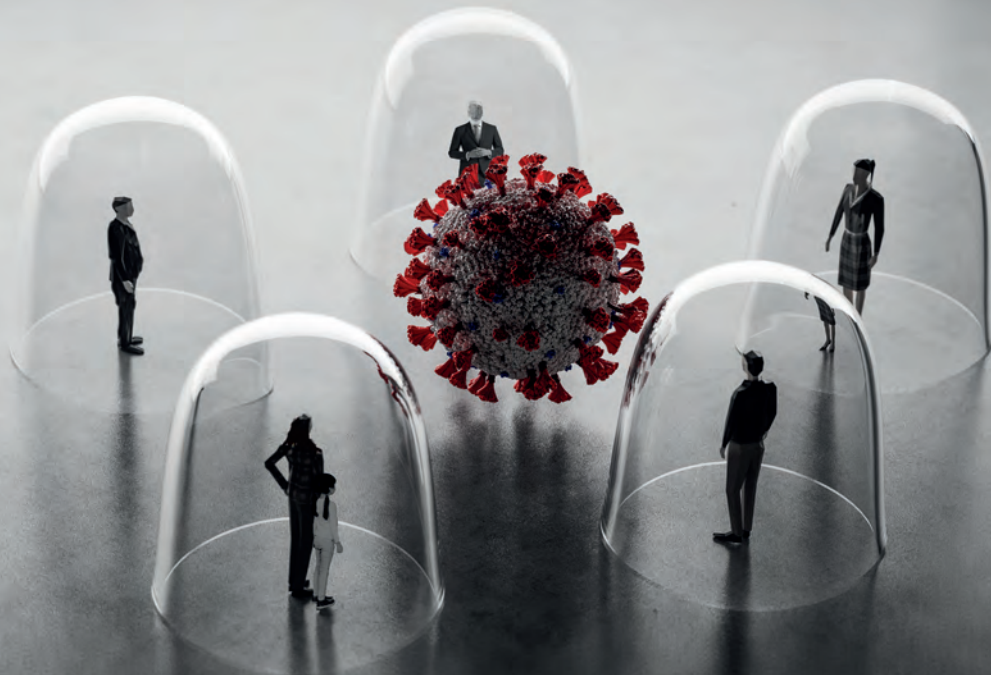


Anna Moskal · Aleksandra Sobarnia
Szymon Pazera · Zuzanna Kopania

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A FAILURE OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION OR
A CHANCE FOR CLOSER COOPERATION AMONG MEMBER STATES?



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Cracow 2021

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SZYMON PAZERA

III. The Outbreak of the COVID-19 in Europe

1. COVID-19

According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (hereinafter: ECDC), the first public information on a suspicious disease in the People's Republic of China was published on 31 December 2019.²⁷⁸ On that day, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission in Wuhan City, Hubei province, China, reported a cluster of pneumonia cases (including seven severe cases). It was linked to Wuhan's Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, a wholesale fish and live animal market.²⁷⁹ In the People's Republic of China this information caused a public panic and outrage. The citizens feared that the government was hiding from them another virus similar to SARS, which caused 2002–2003 epidemic. In the middle of January 2020, Jinping Xi, General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party and China's political leader, suddenly disappeared from the public eye and vanished from Chinese media outlets. By the end of January, the object of blame in Chinese media shifted. Top officials and media outlets started questioning why Wuhan failed to inform the public sooner and considered possible repercussions for local governments.²⁸⁰

The earliest date of onset of symptoms was 1 December 2019. The patients' symptoms included fever, malaise, dry cough and dyspnoea. Due to the symptomatology of these patients, they were initially diagnosed with pneumonia.²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, *Timeline of ECDC's Response to COVID-19*, at <<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/covid-19/timeline-ecdc-response>>, 20 June 2021.

²⁷⁹ Wuhan City Health Committee (WCHC), *Wuhan Municipal Health and Health Commission's briefing on the current pneumonia epidemic situation in our city*, at <https://epaper.hubeidaily.net/pc/content/202001/01/content_15040.html>, 20 June 2021.

²⁸⁰ *China Covid-19: How State Media and Censorship Took on Coronavirus*, BBC, 29 December 2020, at <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-55355401>>, 20 June 2021.

²⁸¹ Y.-C. Liu, R.-L. Kuo, S.-R. Shih, "COVID-19: The First Documented Coronavirus Pandemic in History," *Biomedical Journal*, vol. 43, no. 4 (2020), p. 328.

It is assumed that the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (hereinafter: CDC) quickly realized that it was a new type of coronavirus and the first viral sequence of the pathogen has been deposited into GenBank and made public on 26 December 2019.²⁸² Initially, the linkage between the first patients and their recent visits to the Wuhan's Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market suggested a zoonotic origin of the virus. The fact that bats are hosts to coronaviruses that are phylogenetically close to SARS-CoV-2 made it even more plausible.²⁸³ According to Yen-Chin Liu's, Rei-Lin Kuo's and Shin-Ru Shih's study, the spike glycoprotein of SARS-CoV-2 binds to angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 in humans and Chinese horseshoe bats and civets for cell entry.²⁸⁴ In fact, they believed that Chinese horseshoe bats are the natural host of the virus while the intermediate host (the one who transferred coronavirus from the natural host to humans) may be pangolin. They stated that human coronavirus strains usually cause mild upper respiratory-track infections (such as a common cold) but SARS-CoV-2 (much like SARS-CoV which caused an epidemic in China in 2002–2003 and MERS-CoV responsible for the outbreak in Middle East in 2012) can cause severe acute respiratory syndrome and result in life-threatening disease.²⁸⁵

On 9 January 2020, the CDC reported that a new type of coronavirus was detected and caused 15 cases of pneumonia.²⁸⁶ Whole-genome sequencing revealed that the causative agent behind what was first diagnosed as pneumonia was a novel coronavirus.²⁸⁷ It was described as SARS-CoV-2 which stands for severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2. It was officially named by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses based on a phylogenetic analysis.²⁸⁸ COVID-19 is a disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.²⁸⁹ Surprisingly quickly, on 9 January, the ECDC issued a publication titled "Threat Assessment Brief: Pneumonia cases possibly associated with a novel coronavirus in Wuhan, China," which stated that there were no cases detected outside of the People's Republic of China and the virus' likelihood of introduction to the European Union is "considered to be low but cannot be excluded."²⁹⁰ On 17 January, the ECDC published another report titled "Rapid Risk Assessment: Cluster of pneumonia cases

²⁸² C. Wang et al., "COVID-19 in Early 2021: Current Status and Looking Forward," *Signal Transduction and Targeted Therapy*, vol. 6, 2020, p. 1.

²⁸³ Ibid., pp. 1–2.

²⁸⁴ Y.-C. Liu, R.-L. Kuo, S.-R. Shih, "COVID-19...", p. 330.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 329–331.

²⁸⁶ *Experts Claim That a New Coronavirus is Identified in Wuhan*, Xinhua News Agency, 9 January 2020, at <http://www.xinhuanet.com/2020-01/09/c_1125438971.htm>, 20 June 2021.

²⁸⁷ Y.-C. Liu, R.-L. Kuo, S.-R. Shih, "COVID-19...", p. 331.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ K. Goniewicz et al., "Current Response and Management Decisions of the European Union to the COVID-19 Outbreak: A Review," *Sustainability*, vol. 12, no. 9 (2020), p. 2.

²⁹⁰ European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, *Threat Assessment Brief: Pneumonia Cases Possibly Associated with a Novel Coronavirus in Wuhan, China*, 9 January 2020, at <<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/pneumonia-cases-possibly-associated-novel-coronavirus-wuhan-china>>, 20 June 2021.

caused by a novel coronavirus, Wuhan, China, 2020”.²⁹¹ It revealed that there were 41 pneumonia cases caused by a novel 2019-nCoV virus in the area of Wuhan and only three travel-related cases, in Thailand and Japan at that time. It further assessed that “likelihood of infection for travellers visiting Wuhan, but not visiting these markets, is considered low” and “the assessed likelihood of further spread in the community setting within the EU/EEA is very low, but the risk cannot be excluded”.²⁹²

It is worth mentioning that on 17 January 2020 the Health Security Committee of the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety had its first meeting in regard to the new virus. The United Kingdom noted that “the situation is being monitored by Public Health England” and they have briefed their health workers on the situation. France took more extensive measures and sent an alert message to its medical services at the airports, health care workers, health facilities and general practitioners and all flights between Wuhan and France were providing their passengers audio messages about the threat. No other country that was present at the meeting spoke out about taken precautions.²⁹³

On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organization (hereinafter: WHO) declared the outbreak of the novel coronavirus “a public health emergency of international concern”.²⁹⁴ On 11 March 2020, the Director General of the WHO declared COVID-19 a “global pandemic”.²⁹⁵ In its report of “the WHO-China Joint Mission”²⁹⁶ on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) which was published on 28 February 2020,²⁹⁷ the WHO claimed that the first samples of the virus were acquired and deposited in GenBank on 30 December 2019. However, there are other sources which indicate that they were first acquired a few days earlier, on 26 December 2019.²⁹⁸ After SARS-CoV-2 epidemic in China in 2002 and 2003, the WHO issued a report which stated that while the direct cause of that epidemic is

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ The European Commission, *Audio Meeting of the Health Security Committee – 17 January 2020. Public Flash Report the Cluster of Pneumonia Cases Associated with Novel Coronavirus in Wuhan, China*, at <https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/default/files/preparedness_response/docs/ev_20200117_sr_en.pdf>, 20 June 2021.

²⁹⁴ World Health Organization, *Statement on the Second Meeting of the International Health Regulations (2005) Emergency Committee Regarding the Outbreak of Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)*, 30 January 2020, at <[https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/30-01-2020-statement-on-the-second-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-\(2005\)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-outbreak-of-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/30-01-2020-statement-on-the-second-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-(2005)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-outbreak-of-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov))>, 20 June 2021.

²⁹⁵ World Health Organization, *Director-General’s Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19*, 11 March 2020, at <<https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>>, 20 June 2021.

²⁹⁶ The WHO-China joint mission of 25 national and international experts was held from 16–24 February 2020 and was led by dr. Bruce Aylward of WHO and dr. Wannian Liang of PRC.

²⁹⁷ World Health Organization, *Report of the WHO-China Joint Mission on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)*, 28 February 2020, at <[https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/report-of-the-who-china-joint-mission-on-coronavirus-disease-2019-\(covid-19\)](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/report-of-the-who-china-joint-mission-on-coronavirus-disease-2019-(covid-19))>, 20 June 2021.

²⁹⁸ C. Wang et al., “COVID-19...,” p. 1.

unknown, it is highly possible that the virus was carried out of the National Institute of Virology in Beijing, where scientists conducted experiments using live and inactivated SARS.²⁹⁹ In this report, the WHO warned that new cases involving coronavirus that were laboratory-associated were possible and that biosafety practices of institutions and laboratories (especially those working with SARS coronavirus) should be reviewed.³⁰⁰

2. European Union's Competences and Actions

The EU's political system as a multilayer decision-making system with the ability to act supra-nationally, internationally, multilaterally and transnationally is potentially well suited to manage a global health crisis as well as ensuing economic and security crises, but good leadership and solidarity of the Member States play a pivotal part in it.³⁰¹ In the time of the rise of nationalist movements in several Member States it is easier said than done,³⁰² and the pandemic exposed many weaknesses of the EU as an international organization based on effective cooperation of its Member States.³⁰³ However, what started off as intergovernmental and nationalistic approach of the Member States to the crisis, ended in adopting blended and patchwork-like integrative and collective solutions.³⁰⁴ It is also crucial to understand that the European Union is not equipped or legally competent to be responsible for delivering health care, or to address differences in delivering health care to its citizens between the Member States.³⁰⁵ This subchapter aims to consider the EU's role and legal competence in relation to health so that its actions taken in response to the pandemic and their limitations could be fully understood.

Article 168 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (hereinafter: TFEU) limits EU's competence in relation to public health. However, as it is quite typical for the EU, a right for autonomous interpretation and implementation of European legal provisions is very wide. According to article 168(7) TFEU, all Member States retain their sovereignty in both organization and delivery of health services and medical care, and the EU is obligated to respect that sovereignty.³⁰⁶ When analysing EU's actions toward the pandemic, it is also important to look at article

²⁹⁹ World Health Organization, *China's Latest SARS Outbreak Has Been Contained, but Biosafety Concerns Remain – Update 7*, at <https://www.who.int/emergencies/disease-outbreak-news/item/2004_05_18a-en>, 20 June 2021.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ R. Roloff, "COVID-19 and No One's World, Connections," *The Security Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2020), p. 29.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ E. Brooks, R. Geyer, "The Development of EU Health Policy and the Covid-19 Pandemic: Trends and Implications," *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 42, no. 8 (2020), p. 1060.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 1061.

³⁰⁵ D. Townend et al., "What is the Role of the European Union in the Covid-19 Pandemic?," *Medicine and Law*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2020), p. 252.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 252.

35 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. Article 168 TFEU³⁰⁷ and article 35 of the Charter³⁰⁸ imply that the EU has no competence to centralize the

³⁰⁷ Article 168 TFEU:

1. A high level of human health protection shall be ensured in the definition and implementation of all Union policies and activities.

