
THE BEST WAY

#TheBestWayBulletin
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HOW DO WE GET THE MOLDOVAN ECONOMY BACK ON TRACK AFTER THE PANDEMIC?

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RODICA CRUDU

EXPERT IN EUROPEAN INTEGRATION,
EUROPEAN UNION POLICIES

[ANALYSIS Bulletin No 6] Rodica Crudu | To be able to talk about a possible recovery of the national economy, about strategic action plans and about solutions to overcome the crisis, we should start by understanding the nature of the current economic crisis. We do not want to generate uncertainties and contradictions in terms of the directions to be taken, or of the means to be used, making it thus difficult to return to normal.

WHAT THE PANDEMIC MEANT FOR THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

The COVID-19-induced economic crisis is not an **ordinary, cyclical crisis**, the causes of which originates from financial sphere imbalances, such as those of 2008-09, despite the feature that they share, which is that the stagnation of the economic cycle^[1]. This time, the crisis **originated in the spontaneous, total immobilization of the economic sectors for the period of social restrictions and the imposition of strict sanitary norms during the state of emergency**. They distorted the economic balance between aggregate demand and supply, in investment, consumption, partial and whole value chains, and supply chains. Our economy, being a vulnerable one, as well as in the process of transition and reshaping due to previous political crises, **is deeply affected**.

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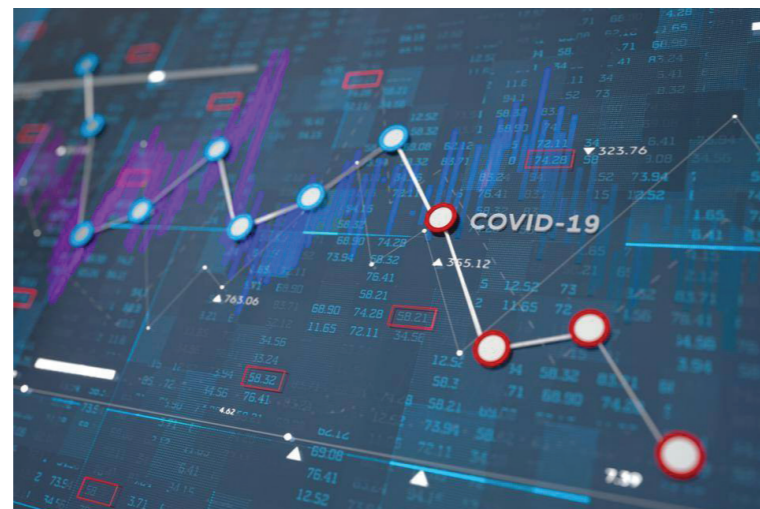
The uncertainty and impossibility to intervene in the medium and long term have determined the Moldovan authorities to adopt a set of measures aimed at establishing a framework for managing the pandemic crisis and at minimizing its damage to the Moldovan economy, citizens in general and the business environment. However, they were not well thought out and were not able to redress the situation properly. In order to determine **appropriate measures for getting the national economy back on track and adapting to the 'new normalcy'**, this analysis aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To identify **the vulnerable economic sectors that are vulnerable** and at the height of economic crisis;
- To determine what were the measures taken by **the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)** – key links in the national economy – to continue business and to avoid bankruptcy;
- To assess **the measures taken by the state**, as well as by our external partners, for relaunching, activating and adjusting the economic processes.

THE MOLDOVAN ECONOMY IS DEPENDENT ON THE ECONOMIES OF EXTERNAL PARTNERS

The state of affairs in the Republic of Moldova is inextricably linked to the situation in the world and especially to that in the European Union. According to IMF estimates, in 2020 most of the large economies will collectively register GDP declines by 2.5-3.0%, and in some economies the recession will reach even higher levels. Preliminary estimates show that **the GDP value of the Republic of Moldova for 2020 will decrease by 4.0-6.0%**[2].

In order to assess the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the economy, research and a number of studies were conducted. According to a study carried out by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Moldova, exporting companies are among the most affected by the pandemic [3]. This is due to the fact that external



demand has dropped considerably, but also the crisis of raw materials has led most companies on both banks of the Nistru **to completely suspend their exports or reduce them** significantly. According to the data of the National Bureau of Statistics, in the first three months of 2020 the volume of goods from the Republic of Moldova sold on foreign markets decreased by 7.9%, due to reduced demand in countries affected by COVID-19. **A greater impact is observed on export-oriented industries:** manufacturing of **car parts** and engines, of **wires and cables, connection devices** for them as well as **clothing and textiles** manufacturing, processing and preservation of **fruits and vegetables**.

