOM (International Organization of Migration) has found that up to 255,00 migrants have a probable intention to return, and circa 79,000 of them manifested an intention to stay in Moldova for a longer period.[3]
- Freelancers, while not being considered part of the traditional vulnerable, have found themselves in a difficult position. Craftsmen, small entrepreneurs and microenterprises have seen decline in sales, restricted access to raw materials and decline in domestic demands and have serious concerns about declines in liquidity/cashflows.[3]

To all the negative effects of the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on the vulnerable population described above we can also mention the negative psychological impact on each person for fear of being infected. Although the vaccine has now appeared in the Republic of Moldova in small quantities, initially intended for doctors, the vaccination rate is very low. Moreover, there is a mass perception of the population about the need for vaccination in order to stop the spread of Covid disease 19. Moldovan society is still confused.

4. Case study, Impact of Covid 19 pandemic on military

In order to understand the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on the military as part of Moldovan society, I decided to make a questionnaire. I surveyed 30 military officers, most of them friends and colleagues. The results are as follows.



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Questions/Answers	Yes, nr.	No, nr.	Not sure, nr.
Were you scared of the virus at the beginning of the pandemic?	3	25	2
Are you right now scared of the virus?	23	2	5
Were you infected with Covid 19?	20	7	3
Did you have some doubts about the gravity of the Covid 19?	21	6	3
Did the pandemic have an negative impact on your life?	25	5	0
Do you want to get vaccinated?	13	12	5

Table 2

Examining the table 2, I noticed that the military believes like the entire Moldovan society has also begun to be afraid of the Covid 19 with the increase in the number of infections and deaths. At the same time, most respondents said that the pandemic has an negative impact on their lives.

5. Conclusions

The Republic of Moldova did not have a coherent communication strategy on the COVID 19 pandemic, and the example set by many senior officials in Moldova remained one of ignoring minimum rules. Another mistake in managing the Covid 19 pandemic was the fact that the politicians and representants of church first spoke and then the specialists. Thus, a series of contradictory information was often delivered in the public, which led to a series of negative effects on society, such as distrust, disorientation, ignorance of protection measures and others.

It is obvious that the Moldovian society has been affected quite a lot by the Covid 19 pandemic, both economically and psychologically. I hope the society will become more responsible and overcome the pandemic Covid 19.

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