Union action, which shall complement national policies, shall be directed towards improving public health, preventing physical and mental illness and diseases, and obviating sources of danger to physical and mental health. Such action shall cover the fight against the major health scourges, by promoting research into their causes, their transmission and their prevention, as well as health information and education, and monitoring, early warning of and combating serious cross-border threats to health.

The Union shall complement the Member States' action in reducing drugs-related health damage, including information and prevention.

2. The Union shall encourage cooperation between the Member States in the areas referred to in this Article and, if necessary, lend support to their action. It shall in particular encourage cooperation between the Member States to improve the complementarity of their health services in cross-border areas.

Member States shall, in liaison with the Commission, coordinate among themselves their policies and programmes in the areas referred to in paragraph 1. The Commission may, in close contact with the Member States, take any useful initiative to promote such coordination, in particular initiatives aiming at the establishment of guidelines and indicators, the organisation of exchange of best practice, and the preparation of the necessary elements for periodic monitoring and evaluation. The European Parliament shall be kept fully informed.

3. The Union and the Member States shall foster cooperation with third countries and the competent international organisations in the sphere of public health.

4. By way of derogation from Article 2(5) and Article 6(a) and in accordance with Article 4(2)(k) the European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, shall contribute to the achievement of the objectives referred to in this Article through adopting in order to meet common safety concerns:

(a) measures setting high standards of quality and safety of organs and substances of human origin, blood and blood derivatives; these measures shall not prevent any Member State from maintaining or introducing more stringent protective measures; (b) measures in the veterinary and phytosanitary fields which have as their direct objective the protection of public health; (c) measures setting high standards of quality and safety for medicinal products and devices for medical use.

5. The European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, may also adopt incentive measures designed to protect and improve human health and in particular to combat the major cross-border health scourges, measures concerning monitoring, early warning of and combating serious cross-border threats to health, and measures which have as their direct objective the protection of public health regarding tobacco and the abuse of alcohol, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States.

6. The Council, on a proposal from the Commission, may also adopt recommendations for the purposes set out in this Article.

7. Union action shall respect the responsibilities of the Member States for the definition of their health policy and for the organisation and delivery of health services and medical care. The responsibilities of the Member States shall include the management of health services and medical care and the allocation of the resources assigned to them. The measures referred to in paragraph 4(a) shall not affect national provisions on the donation or medical use of organs and blood.

³⁰⁸ Article 35 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union: *Everyone has the right of access to preventive health care and the right to benefit from medical treatment under the*

response to a pandemic. The EU is not able to command the Member States' healthcare infrastructure, take precautions and introduce restrictions. Its role is basically limited to encouraging cooperation between the Member States³⁰⁹ and promote health. Most importantly, the EU is not responsible for implementing major legislation or centralize frontline healthcare provisions.³¹⁰ Whatever the newly implemented national policies are, the EU cannot directly challenge them. It only possesses soft-law mechanisms, such as guidelines, recommendations and health promotions.³¹¹ This largely explains the limited scope of EU's response, which is extensively analysed and critiqued in following subchapters and chapters.

In response to the cross-sectoral and complex crisis that the pandemic is, on 28 January 2020 the EU Council activated the Integrated Political Crisis Response Mechanism (hereinafter: IPCR).³¹² IPCR is supposed to enable more flexible communication and a timely and effective decision-making. However, the main responsibility lays in the hands of the Permanent Representatives Committee (which acts as a representative of the Member States). It allows the Member States to receive unrestricted access to reports from the European Commission and the European External Action Service through a dedicated secure web platform. Furthermore, the European Commission and the EU Council are responsible for communication and coordination among national health and interior ministries.³¹³ During video conference meetings, which were held on March 17 and 26 March 2020, EU leaders decided to focus their response to COVID-19 on public health, travel and transportation, research and innovations, economy, crisis management and solidarity, and education. They also confirmed a need to implement restrictions on free movement of persons within the EU.³¹⁴ Personal Protective Equipment was to be purchased through the civil protection framework that was coordinated by the European Commission and financed from the EU funds (in fact, by mid-2020, the EU allocated 4.5 billion euro to support public health measures³¹⁵). Additionally, they pointed out to a need for a coordinated and transparent process of sharing and supporting any developments in research amongst all the supporting

conditions established by national laws and practices. A high level of human health protection shall be ensured in the definition and implementation of all the Union's policies and activities.

³⁰⁹ Article 168 TFEU.

³¹⁰ D. Townsend et al., "What is the Role...", p. 252.

³¹¹ Ibid., p. 253.

³¹² K. Goniewicz et al., "Current Response...", p. 4.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ European Council, *Conclusions by the President of the European Council Following the Video Conference with Members of the European Council on COVID-19*, at <<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/03/17/conclusions-by-the-president-of-the-european-council-following-the-video-conference-with-members-of-the-european-council-on-covid-19/>>, 20 June 2021.

³¹⁵ J. Wise, "Covid-19: EU Has Lessons to Learn From Early Response to Pandemic, Say Auditors," *BMJ*, vol. 372, no. 173 (2021), p. 1.

Advisory Groups on coronavirus.³¹⁶ In order to counter disinformation on the virus with transparent, timely, and fact-based communication, the European External Action Service set out to debunk fake news and make sure that European citizens are well informed. The EEAS has been publishing reports (for example, *Short Assessment of Narratives and Disinformation Around the COVID-19 Pandemic*³¹⁷). The ECDC's continuous reports on risk assessment also aim to support the Member States and the European Commission in their preparedness and response to a severe public health threat that COVID-19 is.³¹⁸ It is important to emphasize that the Member States have obligations to provide information to the ECDC on relevant technical and scientific issues, which is further delivered to the Community network via the early warning and response network. Furthermore, it is also the Member States' responsibility to identify "recognized competent bodies and public health experts" whose work could contribute to ongoing projects conducted by the ECDC.³¹⁹

On 8 April 2020, the ECDC released its opinion on the use of face masks in public by individuals who are not ill to reduce potential pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic transmission of COVID-19. It has been published in 26 languages.³²⁰ On 14 April, the European Commission and the President of the European Council published "A European roadmap to lifting coronavirus containment measures".³²¹ It was not until 13 May that the European Commission published guidelines and recommendations that aimed to help the Member States gradually lift travel restrictions. Under articles 45 and 52 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, free movement of persons is a right of all EU citizens. It can be limited by a Member State only if it is necessary for protection of the rights and freedoms of others. This means that the temporary closures of the Member States' borders was against article 45, and whether or not they had the right to close their borders under article 52 may be put in question.³²² After all, according to the European Commission, "the reintroduction of border control at the internal borders must be applied as a last resort measure, in exceptional

³¹⁶ K. Goniewicz et al., "Current Response...", p. 3.

³¹⁷ EEAS, *Short Assessment of Narratives and Disinformation Around the COVID-19 Pandemic*, updated on December 2020 – April 2021, 28 April 2021, at <<https://www.euneighbours.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2021-05/EEAS-Special-Report-Covid-19-vaccine-related-disinformation-6.pdf>>, 20 June 2021.

³¹⁸ ECDC, *Outbreak of Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Increased Transmission Globally – Fifth Update*, at <<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/RRR-outbreak-novel-coronavirus-disease-2019-increase-transmission-globally-COVID-19.pdf>>, 20 June 2021.

³¹⁹ Article 4 of the Regulation (EC) No 851/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004 establishing a European Centre for disease prevention and control.

³²⁰ ECDC, *Timeline of ECDC's response to COVID-19*, at <<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/covid-19/timeline-ecdc-response>>, 20 June 2021.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² E. Berry, M.J. Homewood, B. Bogusz, *Complete EU Law Text, Cases, and Materials*, Oxford 2019, p. 522.

situations, and must respect the principle of proportionality.”³²³ During the time of the travel restrictions, the EU continuously pressed the Member States to allow cross-border workers to commute to their workplaces as well as to allow movement of healthcare professionals and seasonal workers.³²⁴ Eight days after the publication of the roadmap, the EU Aviation Safety Agency and the ECDC jointly published guidance for the management of airline passengers in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.³²⁵

On 26 October 2020, the ECDC published its report “Key aspects regarding the introduction and prioritization of COVID-19 vaccination in the EU/EEA and the UK.” At the time there were no vaccines available yet, so it is a good example of an EU institution getting ahead of potential challenges (like developing national vaccination strategies) that Member States may face.³²⁶ On 23 November, the ECDC published updated projects of COVID-19 in which they foresaw that if more than a half of the EU/EEA Member States were to keep the measures that were in place in November until the end of December, they would observe a reduction of more than 50% in the daily number of confirmed cases.³²⁷ The report points out that making any projections is difficult due to the Member States enacting new measures and policies individually.³²⁸ Between 2 December 2020 and 3 February 2021, the ECDC published four reports on national vaccination implementation strategies. On 1 February 2021, the ECDC launched an interactive dashboard that provides “live” information on the progress of vaccination efforts across the EU/EEA.³²⁹

On 23 April 2020, EU leaders endorsed a 540 billion euro package of three safety nets for workers, businesses and Member States. The package consists of 100 billion euro to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency, 200 billion euro to guarantee fund for loans to companies and 240 billion euro for European Stability Mechanism for pandemic crisis support for the Member States. The EU also took action to redirect funds to further help the Member States through “€37 billion from structural funds to support EU countries and their citizens in their fight against the outbreak,” “up to €800 million through the EU Solidarity Fund, which has been amended to provide support to member states affected by public health

³²³ European Commission, *Migration and Home Affairs, Temporary Reintroduction of Border Control*, at <https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen/reintroduction-border-control_en>, 20 June 2021.

³²⁴ E. Townsend et al., “What is the Role...,” p. 255.

³²⁵ ECDC, *Timeline...*

³²⁶ ECDC, *Key Aspects Regarding the Introduction and Prioritisation of COVID-19 Vaccination in the EU/EEA and the UK*, 26 October 2020, at <<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/key-aspects-regarding-introduction-and-prioritisation-covid-19-vaccination>>, 20 June 2021.

³²⁷ ECDC, *Updated Projections Of COVID-19 In The EU/EEA And The UK*, 23 November 2020, at <<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/covid-forecasts-modelling-november-2020.pdf>>, 20 June 2021.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.; ECDC, *Timeline...*

crises like the one caused by COVID-19" and unlocked "additional €3.1 billion from the 2020 budget to respond to the COVID-19 crisis".³³⁰

In a table below, the authors gathered dates of initial occurrences of the first confirmed COVID-19 cases in all Member States and the UK. They are listed in an alphabetical order. The United Kingdom has been included because when the pandemic began, the United Kingdom was still a part of the EU.³³¹ The first COVID-19 cases in the EU were confirmed on 24 January 2020 in Bordeaux, in France, and then two others in Paris, and had onset of symptoms on 17, 19 and 23 January 2020 respectively.³³² The virus quickly spread in Europe and was identified in other Member States. The second Member State which reported the COVID-19 cases on 28 January 2021 was Germany. The United Kingdom and Finland confirmed their first cases on 29 January 2020.³³³ Within two months all Member States were affected by the virus. The first death, which was related to the COVID-19, occurred in France on 15 February 2020.

Table 1: First cases of COVID-19 in each Member State³³⁴

Country	Date of the first reported COVID-19 case
Austria	25 February 2020 ³³⁵
Belgium	3 February 2020 ³³⁶
Bulgaria	8 March 2020 ³³⁷

³³⁰ KPMG, *European Union. Government and institution measures in response to COVID-19*, at <<https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/european-union-government-and-institution-measures-in-response-to-covid.html>>, 20 June 2021.

³³¹ EUR-Lex, *Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community*, at <[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12019W%2FTXT\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12019W%2FTXT(02))>, 20 June 2021.

³³² S.B. Stoecklin et al., "First Cases of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in France: Surveillance, Investigations and Control Measures," *Euro Surveill*, vol. 25, no. 6 (2020).

³³³ Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Gesundheit und Pflege, *Bestätigter Coronavirus-Fall in Bayern – Infektionsschutzmaßnahmen laufen*, at <<https://www.stmgp.bayern.de/presse/bestaetigter-coronavirus-fall-in-bayern-infektionsschutzmassnahmen-laufen>>, 20 June 2021.

³³⁴ For more information on each case (age, gender, symptoms etc.) see: J. Liu, S. Liu, "Epidemiology, Clinical Characteristics of the First Cases of COVID-19," *European Journal of Clinical Investigation*, vol. 50, no. 10 (2020).

³³⁵ P. Czarny, "Ograniczenia praw i wolności w okresie pandemii COVID-19 w Republice Austrii" [Restrictions on the Exercise of Freedoms and Rights during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Republic of Austria], in: K. Dobrzaniecki, B. Przywora (eds.), *Ograniczenia praw i wolności w okresie pandemii COVID-19 na tle porównawczym. Pierwsze doświadczenia*, Warszawa 2021, p. 12.

³³⁶ A. Krzynówek-Arndt, "Ograniczenia praw i wolności w okresie pandemii COVID-19 w Królestwie Belgii" [Restrictions on the Exercise of Freedoms and Rights during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Kingdom of Belgium], in: K. Dobrzaniecki, B. Przywora (eds.), *Ograniczenia praw i wolności...*, p. 32.

³³⁷ *Bulgaria: Government Confirms First Cases of COVID-19 March 8*, GardaWorld, at <<https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/320616/bulgaria-government-confirms-first-cases-of-covid-19-march-8>>, 20 June 2021.