According to a study by IDIS 'Viitorul', as a result of the effects of the pandemic, as well as of measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19, export trade from Nistru's left bank and domestic trade with the right bank went into negative-value zone, being **in January-May 2020 9% below the previous year's reference level**. [4] During the first five months, the total value of trade turnover and exports between the two banks **decreased by 13.6%** and deliveries to the right bank diminished drastically for most product groups.

IMPACT ON SMES AND THE POPULATION

According to surveys conducted at the initial stage of the crisis (April 2020) by Expert-Group[5], **about 2/3 of Moldovan enterprises anticipated a decrease in revenues by more than 35%**. The causes are related to the **restrictions applied by the authorities** in the context of the state of emergency, but especially to the internal and external **demand reduction**. Moreover, in order to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 **70% of respondents said that they planned to reduce staff costs** and **64% and 68% planned**

to postpone current and strategic investments, respectively. In most cases, the staff costs optimization was to be achieved through **unpaid leave, reduction of working hours and furlough**. These, in turn, affected even harder the income of the population and therefore the aggregate demand, which would further aggravate the companies' financial situation (through the **snowball effect** of the crisis)[6].

Together with the aforementioned actions, the pandemic severely affected micro, small and medium enterprises, and this in turn – **thousands of Moldovan families who lost their jobs (MSMEs make up 95% of the private businesses in the country and employ over 60% of the population within these enterprises)**. [7]

According to the survey 'Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Moldovan businesses'[8], conducted by the American Chamber of Commerce in Moldova (AmCham Moldova) between 3 and 18 July 2020 on a sample of 205 companies in the ICT sector, HoReCa, tourism, light industry, agriculture, transport, education, etc., **87% of respondents mentioned a decrease in income by up to 50%** and more compared to that reported in the similar period of 2019. Among the factors that affected companies the most are **the decrease in demand for products and services in the domestic market** (77% of respondents) and the difficulties encountered by their business partners, expressed by **delays in paying the invoices issued** (56% of respondents).

In order to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic, **companies implement various measures** such as accessing **intra-group credits**, creating **export opportunities**, creating **new business lines**, **reducing the operating schedule**, **postponing investments**, **reducing staff costs**, **reshaping the business model** and moving towards new market requirements and **new consumer behaviours** etc.

According to 80% of the entities participating in the survey, the measures that should be implemented by the state to overcome the pandemic crisis are **reduction of taxes**, duties and other contributions, which could influence the process of overcoming the pandemic crisis, while 75% of the companies considered the **home-stay pays** should also be taken into account in taxes as an absolutely necessary tool.

WHAT THE GOVERNMENT AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED DID AND HAVE TO DO

In this sense, according to the Government Decision No 630 of 19.08.2020 approving the Endorsement to the draft law on establishing fiscal exemptions for certain categories of enterprises[9], it was rejected the idea of **approving fiscal exemptions** until 31 December 2020 on all taxes, contributions and duties, namely income tax, value added tax, excise duties, private tax, customs duty, road taxes, real estate tax, local taxes, compulsory state social insurance contributions, **on the basis of non-specification of the potential categories of final beneficiary enterprises and the impossibility of reducing the consolidated state budget during this**

unstable period. According to Order No 100 of 26.05.2020 of the Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure[10] regarding the approval of the Support Instrument on digitalization of small and medium-sized enterprises and the operation of amendments to sub-program 5004, the crisis created **the impossibility**



PIB-ul pentru
anul 2020 va
scădea cu
4.0-6.0%

Conform estimărilor FMI, în 2020 **majoritatea economiilor mari** vor înregistra în mod colectiv **scăderi ale PIB-ului situate între 2,5-3,0%**.

Unele exporturi
au scăzut, altele
vor continua să
scadă, iar
celelalte se vor
sista.



În primele 3 luni ale anului 2020 volumul de mărfuri comercializate pe piețele externe a **scăzut cu 7,9%, din cauza reducerii cererii** în țările afectate de COVID-19.



Veniturile
populației au fost
afectate negativ.

Membri a mii de familii **și-au pierdut locurile de muncă (IMM-urile reprezintă 95% din afacerile private și antrenează > 60% din populație)**.