Croatia	25 February 2020 ³³⁸
Cyprus	9 March 2020 ³³⁹
Czech Republic	1 March 2020 ³⁴⁰
Denmark	27 February 2020 ³⁴¹
Estonia	27 February 2020 ³⁴²
Finland	29 January 2020 ³⁴³
France	24 January 2020 ³⁴⁴
Germany	28 January 2020 ³⁴⁵
Greece	28 February 2020 ³⁴⁶
Hungary	4 March 2020 ³⁴⁷
Ireland	26 February 2020 ³⁴⁸
Italy	30 January 2020 ³⁴⁹ 20 February 2020 ³⁵⁰
Latvia	2 March 2020 ³⁵¹

³³⁸ *Croatia Reports First Confirmed Coronavirus Case in Balkans*, Medical Express, at <<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-02-croatia-coronavirus-case-balkans.html>>, 20 June 2021.

³³⁹ *Coronavirus: Timeline of the Covid-19 Outbreak in Cyprus*, CyprusMail, at <<https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/12/30/coronavirus-timeline-of-the-covid-19-outbreak-in-cyprus/>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁴⁰ *Czech Republic Reports First Cases of Coronavirus*, Reuters, at <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-health-czech-idUSKBN20O1XK>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁴¹ *Denmark: Health Minister Confirms First COVID-19 Case February 27*, GardaWorld, at <<https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/318031/denmark-health-minister-confirms-first-covid-19-case-february-27-update-1>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁴² *First Coronavirus Case Found in Estonia*, ERR, at <<https://news.err.ee/1057196/first-coronavirus-case-found-in-estonia>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁴³ *Finland Confirms Its First Coronavirus Case*, Reuters, at <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-health-finland-idUSKBN1ZS27O>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁴⁴ *Epidémie de coronavirus Covid-19 au départ de Wuhan, Chine*, Santé publique France, at <<https://www.santepubliquefrance.fr/dossiers/coronavirus-covid-19>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁴⁵ *Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Gesundheit und Pflege, Bestätigter Coronavirus-Fall in Bayern – Infektionsschutzmaßnahmen laufen*, at <<https://www.stmgp.bayern.de/presse/bestaetigter-coronavirus-fall-in-bayern-infektionsschutzmassnahmen-laufen>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁴⁶ *Greece: Government Confirms First COVID-19 Case February 26*, GardaWorld, at <<https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/317701/greece-government-confirms-first-covid-19-case-february-26>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁴⁷ *Hungary Confirms First Two Coronavirus Cases*, Reuters, at <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-hungary-idUSKBN20R2RA>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁴⁸ V. Perumal, T. Curran, M. Hunter, *First Case of Covid-19 in Ireland*, at <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7576383/>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁴⁹ A couple of Chinese tourists visiting Rome. G. Apolone et al., “Unexpected Detection of SARS-Cov-2 Antibodies in The Prepandemic Period in Italy,” *Tumori Journal*, 2020, pp. 1–6.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ *Latvia: Country Confirms Its First COVID-19 Case March 2*, GardaWorld, at <<https://www.garda.com/fr/crisis24/alertes-de-securite/319196/latvia-country-confirms-its-first-covid-19-case-march-2>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁵² *First Coronavirus Case Confirmed in Lithuania*, My Government, at <<https://lrvt.lt/en/news/first-coronavirus-case-confirmed-in-lithuania>>, 20 June 2021.

Lithuania	28 February 2020 ³⁵²
Luxembourg	29 February 2020 ³⁵³
Malta	7 March 2020 ³⁵⁴
Netherlands	28 February 2020 ³⁵⁵
Poland	4 March 2020 ³⁵⁶
Portugal	2 March 2020 ³⁵⁷
Romania	26 February 2020 ³⁵⁸
Slovakia	6 March 2020 ³⁵⁹
Slovenia	4 March 2020 ³⁶⁰
Spain	31 January 2020 ³⁶¹
Sweden	31 January 2020 ³⁶²
United Kingdom	29 January 2020 ³⁶³ The new mutation strain known as VUI-202012/01: December 202 ³⁶⁴

Source: Created for the purpose of this research.

³⁵² *First Coronavirus Case Confirmed in Lithuania*, My Government, at <<https://lrv.lt/en/news/first-coronavirus-case-confirmed-in-lithuania>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁵³ *Luxembourg Reports First Coronavirus Case, linked to Italy*, Medical Express, at <<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-02-luxembourg-coronavirus-case-linked-italy.html>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁵⁴ S. Micalef et al., *The First Wave of COVID-19 in Malta: A National Cross-Sectional Study*, at <<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0239389>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁵⁵ A. Asiran, *Netherlands Announces First Coronavirus Case*, Anadolu Agency, at <<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/netherlands-announces-first-coronavirus-case/1747688>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁵⁶ *Poland: First Case of COVID-19 Confirmed March 4*, GardaWorld, at <<https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/319811/poland-first-case-of-covid-19-confirmed-march-4-update-1>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁵⁷ *Portugal Registers First Two Cases of Coronavirus: Health Minister*, Reuters, at <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-portugal-idUSKBN20P1BB>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁵⁸ *Romania Detects First Virus Case after Man Has Contact with Italian Visitor*, RFE/RL Romania, at <<https://www.rferl.org/a/romania-finds-first-coronavirus-covid-19-case-contact-with-italian/30457117.html>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁵⁹ *Slovakia: Government Confirms First Case of COVID-19, Suspends All Flights to Italy March 6*, GardaWorld, at <<https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/320366/slovakia-government-confirms-first-case-of-covid-19-suspends-all-flights-to-italy-march-6>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁶⁰ *Slovenia Confirms First Case of Coronavirus: Health Minister*, Reuters, at <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-slovenia-idUSKBN20R33X>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁶¹ J. Henriquez et al., "The First Months of The COVID-19 Pandemic in Spain," *Health Policy Technology*, vol. 9, no. 4 (2020), pp. 560–574.

³⁶² L. Roden, *First Case of Coronavirus in Sweden Confirmed*, Sverige Radio, at <<https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/7398979>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁶³ O. Wright, *Coronavirus: How the UK Dealt with Its First Covid Case*, at <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-55622386>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁶⁴ S. Law, A. Wingnang Leung, C. Xu, "COVID-19 Mutation in the United Kingdom," *Microbes and Infectious Diseases*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2020), p. 187.

Contrary to the ECDC's reports, National Cancer Institute of the Italian city of Milan claims that its study shows cases of COVID-19 as early as in September 2019,³⁶⁵ even despite the fact that Italy first detected cases of COVID-19 in Rome on 30 January 2020 (two tourists in Rome), and its first official COVID-19 patient was detected on 20 February 2020 in Lombardy.³⁶⁶ According to the Italian researchers, 11,6% of 959 healthy volunteers that enrolled in a lung cancer screening trial between September 2019 and March 2020, had developed coronavirus antibodies. Further research conducted by the University of Siena proved that four cases must have contracted the virus in September 2019.³⁶⁷ According to Giovanni Apolone, the co-author of the study, those patients had no symptoms and only found out about being infected from the study.³⁶⁸

Another surprising finding came from France, where samples from 24 patients tested negative for flu in December and in early January were retested because of demonstrated symptoms of COVID-19. According to the results, the first case of the COVID-19 could be traced back to 27 December 2019.³⁶⁹ Groupe Hospitalier Paris Seine in Saint-Denis confirmed these findings, and contacted the patient. As it turned out, he could have contracted the virus from his wife who had contact with Chinese co-workers from a sushi stand at a supermarket near an airport visited by many departing travellers,³⁷⁰ and could potentially be the "patient zero." However, this information has not been officially confirmed yet.³⁷¹

The first clusters of COVID-19 cases were located in Italy, specifically in the region of Lombardy, where in February up to 320 cases per day were reported.³⁷² The northern regions of Lombardy, Veneto, and Emilia-Romagna, have been most affected by the outbreak of the COVID-19 disease.³⁷³ At first, the disease remained unidentified, and the reason why it was spreading so rapidly among Italian citizens was unknown. One of the Italian virologists, Roberto Burioni, said that "This is not the bubonic plague, but it's not the flu either, which is why containment is key and I'm sorry there hasn't been a common European response to

³⁶⁵ G. Vagnoni, *The Coronavirus Emerged in Italy as Early as September of Last Year, A Study Shows*, at <<https://www.businessinsider.com/coronavirus-emerged-italy-september-of-last-year-study-shows-2020-11?r=US&IR=T>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁶⁶ G. Apolone et al., "Unexpected detection..."

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ G. Vagnoni, *The Coronavirus Emerged...*

³⁶⁹ A. Deslandes et al., "SARS-CoV-2 Was Already Spreading in France in Late December 2019," *International Journal of Antimicrobial Agents*, vol. 55, no. 6 (2020).

³⁷⁰ *Coronavirus: France's First Known Case 'Was in December*, BBC News, 5 May 2020, at <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-52526554>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁷¹ A.B.B. Laguipo, *First French COVID-19 Case Was in December 19*, 5 May 2020, at <<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20200505/First-French-COVID-19-case-was-in-December.aspx>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁷² S. Sciorilli Borrelli, *Politics Goes Viral as Italy Struggles with Outbreak*, 25 February 2020, at <<https://www.politico.eu/article/politics-goes-viral-as-italy-struggles-with-outbreak/>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁷³ F.I. Pratiwi, L. Salamah, "Italy on COVID-19: Response and Strategy," *Journal Global and Strategies*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2020), p. 391.

the emergency”.³⁷⁴ Italy was the first European country which introduced restrictions to prevent the rapid spread of the virus. Firstly, Italian government decided to close schools, gyms, museums, clubs and other public places. Secondly, mass events and social gatherings were banned.³⁷⁵ The newly implemented measures of safety were introduced with a help of the Italian army. Italian army helped citizens in mundane activities, such as buying them groceries or transporting them to the hospitals.³⁷⁶ Further restrictions put 16 million people in northern Italy under full lockdown.³⁷⁷ On 10 March 2020, full lockdown was extended to the whole country. Moreover, all sport events were cancelled until 3 April 2020.³⁷⁸ Italy was the first Member State which introduced such harsh restrictions. Overall, Italy's reaction was evaluated as belated.³⁷⁹ The lack of experience in responding to such a severe public health crisis and underestimating the virus spread resulted in a high death rate and a rapid tempo of contracting virus within the country.³⁸⁰ Furthermore, Italy also became the epicentre of the COVID-19 outbreak in Europe, accounting for 60% of all confirmed cases and 90% of those in the EU in March 2020.³⁸¹

Another country which perfectly illustrates the rapid spread of the virus is Spain, where during only one month (March 2020) 100,000 people were infected with the COVID-19 virus and nearly 10,000 of them died.³⁸² Shockingly, the Director of the Emergency Medical Services of Madrid, Fernando Simon, stated in an interview that very few Spanish citizens could be infected.³⁸³ This dismissive attitude towards the spread of the coronavirus contributed to the collapse of the national health system.³⁸⁴ The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Spain constituted the first case of “community transmission”.³⁸⁵ This term means that the source of

³⁷⁴ S. Sciorilli Borrelli, *Politics...*

³⁷⁵ F. I. Pratiwi, L. Salamah, *Italy...*, pp. 391–392.

³⁷⁶ E. Mee, *Coronavirus: Italian Army Called in as Crematorium Struggles to Cope with Deaths*, 19 March 2020, at <<https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-italian-army-called-in-to-carry-away-corpses-as-citys-crematorium-is-overwhelmed-11959994>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁷⁷ *Coronavirus: Northern Italy Quarantines 16 Million People*, BBC, 8 March 2020, at <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51787238>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁷⁸ *Coronavirus: Italy Extends Emergency Measures Nationwide*, BBC, 10 March 2020, at <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-51810673>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁷⁹ F. I. Pratiwi, L. Salamah, “Italy...”, p. 399.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ M. Demertzis et al., “An Effective Economic Response to the Coronavirus in Europe,” *Policy Contribution*, no. 6 (2020), p. 4, at <<https://www.bruegel.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/PC-06-2020-130320.pdf>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁸² A. Viguria, N. Casamitjana, “Early Interventions and Impact Of COVID-19 In Spain,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 18, no. 8 (2021), p. 3.

³⁸³ G. Tremlett, *How Did Spain Get its Coronavirus Response So Wrong?*, 26 March 2020, at <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/26/spain-coronavirus-response-analysis>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁸⁴ E. Sánchez Nicolás, *Italy and Spain: Worst – or Just First?*, 31 March 2020, at <<https://euobserver.com/coronavirus/147932>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁸⁵ Redaccion Medica, *Sanidad confirma 5 nuevos casos de coronavirus en Andalucía*, at <<https://www.redaccionmedica.com/autonomias/andalucia/sanidad-confirma-5-nuevos-casos-de-coronavirus-en-andalucia-6106>>, 20 June 2021.

the infection is unknown or that there is no connection with another confirmed case.³⁸⁶ The first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Spain began on 8 March, when three popular public events, including an International Women's Day celebration, a local football match and a meeting of 9,000 supporters of the Vox Italia party, were organised. Unsurprisingly, the virus spread at an alarming rate, and soon, Spain reached a second largest number of total cases in Europe.³⁸⁷ Moreover, it was also a country with the fastest daily spread of the virus.³⁸⁸ Unfortunately, the Spanish government did not learn from the mistakes of the Italian government, whose slow reaction led to the collapse of their healthcare system. On 13 March a state of alarm was finally declared in Spain.³⁸⁹ As of 15 March, restrictions on movement were introduced, obliging Spanish citizens to stay at homes with the exception of purchasing food, medicines or going to work. The Prime Minister of Spain Pedro Sanchez explained that this decision was necessary in his country in face of a health, economic and social crisis.³⁹⁰ As of 16 March, all flights and all other modes of transport to Spain were banned for both non-citizens and residents.³⁹¹ The situation in the country became tragic, and on 1 April Spain passed 100,000 of total coronavirus cases. On 5 April the number of cases began decreasing, and as of 13 April the government started easing the restrictions.³⁹²

As it was mentioned earlier, the first case of COVID-19 in Europe was recorded in Bordeaux.³⁹³ Similarly, the first death related to COVID-19 was also reported in France.³⁹⁴ At the beginning, the increase in France was rather slow. The rate of the spread of the virus drastically accelerated after a religious event³⁹⁵ held on 17–24 February 2020 in Mulhouse, where about 2,500 people attended the festivities.³⁹⁶ Radio France reported that possibly half of the participants of

³⁸⁶ A.K. Pitol, T.R. Julian, "Community Transmission of SARS-CoV2 by Surfaces: Risks and Risk," *Environmental Science & Technology Letters*, no. 8 (2021), pp. 263–265.

³⁸⁷ A. Viguria, N. Casamitjana, "Early Interventions...", p. 3.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Council of Ministers, *Government Decrees State of Emergency to Stop Spread of Coronavirus COVID-19*, 14 March 2020, at <<https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/lang/en/gobierno/councilministers/Paginas/2020/20200314council-extr.aspx>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁹⁰ S. Jones, *Spain Orders Nationwide Lockdown to Battle Coronavirus*, 14 March 2020, at <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/14/spain-government-set-to-order-nationwide-coronavirus-lockdown>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁹¹ *Coronavirus: Spain Set to Declare National Lockdown*, BBC, 14 March 2020, at <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-51888936>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁹² *Coronavirus: Spanish Deaths Fall for Fourth Consecutive Day*, BBC, 6 April 2020, at <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52182245>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁹³ Eurosurveillance Team, "First Cases of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in France: Surveillance, Investigations and Control Measures, January 2020," *Euro Surveill*, vol. 25, 2020, p. 3.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ This religious gathering is organised every year in the Christian Open Door Church in Mulhouse, visited by almost 2000 pilgrims.

³⁹⁶ *Coronavirus: la «bombe atomique» du rassemblement évangélique de Mulhouse*, Le Point, 28 March 2020, at <https://www.lepoint.fr/sante/coronavirus-la-bombe-atomique-du-rassemblement-evangelique-de-mulhouse-28-03-2020-2369173_40.php>, 20 June 2021.

Milhouse's festivities was exposed to the virus.³⁹⁷ Interestingly, none other than the President of France Emmanuel Macron also participated in the event. On 2 March 2020, French health authorities officially linked the outbreak of the pandemic in France with that religious event.³⁹⁸ In March, local elections were held in France,³⁹⁹ even though at the same time the French government ordered its citizens to close bars, restaurants and businesses that were not essential. Predictably, the elections resulted in the increased number of cases⁴⁰⁰ and the lowest turnout in history.⁴⁰¹ On 11 March, an advisory commission of 11 scientists was appointed to develop a strategy of fighting the virus.⁴⁰² The following day, French president announced that schools and universities across the country were to be closed until further notice. On 13 March, Prime Minister of France Édouard Philippe announced the closure of pubs, restaurants and nightclubs. On 16 March, the French government decided to close the borders.⁴⁰³ On 17 March, the entire country was engulfed in lockdown,⁴⁰⁴ which meant that citizens were not allowed to go too far from home, except for work, or to the nearest grocery store and pharmacy.⁴⁰⁵ At the beginning, the lockdown was announced to last 15 days, but this period was quickly extended due to the increasing number of infections and deaths.⁴⁰⁶ It was not until 11 May when primary and secondary schools were allowed to open, which constituted a first step in reopening the economy in France.⁴⁰⁷

An equally important state that is worth mentioning in the context of first COVID-19 cases in Europe is the Federal Republic of Germany. The first case in Germany was discovered on 27 January 2020 in the state of Bavaria. In response

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ *France votes in nationwide municipal elections despite coronavirus lockdown*, France24, 15 March 2020, at <<https://www.france24.com/en/20200315-france-heads-to-the-polls-in-nationwide-municipal-elections-amid-coronavirus-pandemic>>, 20 June 2021.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ *French Voters Shun Elections, Enjoy Sunshine Despite Coronavirus Restrictions*, Reuters, 15 March 2020, at <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-france-elections-v-idUSKBN2121A9>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² *Germany Confirms Human Transmission of Coronavirus*, DW, 28 January 2020, at <<https://www.dw.com/en/germany-confirms-human-transmission-of-coronavirus/a-52169007>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴⁰³ *Macron Announces 15-day Lockdown in French 'War' on Coronavirus*, France24, 16 March 2020, at <<https://www.france24.com/en/20200316-live-france-s-macron-addresses-nation-amid-worsening-coronavirus-outbreak>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴⁰⁴ G. Pullano et al., *Population Mobility Reductions During COVID-19 Epidemic in France Under Lockdown*, Yale 2020, p. 2, at <<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.05.29.20097097v1.full.pdf>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴⁰⁵ J. Roux, C. Massonnaud, P. Crepey, *COVID-19: One-Month Impact of the French Lockdown on the Epidemic Burden*, Rennes 2020, p. 1, at <<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.04.22.20075705v1.full.pdf>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ *Macron Says France's Covid-19 Lockdown to Last Until May 11*, France24, 13 April 2020, at <<https://www.france24.com/en/20200413-live-france-s-macron-makes-third-primetime-tv-address-on-covid-19-crisis>>, 20 June 2021.

to the spread of the COVID-19, the Federal Ministry of Health prohibited people from crossing state borders, introduced tracking potentially infected people, and involved all doctors, health professionals and medical students in fighting the pandemic. On 4 March 2020, Germany issued an extensive version of a document titled the “National Pandemic Plan,”⁴⁰⁸ which set four objectives: reduction in morbidity and mortality, treatment of infected people, maintaining basic public services, and keeping decision makers, doctors, the media and the public informed on an ongoing basis.⁴⁰⁹ The National Pandemic Plan made sense in the successive waves of the pandemic, where decisions were made more quickly, and all phases of actions were not mixed together. On 1 March, it was announced that the vaccine would be developed by the end of the year, and the Minister of Finance declared that the bailout package was ready to mitigate any negative economic effects.⁴¹⁰ In the following days, Germany supplied itself with laboratory equipment for hospitals. Public events were cancelled and the first deaths related to the pandemic occurred at the beginning of March. The day after local elections were held, Bavaria declared a 14-day state of emergency and imposed a travel ban. On 16 March, the German government announced that there would not be any “shutdown” of the state,⁴¹¹ while in the following days Bavaria, inspired by Austria, announced a curfew and a lockdown for the entire state. On 22 March, the lockdown deepened throughout the country by banning gatherings of more than two people and introducing a safe distance of 1.5 meters. On 23 March, the government decided to implement a financial package worth 750 billion euro.⁴¹² Medical equipment, protective masks and a great number of tests were delivered. On 2 April, the Robert Koch Institute advised to impose the obligation to wear masks on all citizens, regardless of the presence of typical COVID-19 symptoms.⁴¹³ In the following days, German strategy was defined and since the middle of April restrictions have been progressively eased. Shops up to 800 square meters or bookstores were opened by the end April, followed by schools on 4 May. However, mass events remained banned until 31 August.⁴¹⁴

⁴⁰⁸ Robert Koch Institute, *Ergänzung zum Nationalen Pandemieplan – COVID-19 – neuartige Coronaviruserkrankung*, Berlin 2020.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴¹⁰ *Coronavirus Cases in Germany Jump to 117*, Reuters, 1 March 2020, at <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-germany-cases/coronavirus-cases-in-germany-jump-to-117-idUSKBN2001NG>>, 30 June 2021.

⁴¹¹ D. Rzepka, *Merkel: Supermärkte dürfen sonntags öffnen*, 16 March 2020, at <<https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/corona-merkel-geschaefte-schliessen-100.html>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴¹² M. Nienaber, *Germany Launches 750 Billion Euro Package to Fight Coronavirus*, 23 March 2020, at <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-germany-budget/germany-launches-750-billion-euro-package-to-fight-coronavirus-idUSKBN21A2XU>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴¹³ *‘They Could Reduce the Risk’: Germany’s Public Health Institute Updates Stance on Face Masks*, TheLocalDE, 2 April 2020, at <thelocal.de/20200402/latest-face-masks-in-public-could-help-to-reduce-spread-of-coronavirus-says-germanys-robert-koch-institute/>, 20 June 2021.

⁴¹⁴ P. Oltermann, *Merkel Announces Plans to Reopen Schools and Shops in Germany*, 15 April 2020, at <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/15/angela-merkel-announces-plans-reopen-schools-shops-germany-coronavirus-lockdown>>, 20 June 2021.

Similar to the above discussed cases, March 2020 turn out to be a key month in other Member States as well. Not only did most of European states faced their first COVID-19 cases at that time, but they also decided to impose lockdowns and close their borders. Beside the previously described, the earliest European cases were reported in Croatia, Greece, Romania, Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Portugal, and Poland. Initially, the pandemic seemed to develop quite gently in these countries, which might be explained by a small number of tests. Interestingly, smaller countries took coronavirus and its potentially tragic consequences much more seriously. For instance, in Greece the carnival week was cancelled just after two or three identified cases.⁴¹⁵ On 10 March, the Greek schools were closed for two weeks and football matches were played without audience. Similarly, on 11 March, Polish schools and universities were closed for two weeks.⁴¹⁶

At the beginning of the first wave in the EU, the pattern of national governments' activities was rather similar – it usually started with the closure of educational institutions, then the number of people allowed in public places was reduced, and later people were asked not to participate in mass events such as football matches and concerts. The Member States quickly learned from the mistakes of the Mediterranean countries that they cannot underestimate the spread of the virus. After 12 March, four countries (Slovakia, Denmark, Poland, and the Czech Republic) closed their borders. Moreover, the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Andrej Babiš, suggested that it would be worth banning the movement of Italian citizens within the Schengen area, but his request passed unnoticed.⁴¹⁷ The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, criticized the decision of closing borders, referring to the WHO which stated that the travel ban is an ineffective measure for spreading the transmission of the virus, and that the shutdown is dangerous for people who wish to return to their countries and are not able to do so immediately. However, just a few days later, she admitted that she had underestimated the virus and announced that the EU would strengthen the external borders by applying a temporary 30-day ban on trips to the EU that are not essential.

After closing the borders, introducing online teaching and banning mass gathering, most Member States decided on closing businesses and prohibiting travel, with a few exceptions. For example, in the Czech Republic, the lockdown was introduced only in the western part of the country, and citizens were allowed to move only to work or in case of emergency. Another example was Poland,

⁴¹⁵ *World Combats Virus Outbreak as Spread Continues*, BBC, 26 February 2020, at <<https://www.bbc.com/news/live/world-51655133/page/2>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴¹⁶ *Ministerstwo Nauki zawiesza zajęcia dydaktyczne na uczelniach do 25 marca, aby zapobiec rozprzestrzenianiu się COVID-19*, Polish Government Site, 13 March 2020, at <<https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/ministerstwo-nauki-zawiesza-zajecia-dydaktyczne-na-uczelniach-do-25-marca-aby-zapobiec-rozprzestrzenianiu-sie-covid-19>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴¹⁷ *Czech PM: Italians Should Be Banned From Travelling Due to Coronavirus*, Schengen Visa Info, 9 March 2020, at <<https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/czech-pm-italians-should-be-banned-from-travelling-due-to-coronavirus/>>, 20 June 2021.

where on 24 March new restrictions were generally imposed.⁴¹⁸ Additionally, special rules for seniors were introduced in Poland, such as, a time of the day during which older citizens could safely do their shopping without the risk of contracting the virus from younger people in stores.⁴¹⁹ The Czech Republic was the first country in the EU that ordered its citizens to wear masks, which were obligatory from 18 March 2020.⁴²⁰

Although most Member States followed a certain pattern of imposing restrictions, there was one country which created its own model to survive the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. As one may guess that state was the Kingdom of Sweden. The whole Swedish strategy was based only on isolating infected people from society without any obligatory restrictions for the rest of the society. The local businesses were not prohibited to operate.⁴²¹ The cost of that strategy was the overloading of the health system. Even though the Swedish Ministry of Health decided to introduce some restrictions, they were not obligatory.⁴²² The Swedish authorities simply assumed that their citizens would follow the restrictions voluntarily, because they could observe severe effects of the virus in other Member States. The Swedish Public Health Agency is an institution that has largely contributed to the great explosion of the virus cases in society, and the authorities themselves have been criticized numerous times by Swedish and foreign scientists demanding radical measures to counter the virus.⁴²³ In opposition to the Swedish government's hopes, the citizens did not follow the official recommendations. Criticism fell on the decision of the Swedish authorities for not implementing any major restrictions. A group of 22 researchers⁴²⁴ (Vetenskapsforum) was formed to criticize the government's actions on an ongoing basis and demanded more decisive action. According to researchers, the Swedish model was incapable of fighting the pandemic as many more people contracted the virus and died from COVID-19.⁴²⁵

⁴¹⁸ *Wprowadzamy nowe zasady bezpieczeństwa w związku z koronawirusem*, Polish Government Site, 24 March 2020, at <<https://www.gov.pl/web/koronawirus/wprowadzamy-nowe-zasady-bezpieczenstwa-w-zwiazku-z-koronawirusem>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁰ *Coronavirus: How the Wearing of Face Masks Has Exposed a Divided Europe*, Euronews, 15 July 2020, at <<https://www.euronews.com/2020/07/14/coronavirus-how-the-wearing-of-face-masks-has-exposed-a-divided-europe>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴²¹ E. Reynolds, *Sweden Says its Coronavirus Approach Has Worked. The Numbers Suggest a Different Story*, 28 April 2020, at <<https://amp.cnn.com/cnn/2020/04/28/europe/sweden-coronavirus-lockdown-strategy-intl/index.html>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴²² M. Lindström, "The New Totalitarians: The Swedish COVID-19 Strategy and the Implications of Consensus Culture and Media Policy for Public Health," *SSM – Population Health*, no. 14 (2021), pp. 1–2.