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BUSINESS SOLUTIONS IN THE TIME OF COVID-19



lity of consumers movement and affected the process of meeting supply and demand. According to the study 'How COVID-19 pandemic affected the work of Moldovan companies'[11], **companies in all sectors want to readjust and access the online market.** As a result, the 'SMEs Digitalisation Program' was launched by the Organisation for SMEs Development (ODIMM), with the aim of supporting domestic producers in digitising their business processes and selling products or services on online platforms. In the same train of thoughts, as a result of co-

operation of the Association of Creative Companies of Moldova and the Artcor Center, the GoOnline platform was launched to connect digital service providers with SMEs that needed support to transfer their businesses online and generate sales. According to the administrators of the platform, 61 small businesses were digitised as part of the project, benefiting from the development of visual identity, websites integrated with online payment and delivery solutions, etc. Another 25 digital service providers joined together to help small businesses be present online.[12]

As to guaranteeing loans, the Government came up with a New Guarantee Product – a financial product launched by ODIMM in partnership with Moldovan commercial banks, for issuing preferential loans to SMEs affected by the pandemic crisis.[13] Thus, companies that recorded a decrease in sales revenue by 30% between March and June 2020 compared to the similar period of the previous year will be able to apply for working capital loans state-guaranteed to an extent of up to 80%, with a zero guarantee fee until 31.12.2021. Also, companies applying for investment loans will be able to benefit from guarantees that will cover up to 80% of the loan with a maximum value of MDL 5 million. The new guarantee product was developed as a result of engaging Government's responsibility towards the Parliament and by approving the amendments to the 2020 State Budget Law, thus being additionally allocated MDL 50 million lei for the capitalization of the Loan Guarantee Fund, managed by ODIMM.

Conclusions and recommendations

Relaunching economic processes, ensuring competitive development, strengthening the business environment, remain among the major challenges of our country. And the pandemic only made them worse. In this context, the Government should come up with solutions that give the possibility of readjustment to the new realities, in the form of an anti-crisis plan focused on financially supporting the companies and the population. Maintaining income for both households and companies is a key factor in maintaining market demand, avoiding poverty rates increases, producers going bankrupt, state budget revenue decrease. These practices are widely used in Western economies, but also in Central and Eastern Europe, in countries such as the Czech Republic and Romania.

Other solutions could be to ensure increased tax flexibility for businesses and employment protection measures. The experience from previous crises shows that the recovery of



ECONOMIA IN "NOUA NORMALITATE". RECOMANDARI





Elaborarea unui plan anti-criză de către Guvern, orientat spre suportul financiar al firmelor și a populației.



Mentținerea veniturilor gospodăriilor, companiilor.



Digitalizarea, comunicarea, platforme între companii, ONGuri, parteneri externi și autorități publice



Asigurarea unei flexibilități fiscale sporite mediului de afaceri

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the economy is all the more difficult as unemployment rises. That is why the Government's efforts should be channelled towards the active support of domestic producers through various fiscal and financial instruments, as well as through campaigns meant to actively promote domestic producers. This will allow avoiding bankruptcies and mass layoffs, i.e. mitigation of the economic recession. At the same time, in order to mitigate the crisis' influence on the expectations of consumers and companies, it is necessary to communicate actively and transparently with them on the measures taken by the authorities. Moreover, the creation of platforms for communication between companies, civil society, external donors and public authorities could be an important resource for post-crisis recovery and adaptation to the 'new normalcy'.

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Source: <https://www.lidmoldova.org/en/news/how-do-we-get-moldovan-economy-back-track-after-pandemic>



DICTATORS NEAR US. HOW AUTHORITARIAN LEADERS USED THE PANDEMIC CRISIS TO GET UNLIMITED POWER

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DAN NICU

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
AND SOVIET SPACE EXPERT

[ANLYSIS Bulletin No 6] Dan Nicu | The pandemic that engulfed the entire world at the beginning of 2020 is an unique opportunity to see the behaviour of political stakeholders who govern in different countries of the world. Faced with the need to adapt to unique challenges in their political carrier, some of them turned to quasi-dictatorial control measures – officially claiming that they needed them to avoid plunging their countries into chaos, but de facto – in order to make sure they would not lose their power.

The article below analyses two neighbouring countries that are very close to us geographically, officially democratic, where two leaders took advantage of the pandemic crisis and transformed their countries from shaky democracies into de facto dictatorships. The first case is Hungary and the second – Serbia.