⁴²³ Library of Congress Law, *Sweden: Legal Responses to Health Emergencies*, The Law Library of Congress. Washington 2015, pp. 211–220, at <<https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/l1/llglrd/2014504236/2014504236.pdf>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴²⁴ The group increased to 150 researchers.

⁴²⁵ J.F. Ludvigsson, "The First Eight Months of Sweden's COVID-19 Strategy and The Key Actions and Actors That Were Involved," *Acta Paediatrica*, vol. 109, no. 12 (2020), p. 2470.

A relative stabilization began in Europe around the second week of April 2020. The European leaders noticed that some of the introduced restrictions paid off, and they wrongly assumed the worst was over. Austria was the first Member State which opened up on a large scale. It was also one of the first European countries which announced a significant policy of opening its economy.⁴²⁶ According to a report made by a team from the Global Policy Lab at UC Berkeley, the decisions implemented by the governments of most Member States to introduce restrictive measurements saved about 500 million people around the world from becoming infected.⁴²⁷ Between May and July, it was decided (on a national level) to open up most European countries also for non-European citizens travelling from the countries with stabilised COVID-19 situation. On 30 June, the EU decided to open its borders to 14 countries.⁴²⁸ Unfortunately, the favourable situation after overcoming the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe did not last long. Moreover, the loosening up of some preventive measures eventually contributed to the imminent collapse of the system in many Member States. This paradox has a sound psychological explanation – when people noticed that the situation was improving, they assumed that they had successfully beaten the virus and could now return to pre-COVID normality.⁴²⁹ A great number of European governments began to downplay the virus – its contagiousness and mortality rates. This dismissive approach brought on tragic consequences. One of the most noticeable example of such a reckless approach during summer 2020 was Poland. In June and July 2020, two rounds of previously postponed presidential election were held⁴³⁰ respectively. Polish Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, publicly encouraged Polish citizens, especially the elderly, to turn out in masses to vote for President Andrzej Duda (who is commonly known as a supporter of Morawiecki's party) who was fighting for re-election. Specifically, on 1 July 2020 Morawiecki stated that “We are less and less afraid of this virus. This is a good approach, because (the epidemic) is in retreat. You do not need to be afraid of it now. You should go

⁴²⁶ European Parliament, *The Enlargement of the EU*, p. 62, at <<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/167/the-enlargement-of-the-union>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴²⁷ *Emergency COVID-19 Measures Prevented More than 500 Million Infections, Study Finds*, Berkeley News, 8 June 2020, at <<https://news.berkeley.edu/2020/06/08/emergency-covid-19-measures-prevented-more-than-500-million-infections-study-finds/>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴²⁸ Council of the EU, *Council Agrees to Start Lifting Travel Restrictions for Residents of Some Third Countries*, 30 June 2020, at <<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/06/30/council-agrees-to-start-lifting-travel-restrictions-for-residents-of-some-third-countries/>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴²⁹ S. Messenger Cayetano, L. Crandall, “Paradox of Success and Public Perspective: COVID-19 and the Perennial Problem of Prevention,” *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, vol. 74 (2020), at <<https://jech.bmj.com/content/74/8/679>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴³⁰ Polish presidential election are held each five years and usually two round are needed to determine the winner. As regard Polish presidential elections in 2020, the original date of the first round, 10 May 2020, was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland. On 3 June 2020, the Marshal of the Sejm, Elżbieta Witek, announced that the first round of the election would be held on 28 June 2020, whereas the second round was scheduled on 12 July 2020.

vote ‘in crowds’ on 12 July... Everyone, especially seniors, do not be afraid. Let’s go vote.”⁴³¹ Just two months later the number of the COVID-19 cases started to dramatically increase in Poland. In September, the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic began in Poland. Even though the country succeeded in keeping infections low during the first phase of the coronavirus pandemic, the second wave hit the country hard with its COVID-19 death rate among the highest in the EU at that time.⁴³² In fact, according to Eurostat, Poland recorded the highest rate of excess deaths among all EU Member States in 2020.⁴³³

Another example of a Member State which struggled with the sudden increase of daily COVID-19 cases in summer was Czech Republic. There were two main reasons for this rapid growth. First one was related to the infection of miners in the Karvina area, where about 20% of workers suffered from COVID-19 and spread the virus in their homes and neighbourhoods.⁴³⁴ The second source of spreading the virus were clubs, popular among many young Czechs.⁴³⁵ These two cases prove that the transmission of the virus was still high, and the threat was still real in the EU.

Although there is no single common date of the beginning of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in the EU, as it differs between the Member States, there are no doubts that in August 2020 the virus was winning again. During that time, Spain was the Member State which struggled the most in the EU. On 19 August, it recorded 145 cases per 100,000 inhabitants, which was about three times more than in France.⁴³⁶ At the end of August, many other Member States, such as Greece, Ireland, Germany, Italy and Belgium, began to struggle with the rapidly growing number of infected people per day. This resulted in tightening restrictions and introducing new restrictive measures in many Member States. Face masks were obligatory, many businesses had to shut down, and the limits of people in public places were reintroduced. The second wave of the pandemic in the EU was becoming a reality at the beginning of Autumn 2020. September became as important in the second wave, as March was one in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe. During that month new records of infections

⁴³¹ ‘We No Longer Need Fear Coronavirus’: PM Encourages Elderly to Vote in Polish Presidential Election, Notes from Poland, 1 July 2020, at <<https://notesfrompoland.com/2020/07/01/poles-no-longer-need-fear-coronavirus-pm-encourages-elderly-to-vote-in-presidential-election/>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴³² *Where Did it Go Wrong for Poland’s Pandemic Response?*, Notes from Poland, 11 February 2020, at <<https://notesfrompoland.com/2020/11/02/where-did-it-go-wrong-for-polands-pandemic-response/>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴³³ Eurostat, *Deaths (Total) by Month*, at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/demo_mmonth/default/table?lang=en>, 20 June 2021.

⁴³⁴ European Trade Union Institute, *Covid-19 Rising Cases in Czech Mines*, 19 June, 2020 at <<https://www.etui.org/news/covid-19-rising-cases-czech-mines>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴³⁵ *Number of Coronavirus Cases Linked to Prague Nightclub Rises to 98*, The Guardian, 23 July 2020, at <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/23/coronavirus-cases-linked-to-prague-nightclub-98-outbreak-football-czech-republic>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

were recorded in many Member States. Notably, in France, this number exceeded 10,000 within just 24 hours.⁴³⁷

In March 2021, the third wave of the pandemic began. The number of infections, hospitalizations and deaths increased. In France, decisions were made immediately to block the country and to implement a curfew. Growth was recorded in many countries – in Belgium by 95%, in the Netherlands by 48% and in Germany by 75%. The third wave in Poland was by far the worst as the health care system was burdened the most. The third wave lasted about two weeks, was the shortest wave so far, but at the same time the most dynamic one. However, the Member States themselves have expressed quite responsible behaviour. The restrictions were quite radical, but most importantly – they were effective. The most crucial, however, are vaccinations. They can replace social distancing and increased restrictions when the number of new cases is growing.

During the first three waves of the COVID-19 pandemic in the EU, it was necessary to develop initiatives and mechanisms that would strengthen a cooperation between the Member States and protect European citizens. Initiatives came not only from the EU itself, but also from individual Member States. Some of the mechanisms had been developed much earlier and were used for the first time during the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, several Member States showed an impressive level of solidarity and cooperation, however, a few egoistic and non-cooperative actions of some Member States were also noticed. Let us explore the most significant of them.

The EU Civil Protection Mechanism, which was established in October 2001 by the European Commission, aims to strengthen cooperation between the Member States and six Participating States (Iceland, Norway, Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Turkey) on civil protection to improve prevention, preparedness and response to disasters.⁴³⁸ Through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, the European Commission has coordinated and co-financed the supply of 15 million different medical supplies to 30 countries in Europe. Examples of cooperation included deployment of teams of doctors and nurses from Romania and Norway to Italy in March, further delivery by Norway of 4 million surgical gloves in October/November, shipment of 50 respirators to Ukraine from Denmark, and shipment of gloves, blankets and disinfectants to Moldova from Austria and Poland.⁴³⁹

The recently introduced additional component of the Mechanism is popularly known as the “rescEU” which stands for a European reserve of additional capacities. It consists of a fleet of firefighting planes and helicopters, medical evacua-

⁴³⁷ *France Reports Highest Number of New COVID-19 Cases in a Day*, Reuters, 17 September 2020, at <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-france-casualties-idUKKBN2682VD>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴³⁸ European Commission, *EU Civil Protection Mechanism*, at <https://ec.europa.eu/echo/what/civil-protection/mechanism_en>, 20 June 2021.

⁴³⁹ European Commission, *Crisis Management and Solidarity*, at <https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/crisis-management-and-solidarity_en>, 20 June 2021.

tion planes, and stocks of medical equipment.⁴⁴⁰ The purpose of this institution is to respond to emergency health cases as well as to potential biological and nuclear incidents that can occur on the European continent.⁴⁴¹ In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, European Commission sent 3.5 million masks with other necessary equipment to the countries that were particularly in need of it under the rescEU mechanism. The first Member States where rescEU stockpiles were located were Germany and Romania. Since September, stocks have also been stored in Denmark, Greece, Hungary and Sweden. Since January 2021 they have been also placed in Belgium, the Netherlands and Slovenia. The inventory includes 65 million face masks and 15 million FFP2 and FFP3 masks, 280 million pairs of medical gloves, several thousand oxygen concentrators and respirators. Over a million protective masks from the medical reserve have been distributed by rescEU. The masks were distributed to Italy (142,000), Spain (173,000), Croatia (65,000), Lithuania (20,000), Montenegro (140,000), and to some non-EU countries, such as North Macedonia and Serbia. The rescEU reserves are constantly replenished and deliveries take place on a regular basis depending on the needs of the Member States.

Under the “Europeans versus COVID-19” initiative, the Council of the EU honoured those Europeans who, in solidarity, were helping other citizens to get through the COVID-19 crisis by continuing their work, helping those in need, keeping Europe going and paving the way to recovery. The purpose of such a remembrance of many citizens of the EU Member States is to honour them by reporting on their activities in helping others and acting in a spirit of solidarity.⁴⁴² Several citizens’ outstanding actions were presented on the Council’s webpage,⁴⁴³ and national campaigns for bringing citizens home were praised as well.⁴⁴⁴ The goal of such a heart-warming tribute was to create bonds between the European citizens.

The national campaigns for bringing citizens home are also admirable. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Member States managed to bring 600,000 of their citizens home.⁴⁴⁵ Such a huge number of passengers and tremendous effort in organising flights required a lot of cooperation from the Member States, whose embassies aided every EU citizen regardless of their country of origin. The whole action was financially supported by the EU. Overall, return flights were co-financed by the EU up to 75% of the fare, which was an enormous help for many European citizens who could come back home safely.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ J. Almodóvar Aráez, *RescEU: A new development for the UCPM*, at <<https://www.ironore.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/RescEU-for-IRONORE-2020.pdf>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴⁴² European Council, *Europeans versus COVID-19*, 9 March 2021, at <<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/events/europeans-versus-covid-19/>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

Apart from the above presented individual examples of European solidarity in micro scale, numerous examples on a macro scale between Member States could be noticed during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many Member States sent medical personnel and medical equipment to those Member States that struggled the most with the health crisis and the ensuing collapse of their national health care.⁴⁴⁶ For instance, medical teams from Germany, Poland and Romania were sent to help in hospitals in the north and south of Italy at the beginning of the pandemic.⁴⁴⁷ Moreover, Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany made their hospital rooms in intensive care units available to patients in serious condition who were citizens of other Member States, such as France, the Netherlands and Italy.⁴⁴⁸ Another act of solidarity in the treatment of patients was performed by Germany and Luxembourg – both countries provided air ambulance teams, pilots and personnel to help treat and rescue patients from countries such as Italy, France and Netherlands in March.⁴⁴⁹ Other actions of solidarity between the Member States that are worth mentioning include supplying respirators (e.g. from Austria to the Czech Republic), medical masks (e.g. from Austria to Italy), sharing protective suits (e.g. the Czech Republic with Italy and Spain), creating helmets in 3D technology (the idea was first conceived by the Czech Technical University in Prague and shared with other companies all over Europe), wholesale shipping of various equipment (e.g. Italy received one million masks, 20,000 protective suits and 2,400 specialized medical clothing from France, and around 5 tons of equipment from Germany) and shipping other useful items, such as bottles of disinfectant.⁴⁵⁰ Furthermore, the European Commission delivered 10 million protective masks to several Member States and the United Kingdom.⁴⁵¹ They were the first batch purchased with the Emergency Support Facility money and were delivered in weekly instalments of 1.5 million units between May and June 2020.⁴⁵² Prior to this initiative, around 330,000 masks had been distributed by the EU to the Mediterranean countries of the EU, including Spain, Italy and Croatia.

The above-described examples illustrate an impressive degree of mutual support and solidarity between the Member States during this unprecedented and severe crisis. With a perspective of assisting the Member States, the EU created online platforms and tools dedicated to enhancing cooperation on many levels.⁴⁵³ Generally, they helped reduce the stagnation of health services, and fill in staff

⁴⁴⁶ European Council, *Europeans versus...*

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Such as a European Solidarity Tracker, EUvsDisinfo.

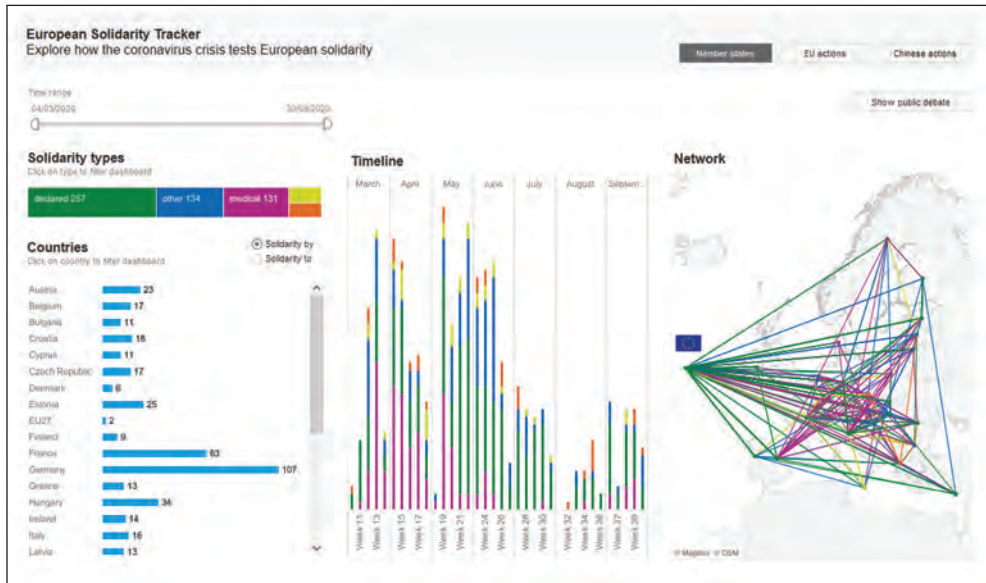


Figure 2. European Solidarity Tracker, source: <https://ecfr.eu/special/solidaritytracker>

or equipment gaps in the Member States.⁴⁵⁴ One of such tools is the European Solidarity Tracker (hereinafter: the tracker), which was created under Rethink: Europe project by scientists affiliated to the European Council on Foreign Relations.⁴⁵⁵ Rethink: Europe is an initiative launched in 2015, aimed to craft policy strategies based on open data sources, government statistics, dialogue, and experts' recommendation.⁴⁵⁶ The European Solidarity Tracker analyses cohesion and cooperation in the EU by collecting and examining national open data sources. It helps to assess effectiveness of communication and level of solidarity of the Member States during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁵⁷ After analysing activities of the Member States from March to September 2020, it removed duplicates of information through deep and careful selection and provided high quality information to both the EU and its Member States.⁴⁵⁸ It successfully created a very dense network of aid between the Member States, which helped in indicating a space for the supportive role of the EU. The tracker proved that the claims of the irrelevance of actions taken by the EU had no solid grounds.⁴⁵⁹ However, the European

⁴⁵⁴ European Council, *Europeans versus...*

⁴⁵⁵ C. Busse et al., *European Solidarity Tracker*, European Council on Foreign Relations, 11 June 2020, at <<https://ecfr.eu/special/solidaritytracker/>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴⁵⁶ European Council on Foreign Relations, *Rethink: Europe*, 8 July 2020, at <<https://ecfr.eu/europeanpower/rethink/>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴⁵⁷ European Council on Foreign Relations, *European Solidarity Tracker: The Solidarity That Always Was There*, 10 June 2020, at <https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_european_solidarity_tracker_the_solidarity_that_always_was_there/>, 20 June 2021.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

Commission reminded France and other Member States that, for example, restrictions on the export and supply of drugs could hinder any overall European response. One particularly interesting finding from this tool is that smaller Member States appeared less frequently in articles and other published works on sending aid to other countries, whereas in fact examples of their help were numerous.⁴⁶⁰ For example, Luxembourg welcomed unaccompanied children who were located in refugee camps in Greece when the virus hit them.⁴⁶¹ Further, Estonia and Lithuania sent protective equipment and high quantities of disinfectant to Spain and Italy along with other valuable equipment for the local health service.⁴⁶² Another fascinating and somewhat peculiar case was that of Portugal, which sent language teachers to primary schools in Luxembourg.⁴⁶³ Thus, the tracker demonstrated that the mutual support between the Member States was not only of financial, but also of spiritual nature.

3. European Union versus Disinformation

The European Digital Media Observatory (hereinafter: EDMO) is one of the projects established in order to strengthen cooperation between the Member States in the area of combating disinformation. EDMO is managed by the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. EDMO is basically a platform for fact-checkers, academics and other relevant stakeholders, which contributes to mapping and supporting fact-checking organisations in Europe, coordinating research activities on disinformation at the European level, and raising awareness through a safe, public platform.⁴⁶⁴ In the first phase, EDMO will implement a platform to support the work of a community of fact-checkers, academic researchers and other stakeholders with expertise in the field of online disinformation. EDMO will contribute to a deeper understanding of the relevant actors of disinformation, vectors, tools, methods, dissemination dynamics, priority targets and impact on society.⁴⁶⁵ The second phase of the project will aim to establish both national and regional media research centres. EDMO developed training courses for people who check information and verify facts about the virus itself, its transmission and vaccines.⁴⁶⁶ EDMO also designs courses where one can learn how to identify false information – especially during a pandemic.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ European Commission, *European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)*, at <<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/european-digital-media-observatory>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ EDMO, *EDMO News*, at <<https://edmo.eu/news/>>, 20 June 2021.

To counter disinformation, the EU has also funded the East StratCom Task Force, which was established in 2015 as part of the Strategic Communication and Information Analysis Unit of the European External Action Service. The main three goals set by the task force are to introduce effective communication and promotion of the EU policies in the Eastern Neighbourhood, strengthen relations with the Eastern Neighbourhood in the field of media and supporting independent opinion in that region, and to combat disinformation which is carried out by external entities.⁴⁶⁸ According to EUvsDisinfo, which is the main project of the East StratCom Task Force, disinformation is a:

verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm. Public harm includes threats to democratic processes as well as to public goods such as Union citizens' health, environment or security. Disinformation does not include inadvertent errors, satire and parody, or clearly identified partisan news and commentary.⁴⁶⁹

The main goal of EUvsDisinfo is to increase public awareness and understanding of the Kremlin's disinformation activities to help citizens in Europe and beyond to develop resilience to digital information and media manipulation. EUvsDisinfo identifies, processes and reveals cases of disinformation from pro-Kremlin media that are scattered throughout the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries. Cases are collected in the EUvsDisinfo database, which now contains over 6,500 samples of pro-Kremlin disinformation. The database is updated weekly with a short trend summary.

Infodemia is a relatively new word which was created to describe a phenomenon such as:

an overabundance of information, both online and offline. It includes deliberate attempts to disseminate wrong information to undermine the public health response and advance alternative agendas of groups or individuals. Mis- and disinformation can be harmful to people's physical and mental health; increase stigmatization; threaten precious health gains; and lead to poor observance of public health measures, thus reducing their effectiveness and endangering countries' ability to stop the pandemic.⁴⁷⁰

During the World Health Assembly in May 2020, WHO member states implemented Resolution WHA73.1 which states that information management is a key element in controlling the COVID-19 pandemic. It called on the Member States to provide reliable content on COVID-19, to take measures to counter disinformation and to use digital technologies in response to fake news. The resolution

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ European Commission, *Tackling Online Disinformation*, at <<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/online-disinformation>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴⁷⁰ World Health Organization, *COVID-19 Response*, at <https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdffiles/WHA73/A73_R1-en.pdf>, 20 June 2021.

also called on international organizations to tackle misinformation in the digital sphere, work to prevent harmful cyber activities that undermine the health response and support the provision of scientific data to the public.⁴⁷¹ According to the Communication to the European Parliament made by European Council, infodemia is believed to exacerbate people's fears. Isolation measures forced millions of people to stay at home, and this resulted in a heavy usage of social media, which were bombarded with millions of false or misleading posts at the time of pandemic.⁴⁷² According to the Action Plan to Combat Disinformation, the problem requires more coordinated actions to counter threats to open societies. Anyone with access to the Internet is exposed to this problem, particularly intense during the unsettling time of this unprecedented pandemic.⁴⁷³

On 10 June 2020, joint communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions was implemented in order to address a burning problem of the rapid spread of fake news during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁷⁴ The key message from this document, titled "Tackling COVID-19 disinformation – Getting the facts right,"⁴⁷⁵ explains how detrimental infodemia's spread was during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU suggests that the media, journalists, and competent state authorities should take action to refute harmful theories, for example in a form of closing accounts or legal sanctions against their owners.⁴⁷⁶ The challenges indicated in the communication include false information that circulated in social media regarding the work of medical personnel, blaming ethnic groups for the outbreak of the global epidemic, and cybercrimes. The People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation were identified as the countries particularly active in flooding the European society with false information.⁴⁷⁷ The goals of the EU in regards to combating disinformation include strengthening strategic communication in the EU and beyond,⁴⁷⁸ improving cooperation within the organization,⁴⁷⁹ as well as with third countries and partners of the EU (cooperation with WHO, UN, G7 or NATO),⁴⁸⁰ introducing more transparency on online platforms and tasking them with counteracting disinformation,⁴⁸¹ ensuring free-

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² European Council, *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Tackling COVID-19 disinformation – Getting the Facts Right*, Brussels 2020, at <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020JC0008>>, 20 June 2021.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 2–4.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 5–6.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 7–9.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 9–14.

dom of expression and pluralistic democratic debate,⁴⁸² and strengthening public awareness through the opinions of scientists and verified information, protection of public health and consumer rights.⁴⁸³

At this point, it is worth quoting the Bronisław Geremek Foundation's report which examined the image of the EU in Poland during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁸⁴ It identified some of the most popular trends in the spreading of disinformation about the actions taken by the EU. The main findings of the report were that the overall image of the EU during the pandemic is negative, that the debate about the EU and the coronavirus in social media is largely shaped by politicians who deliberately exaggerate EU's failures and diminish its achievements, and that the pandemic situation is used by political actors for political purposes (that is, putting the blame on the EU to avoid public outrage at national politics, running a presidential campaign, image-building).⁴⁸⁵ In general, it can be concluded that online debate on the EU actions is controlled to some extent by bot or troll accounts and by vast manipulative and misinformative content in the web. The number of mentions of the Union grew along with the increase of infections in Europe, and the slogan "Where is the EU?" became particularly popular in March 2020. The main messages were that the EU is weak, incompetent and useless; that the organisation is downplaying the pandemic; and that the EU's action were taken too late. To combat the spread of such misinformation, the European Commission introduced in March 2020 a storehouse of strategic materials and called upon online platforms to help prevent flooding the net with misleading information.

A European Parliament's study on disinformation and propaganda found that some of the Kremlin's disinformation efforts are targeting disadvantaged communities abroad in order to "feed on frustration".⁴⁸⁶ The research shows that the economic crisis and the resulting social inequalities and frustration have the potential to fuel violent extremism and terrorism; however, such a correlation requires further study and analysis. One of the goals of the Russian hybrid warfare strategy is to provoke riots and mass protests abroad. Russia is believed to support and finance, directly or indirectly, competing foreign groups of countries.⁴⁸⁷ The first disinformation about the coronavirus that the EUvsDisinfo recorded appeared on 22 January 2020 on the Kremlin-funded Sputnik News website. In March 2020, the methods and techniques of spreading fake news, as in the case of Brexit, were

⁴⁸² Ibid., pp. 15–16.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., pp. 16–19.

⁴⁸⁴ Bronisław Geremek Foundation, *Raport „Obraz Unii Europejskiej w trakcie pierwszych miesięcy pandemii COVID-19,”* March 2020, p. 1.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁸⁶ European Parliament, *Disinformation and Propaganda – Impact on the Functioning of the Rule of Law in the EU and its Member States*, Brussels 2019.

⁴⁸⁷ W.R. Moy, K. Gradon, "COVID-19 Effects and Russian Disinformation Campaigns," *Homeland Security Affairs – Special Covid Issue*, 2020, p. 7, at <https://www.uw.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/hsaj_covid192020_covid19effectsrussiandisinformationcampaigns.pdf>, 20 June 2021.

re-adapted only to lower trust in the institution.⁴⁸⁸ Russian disinformation consisted of throwing claims that the virus is a hoax and that the EU states exaggerate its threat. Conspiracy theories about the ineffectiveness and harmfulness of vaccines, as well as false claims that mass vaccination and implantation of nano-processors were used for social control, have been disseminated through local branches of Sputnik, RT and South Front.⁴⁸⁹ Following China, Russia also sent medical supplies and teams to Italy in March as a part of the “From Russia with Love” mission. Interestingly, both the Italian populist Five Star Movement and the far-right Alternative for Germany party tried to take credit for allowing Russian aid. This “humanitarian” mission was later used for propaganda and disinformation campaigns against the EU. A report released by the U.S. Department of State in August 2020 indicated that senior Moscow military intelligence officers were involved in spreading disinformation about the pandemic through English-language proxy sites (such as South Front, Global Research, and New Eastern Outlook) in order to reach audiences in the US and the EU.⁴⁹⁰

Last but not the least, it is worth to examine Eurobarometer reports on how the EU citizens perceive the actions of the organization. Two reports particularly interesting in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic were issued in June 2020⁴⁹¹ and in spring 2021.⁴⁹²

The first report shows that 34% of respondents are satisfied with solidarity of the Member States and the actions between them.⁴⁹³ The respondents from Ireland, Denmark and the Netherlands were the most satisfied ones, whereas those from Greece, Spain and Italy – the least satisfied.⁴⁹⁴ About three-quarters of respondents (74%) declared they have heard, seen or read about measures or actions initiated by the EU in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Overall, about two out of five respondents (42%) said that they were satisfied with the measures taken by the EU to fight against the coronavirus pandemic; including 5% very satisfied and 37% fairly satisfied. The most satisfied countries were Ireland, the Netherlands and Denmark respectively, and the least satisfied were Greece, Spain and Italy.⁴⁹⁵ One important question that was asked was whether “The EU should have more competences to deal with crises such as the coronavirus pandemic,” and 67% of respondents gave positive answers.⁴⁹⁶ The most positive answers were

⁴⁸⁸ Y. Brovdiy, “Disinformation in Times of COVID-19: Reinforcing the Responses of the European Union and the United States,” *CEBOP*, no. 5 (2020), p. 1.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹¹ European Parliament, *Uncertainty/EU/Hope, Public opinion in times of COVID-19*, Brussels 2020.

⁴⁹² European Parliament, “Resilience and Recovery. Public Opinion One Year into Pandemic,” *Eurobarometer*, vol. 95, no. 1 (2021).

⁴⁹³ European Parliament, *Uncertainty/EU/Hope...*, pp. 21–22.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 27–28.

⁴⁹⁶ European Parliament, *Uncertainty/EU/Hope...*, pp. 30–31.

in Portugal, Ireland and Romania, and the most negative ones in Croatia, Sweden and the Czech Republic.⁴⁹⁷

In the report issued in spring 2021, almost half of respondents have heard, seen or read about EU measures/actions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and know what those measures are.⁴⁹⁸ The respondents in Slovenia, Germany and Finland know the most, and the least is known in Poland, France and Denmark.⁴⁹⁹ Almost half of the respondents (48%) are very satisfied or rather satisfied with what the EU is doing to combat the pandemic.⁵⁰⁰ Most EU citizens have a positive image of the EU.⁵⁰¹ Despite a slight decline since December 2020, the positive image of the EU remains at its highest level in more than a decade. Across all Member States, the vast majority of respondents agree to some extent that the EU should be more competent to deal with crises similar to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵⁰²

The most admirable fact is that the EU, after a year of fighting the virus, has received a better recognition and admiration for its action among the EU citizens. More citizens wish that the EU received more competences, which may come from their fear of another crisis and the understanding that certain national mechanisms simply do not work. This means that actions of the EU are generally viewed as effective and the fight against fake news (which at first was not very successful) eventually resulted in rebuilding a trust among citizens.

4. Distribution of Vaccines in the EU and Vaccination Certificates

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, one particular question has been discussed and debated on relentlessly. Everybody has been wondering whether medicine and unified society will be enough to win over the coronavirus. For many, the most promising tool to win this difficult and bloody battle is vaccination and achieving herd immunity. However, there is a group of people who view vaccines as tools to enslave society. The opinion of both the EU's institutions and the Member States was clear from the beginning – that Europe's best hopes and efforts are in quick and effective vaccination.

On 17 June 2020, the European Commission approved the EU Strategy for vaccines against COVID- 19,⁵⁰³ with the hope that vaccination would help the

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ European Parliament, "Resilience and Recovery...", p. 8.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 10.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., p. 11.

⁵⁰² Ibid., pp. 12–13.

⁵⁰³ European Commission, *Coronavirus: Commission Unveils EU Vaccines Strategy*, 17 June 2020, at <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1103>, 20 June 2021.

Member States return to the pre-COVID normality. To understand how important this goal is for the EU, it is worth citing a part of Ursula van der Leyen's speech given on 16 March 2020, in which she said:

This is a moment for science and solidarity. Nothing is certain, but I am confident that we can mobilise the resources to find a vaccine to beat this virus once and for all. We must be ready to manufacture and deploy such a vaccine across Europe and the world. This vaccine will be a breakthrough in the fight against the coronavirus, and a testament to what partners can achieve when we put our minds, research and resources together. The EU will do all in its power to ensure that all peoples of this world have access to a vaccine, irrespective of where they live.⁵⁰⁴

The same message was heard from Stella Kyriakides, who holds the position of Commissioner for Health and Food Safety.⁵⁰⁵ The EU's strategy predicts that the process of creating a vaccine will last from 12 to 18 months and that depending on the producers of vaccines, it may be either delayed or completed much faster.⁵⁰⁶ The strategy also indicated that the EU takes responsibility for testing, treatment and vaccination in a spirit of solidarity and willingness to return to normality.⁵⁰⁷ Noteworthy, solidarity constituted the main theme of this document.⁵⁰⁸ Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz harshly criticized the EU's COVID vaccine distribution system among the Member States for to the lack of transparency or accountability, and comparing it to a "bazaar" operating upon agreements between pharmaceutical companies and certain Member States. A few days later, on March 16, Kurz and the leaders of Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Latvia and Slovenia wrote to the President of the European Commission to complain that the vaccine supplies "are not being delivered on an equal footing according to a population-proportional key" and that if the current system continues, it will exacerbate the "huge disparities" that already exist between the Member States. They called for a solution to the problem to be considered at an upcoming EU Council meeting and to adopt a "correction mechanism".⁵⁰⁹ Their voice was heard and the vaccination rollout mechanism was improved in the following weeks.

A common strategy for vaccination gives the Member States a better security and higher chances to make an investment with more certain and satisfying

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council and the European Investment Bank – EU Strategy for COVID-19 Vaccines*, Brussels 2020, p. 1, at <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0245>>, 20 June 2021.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 1–2.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.,

⁵⁰⁹ *EU Counters 'Vaccine Nationalism' With 'Vaccine Solidarity' for Hard-hit Eastern States*, Yale Macmillan Center, 5 April 2021, at <<https://macmillan.yale.edu/news/eu-counters-vaccine-nationalism-vaccine-solidarity-hard-hit-eastern-states>>, 20 June 2021.

results. It also makes transactions simpler, more transparent and at reduced cost for all. It is also faster in its efficiency because if one entity comes out with a procurement initiative, the company does not have to negotiate with 27 different entities.⁵¹⁰ Consequently, such a solution was presented as a tool, which would prevent harmful competition between the Member States and strengthen solidarity between them. However, despite these obvious benefits, a group of Member States decided to act on their own. France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands decided to create an inclusive vaccine alliance.⁵¹¹ It was created to pool these countries' national resources and secure fair access to a supply of vaccines available to the people of Europe. This clearly set a very dangerous precedent in context of the strength of European integration.

The purchase of vaccines is funded from the EU's Emergency Support Fund. According to the communication from the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council made 2.7 billion euro available for that purpose.⁵¹² Acknowledging that quick and effective vaccination is the main priority, the Commission intended to allocate most of the funds to actions aimed at developing an effective vaccine in the shortest time possible. On 9 April 2020, the European Medicines Agency set up an EMA Pandemic task Force (ETF) to cooperate with companies developing vaccines against COVID-19.⁵¹³ The EMA itself also offered scientific support in the early stages of development by providing scientific advice and feedback to help vaccine manufacturers increase efficiency.⁵¹⁴ All these activities were intended to facilitate the evaluation of the manufacturers' activities and to accelerate development, efficiency, issuing marketing authorizations, and determining whether the vaccines are safe for European citizens. By the end of June, around 16 billion euro was collected for the fight against COVID-19 and the creation of a vaccine.⁵¹⁵ On 27 June 2020, additional funds were donated in the amount of 6.9 billion euro. The funding was mobilized as a part of the Global Purpose: United for the Future campaign. That huge amount was collected by Global Citizens, the European Commission, world leaders and artists.⁵¹⁶ On 31 August,

⁵¹⁰ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission...*, p. 4.

⁵¹¹ On 13 June 2020, these countries signed a contract with Astra Zeneca for 300 million doses by the end of the year. Ursula von der Leyen argued that both the common good and the interests of individual countries would be best served by strengthening the Commission's position in this matter. Ultimately, the Alliance withdrew, allowing the European Commission to take over negotiations with pharmaceutical companies.

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ EMA, *EMA Establishes Task Force to Take Quick and Coordinated Regulatory Action Related to COVID-19 Medicines*, 9 April 2021, at <<https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news/ema-establishes-task-force-take-quick-coordinated-regulatory-action-related-covid-19-medicines>>, 20 June 2021.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ *Global Goal: Unite for Our Future | The Concert*, An official website of European Union, at <https://global-response.europa.eu/index_en>, 20 June 2021.

⁵¹⁶ Global Citizen, *Global Citizen Mobilized Over \$1.5B in Cash Grants and \$5.4B in Loans and Guarantees for a Total of \$6.9B Pledged for COVID-19 Relief*, 27 June 2020, at <<https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/global-goal-unite-for-our-future-impact-report/>>, 20 June 2021.

the EU confirmed its decision to join the COVAX program.⁵¹⁷ The main goal of this initiative was to provide vaccines at appropriate, fair prices and to make them available even in the poorest parts of the world.⁵¹⁸ The “Team Europe”⁵¹⁹ was very active in COVAX and shared its expertise in production of the vaccines.

At the end of July, the European Commission ordered overall 300 million doses of the vaccine on behalf of the Member States. The first pharmaceutical company that the EU reached out to was Sanofi-GSK. To date, there is no such vaccine in circulation, but it was the first company with which the EU signed a preliminary contract.⁵²⁰ However, this was a sign that pharmaceutical companies had a chance to create a vaccine by the end of the year. Initial talks were completed with Johnson & Johnson on 13 August 2020.⁵²¹ Moderna on 24 August,⁵²² and with BioNTech-Pfizer on 9 September.⁵²³ On 27 August, the first official agreement negotiated by the European Commission with Astra Zeneca for 300 million doses of the vaccine, with the options to purchase another 100 million, entered into force.⁵²⁴ The contract with this company additionally provided for a transfer of vaccines to low and middle-income countries.⁵²⁵ Further agreements were signed with Sanofi-GSK on September 18 (300 million doses),⁵²⁶ Janssen Pharmaceutical (Johnson & Johnson) on October 8 (200 million doses),⁵²⁷ BioNTech and Pfizer on

⁵¹⁷ European Commission, *Coronavirus Global Response: Commission Joins the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility (COVAX)*, 31 August 2020, at <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1540>, 20 June 2021.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Team Europe is an expert team providing information about the functioning and policies of the European Union. They offer their expertise to those who need specialists in the field of EU policies.

⁵²⁰ European Commission, *Coronavirus: Commission Concludes Talks to Secure Future Coronavirus Vaccine for Europeans*, 31 July 2020, at <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/%5Beuropa_tokens:europa_interface_language%5D/ip_20_1439>, 20 June 2021.

⁵²¹ European Commission, *Coronavirus: Commission Reaches First Agreement on a Potential Vaccine*, 14 August 2020, at <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1438>, 20 June 2021.

⁵²² European Commission, *Coronavirus: Commission Expands Talks to a Fifth Vaccine Manufacturer*, 24 August 2020, at <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/%5Beuropa_tokens:europa_interface_language%5D/ip_20_1513>, 20 June 2021.

⁵²³ European Commission, *Coronavirus: Commission Completes Vaccines Portfolio Following Talks With a Sixth Manufacturer*, 9 September 2020, at <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1556>, 20 June 2021.

⁵²⁴ European Commission, *Coronavirus: the Commission Signs First Contract With AstraZeneca*, 27 August 2020, at <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1524>, 20 June 2021.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

⁵²⁶ European Commission, *Coronavirus: the Commission signs second contract to ensure access to a potential vaccine*, at <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1680>, 20 June 2021.

⁵²⁷ European Commission, *Coronavirus: the Commission Signs Second Contract to Ensure Access to a Potential Vaccine*, 18 September 2020, at <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1680>, 20 June 2021.

November 11 (initially 200 million doses for the Member States and subsequently 100 million if the product proves safe and effective).⁵²⁸ On 12 November, the EU announced that it would allocate another 100 million euro to faster distribution of the vaccine in low and middle-income countries.⁵²⁹

In the following weeks, the European Commission, in its communication to the European Parliament and the Council “Preparedness for COVID-19 vaccination strategies and vaccine deployment” presented the principles that should be implemented in the vaccination strategy of each Member State as part of solidarity and cooperation in vaccine distribution.⁵³⁰ According to these principles, once vaccines are approved by the EMA, the Member States should be ready with a vaccination strategy ensuring services responsible for the safe vaccination of citizens (qualified personnel with an appropriate amount of medical and protective equipment), easy access to vaccines for the citizens, supply chains that are to safely transport vaccines to the right places, as well as an access to transparent information through social campaigns created by the government and the media.⁵³¹ This communication confirmed that the Member States would have access to vaccines proportionally to their population sizes.⁵³²

A date that gave a real hope for a return to normality in the EU was 21 December 2020. On that day, the European Commission approved BioNTech/Pfizer’s vaccine as the first accepted COVID-19 vaccine in the EU.⁵³³ A study by the EMA concluded that it was safe and effective.⁵³⁴ On 8 January, 200 million doses of the vaccine were purchased with the option for another 100 million, which would bring the number of doses to a total of 600 million. The next approved vaccines were those developed by Moderna (6 January 2021),⁵³⁵ Astra Zeneca (29 January), and Johnson & Johnson (11 March).⁵³⁶

⁵²⁸ European Commission, *Coronavirus: Commission Approves Contract with BioNTech-Pfizer Alliance to Ensure Access to a Potential Vaccine*, 11 November 2020, at <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2081>, 20 June 2021.

⁵²⁹ European Commission, *Coronavirus Global Response...*

⁵³⁰ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission...*, p. 1.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 7–9.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁵³³ European Commission, *European Commission Authorises First Safe and Effective Vaccine Against COVID-19*, at <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2466>, 20 June 2021.

⁵³⁴ European Medicines Academy, *EMA Recommends First COVID-19 Vaccine For Authorisation in the EU*, 21 December 2020, at <<https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news/ema-recommends-first-covid-19-vaccine-authorisation-eu>>, 20 June 2021.

⁵³⁵ European Commission, *European Commission Authorises Second Safe and Effective Vaccine Against COVID-19*, 6 January 2021, at <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_3>, 20 June 2021.

⁵³⁶ European Commission, *European Commission Authorises Fourth Safe and Effective Vaccine Against COVID-19*, 11 March 2021, at <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_1085>, 20 June 2021.

Several studies show that Europeans are among the most sceptical as regards vaccination against COVID-19. In the survey conducted in October 2020,⁵³⁷ 73% of respondents from 15 countries stated that they would vaccinate against COVID-19 if the vaccine was available. However, an intention to vaccinate against COVID-19 was expressed by just over half of adults in France (54%) and around two-thirds in Spain (64%), Italy (65%) and Germany (69%).⁵³⁸ Two Czech polls conducted in early December 2020 found that only 40% of Czechs would be willing to vaccinate against COVID-19.⁵³⁹ Vaccine hesitancy has been successfully fought by both the Member States and the EU institutions. Misinformation on vaccines has been combated through governmental and European platforms (EUvsDisinfo). The Member States created numerous campaigns to encourage the public to vaccinate and tried to ensure that false information about vaccines would be deleted as soon as possible. The vaccines producers are also very transparent and provide all necessary information on their websites.

As regards the vaccination process, solidarity and cooperation between Member States has shown some flaws. For example, in March 2021, Germany, France and Italy stopped vaccinating with AstraZeneca without prior informing the EMA. Their action was caused by the increased number of blood clot cases after vaccination. A few days after this decision, they returned to vaccinating with AstraZeneca, because it was evaluated that the benefits of the vaccine prevail over the risk of blood clots and other side effects. Another act of disobedience was recorded in Hungary, which started to vaccinate with Chinese and Russian vaccines without any permission from the EMA.

At the beginning of the vaccine rollout in Europe, the EU searched for ways the Member States could safely open their borders in order to enable free movement. Many European tourist destinations suffered from the pandemic in 2020, and in 2021 they could go bankrupt due to the lack of tourists.⁵⁴⁰ A key factor in opening up was a rapid and effective distribution of vaccines. In a communication titled “A common path to safe and sustained re-opening,”⁵⁴¹ the European Commission set out goals for itself and for the Member States to re-open economy and borders.⁵⁴² The European Commission pointed out that the Member States, so far, effectively introduced vaccination strategies and encouraged their citizens to vaccinate.⁵⁴³ However, the Commission made it clear that a common framework

⁵³⁷ *COVID-19 Vaccination Intent is Decreasing Globally*, IPSOS, 5 November 2020, at <<https://www.ipsos.com/en/global-attitudes-covid-19-vaccine-october-2020>>, 20 June 2021.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ European Parliament, *Covid-19 Vaccination Campaigns: The Public Dimension*, 29 January, 2021, p. 3.

⁵⁴⁰ European Commission, *COVID-19: Digital Green Certificates*, 10 April 2021, at <https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/safe-covid-19-vaccines-europeans/covid-19-digital-green-certificates_en#what-is-a-digital-green-certificate>, 20 June 2021.

⁵⁴¹ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission...*, p. 1.

⁵⁴² Ibid., pp. 1–2.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., p. 1.

developed at the Union level could help in increasing confidence in decisions, especially among the individuals less concerned about the pandemic due to being tired with the subject or due to their constantly growing sense of security.⁵⁴⁴ Furthermore, it was noted that a common framework could lead to an increased trust between the Member States, whereas an excessive caution – to the collapse of quite well-functioning solidarity between the Member States.⁵⁴⁵ The first and the most important tool mentioned in the communication is the Digital Green Certificate⁵⁴⁶ which aims to provide the EU citizens with a secure proof that they have been vaccinated against COVID-19, or that they have received a negative test result, or that they have recovered from COVID-19.⁵⁴⁷ The certificate would enable EU citizens to move freely within the EU.

On 28 April 2021, the European Parliament voted to introduce the EU Digital COVID Certificate. The solution is to be tested for the first time in the Member States in June.⁵⁴⁸ However, there were some heated controversies regarding the naming of this tool. The European Parliament suggested that it should be called the EU COVID-19 certificate as it would be used within the organization.⁵⁴⁹ France raised some concerns that perhaps introducing such a solution would cause more problems and someone would accuse the EU itself of a lack of solidarity.⁵⁵⁰ This was due to the fact that many people simply did not have a chance to get vaccinated. On the other hand, it was proposed that in the scope of the tool unvaccinated citizens should be allowed free testing to find out if they are carriers of the virus. Among all the amendments that were agreed on by the Member States, the most important is the one that the EU Digital COVID Certificate “is not a precondition to exercise free movement rights and it is not a travel document in order to stress the principle of non-discrimination, in particular towards non-vaccinated persons.”⁵⁵¹ A study conducted by Euroconsumers shows that, in general, the digital green certificate has been well received.⁵⁵² According to this

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 1–2.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 2–3.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 3–4.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵⁴⁸ *EU COVID-19 Certificate Must Facilitate Free Movement without Discrimination*, European Parliament News, 29 April 2021, at <europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210422IPR02606/eu-covid-19-certificate-must-facilitate-free-movement-without-discrimination>, 20 June 2021.

⁵⁴⁹ European Parliament, *EU Covid-19 Certificate – A Tool to Help Restore the Free Movement of People Across the European Union*, 20 May 2021, p. 4. Afterwards they named it EU Digital COVID Certificate, at <[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690618/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)690618_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690618/EPRS_BRI(2021)690618_EN.pdf)>, 20 June 2021.

⁵⁵⁰ *EU Countries Agree to Five Key Amendments to the Digital Green Certificate Proposal*, The Journal.ie, 14 April 2021, at <<https://www.thejournal.ie/council-of-eu-5410140-Apr2021/>>, 20 June 2021.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵⁵² Euroconsumers, *Euroconsumers' Second Survey on Vaccination: Citizens Expect Free of Charge Tests For the EU Digital Green Certificate*, 9 April 2021, at <<https://www.euroconsumers.org/activities/survey-vaccination-citizens-expect-free-charge-tests>>, 20 June 2021.

study, 59% respondents agreed that this tool is a good way to move freely within the EU again, and 63% agreed that the tool will encourage vaccination. However, the vast majority of respondents expressed their concerns that the COVID pass may discriminate between vaccinated and unvaccinated people. Two-thirds believed that free testing should be offered to people who have not had the opportunity to get vaccinated in order to obtain this pass.⁵⁵³

Another valid element of the opening up process is testing and infectious contact tracing by the Member States. Monitoring epidemiological situation and responding to it helps stop the spread of the virus. A large amount of testing is still needed for citizens who may have a chance of encountering the virus.⁵⁵⁴ On 28 October 2020, the Health Safety Committee agreed on a common list of antigen tests.⁵⁵⁵ The European Commission will provide⁵⁵⁶ around 20 million rapid antigen tests in 2021.⁵⁵⁷ Currently, the Commission is also putting a great amount of pressure on the Member States to introduce mobile applications that track infectious contacts.⁵⁵⁸ Patient location cards collected by the Member States are additional, useful tools to identify people who will become infected with COVID-19 in the future. They show data from foreign travellers and the exchange of this data between the Member States' authorities can be important in identifying the infected citizens. Such data, thanks to the cooperation with EU Healthy Gateways is now available on the Passenger Locator Form digital platform and is used by the governments of the Member States.⁵⁵⁹

The future will depend on the EU citizens' willingness to act in accordance with social solidarity. At the moment of writing this chapter, 173 million EU citizens are vaccinated with the first dose, and 84 million are fully vaccinated.⁵⁶⁰ The Member States reporting the highest number of doses are Germany, France and Italy. This gives them the sixth, seventh and eighth places in the world, respectively. Hungary (39%), Cyprus (27.1%) and Lithuania (24.6%) come last in the percentages of the vaccinated population.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵⁵⁵ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission...*, p. 5.

⁵⁵⁶ European Union signed a contract with Abbott and Roche which allowed to purchase about 20 million antigen tests.

⁵⁵⁷ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission...*, p. 5.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁰ ECDC, *COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker*, at <<https://vaccinetracker.ecdc.europa.eu/public/extensions/COVID-19/vaccine-tracker.html#uptake-tab>>, 20 June 2021.

⁵⁶¹ *Coronavirus (COVID-19) Vaccinations*, Our World in Data, at <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations?country=OWID_WRL>, 20 June 2021.

5. Summary

In the last 16 months, the European Union and its Member States had to face an unprecedented deadly threat which not only put health and lives of the European citizens at risk, but also threatened the core of solidarity and integrity of the union. For the first time in the EU history, the Member States univocally closed their borders, limited their citizens' rights and freedoms to unparalleled scale, and took intergovernmental and nationalistic approach in order to prevent the collapse of their national health systems. Although the COVID-19 pandemic initially exposed many weaknesses of the EU, the later integrative, solidarity-based and collective approach of the Member States eventually prevailed. With the exception of Sweden, the pattern of the Member States activities at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic was similar and could be summed up as a sum of chaotic and uncoordinated national responses. However, the Member States quickly learned a lesson from the mistakes of the most affected Mediterranean countries – that they cannot underestimate the spread of the virus.

Although the competences of the EU in handling health crisis are legally limited, the organisation assisted its Member States by developing initiatives and mechanisms that strengthened the cooperation between countries and boosted their morale. They included, for instance, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, “rescEU” project, and the Council’s “Europeans versus COVID-19” initiative. The European Solidarity Tracker showed an impressive level of solidarity and cooperation between the Member States; however, a few egoistic and non-cooperative actions were also noticed.

At that time of severe health crisis, the EU had to address numerous fake news, Russian disinformation campaigns and misleading information clearly directed against the EU. Due to an impressive amount of work performed by the European Digital Media Observatory, the East StratCom Task Force and the EUvsDisinfo, the EU combated false information, successfully increased public awareness and helped its citizens develop resilience to online disinformation and media manipulation.

The EU managed to keep its positive image, which can be clearly identified in the Eurobarometer reports which focus on evaluating the response to actions taken by the EU and its Member States during the COVID-19 pandemic. The surveys demonstrated that 2/5 of the respondents were satisfied with the measures taken by the EU to fight against the coronavirus pandemic, 1/3 of the respondents were satisfied with the solidarity of the Member States and the actions between them, and 2/3 of the respondents thought that the EU should have more competences in health crisis management and other emergency situations. Particularly admirable is the fact that the EU, after a year of fighting the virus, has received a great deal of recognition and admiration for its actions from the EU citizens.

This publication makes a notable contribution to the highly discussed and lively topic of European integration. It includes a brief description of the origins of the European Union, the evolution of the organisation over the last several decades, the changing visions of the future of Europe, the crises that the Member States faced in the past, and finally, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the current and future level of European integration. This publication provides the reader with novel and very detailed data on the performance of the EU and its Member States during the unprecedented global pandemic. It is a must-read for those who search for the most recent information on the shape and level of European integration, the cooperation of the Member States during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as on the level of trust given to the EU by its citizens. Additionally, this book sheds light on the Eurosceptic disinformation and fake news which have arisen in the past few years and which will continue to constitute a very controversial topic for the next few years.



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