VIKTOR ORBAN AND GOVERNANCE BY DECREE

At the end of March, the unicameral Parliament of Hungary received a draft law that allows the Prime-Minister Viktor Orban to rule the country by decrees for an unlimited period of time. The same draft law introduces criminal punishment of up to five years of detention for the deliberate dissemination of fake news about SARS-Cov-2 pandemic. Fake news fall within the scope of the law if courts be-

lieve they would affect substantially the capacity of the Government to manage the pandemic crisis. In order to be adopted the same week when it was tabled, the draft law had to be voted by 4/5 of members of the National Assembly, that is, 160 of 199, which is impossible due to the opposition parties that own 66 mandates. All the opposition parties were against the measures proposed by the new law, which determined the governing party Fidesz to wait for a new session of the Parliament during which they had the right to adopt the new law with 2/3 of the MP's votes, which eventually happened on 30 March 2020.

During the debates regarding the adoption of this law, the position of the governing party, Fidesz, was very tough, unwilling to make one single concession required by the opposition: set a concrete deadline when the extraordinary prerogatives allowing Viktor Orban to govern on his own, without the involvement of the Parliament, will expire.

At the same time, several European countries empowered by law certain officials with increased prerogatives in order to fight the pandemic crisis, but all these measures were adopted with a deadline. For instance, the UK Coronavirus Act 2020, adopted in March and which expires within six months – unless the House of Commons decides to prolong it for six more months.

In France, the measures proposed by President Emanuel Macron are effective for two months, and this period can be extended if necessary. In Romania, the state of emergency was adopted for a month and was further prolonged for one more month and later on it was replaced with state of alert, which does not have a fundamental impact on the operation of state institutions.

Imposing in the middle of Europe and European Union a state of emergency that allows the state leader to rule without being able to stop him in one way or another, for an unlimited period, is an abnormal behaviour of decision makers in a state with a functional democracy.

However Hungary is moving very fast towards democracy degradation – a pro-



VIKTOR ORBAN UNGARIA	ALEKSANDR VUCIC SERBIA
Din 2010, Ungaria e singura țară din UE cu o guvernare autoproclamată pompos "iliberală" - fals conservatoare, sau o "democrație suverană" de tip putinist	În martie 2020, Serbia a urmat exemplul vecinei de la nord, Ungaria, decretând o stare de urgență de o duritate neobișnuită pentru Europa. Președintele Aleksandar Vucic a anunțat instituirea stării de urgență fără să indice și durata acestei măsuri.
Justiția a fost aservită guvernării, majoritatea instituțiilor independente de presă au fost preluate de apropiați ai puterii sau închise, o bună parte a economiei a fost etatizată iar organizațiile non-guvernamentale care promovează democrația și drepturile civice au fost desemnate drept agenți străini.	La fel ca prim-ministrul maghiar Viktor Orban, Vucic și-a oferit și însuși prerogativa de a conduce țara prin decrete. Prin asta, el și-a depășit vădit prerogativele mai mult ceremoniale pe care i le oferă Constituția Serbiei.
La sfârșitul lunii martie 2020, în parlamentul unicameral al Ungariei a fost introdus un proiect de lege care îi permite prim-ministrului Viktor Orban să conducă țara prin intermediul decretelor pe termen nelimitat.	La începutul lui iulie, guvernul sârb și președintele Vucic și-au anunțat intenția de a reintroduce starea de urgență, cu tot ce a conținut aceasta din martie până în mai, inclusiv guvernarea prin decrete prezidențiale.
Tot în martie a fost introdusă pedeapsa penală pentru răspândirea intenționată de știri false cu privire la pandemia de SARS-Cov-2, în mărime de până la 5 ani de detenție.	Au fost nevoie de manifestații violente pentru a-l determina pe Vucic să renunțe la intențiile sale. Până la urmă, acesta a renunțat la intențiile sale de a reinstaura starea de urgență. Dar i-a acuzat pe protestatari că ar fi dirijați de servicii secrete străine, extremiști și criminali.
Ambii lideri au venit la putere pe cale democratică, dar au îngrădit democrația, subordonându-și instituții independente și instaurând niște regimuri autoritare de facto conduse de figuri "providențiale"	Există și la noi un personaj care și-ar dori foarte mult să se simtă "oleacă dictator". Dacă va reuși să câștige alegerile prezidențiale din noiembrie, visul îi poate deveni realitate.

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cess that did not start yesterday, but 10 years ago, since Fidesz party and its leader Viktor Orbán has been ruling the country. It is true that in 2010, Fidesz returned to power on the basis of free and democratic vote of the Hungarian people. But, from a country with firm democracy strengthening trends, characteristic for the new members of the European Union from Central Europe in 2000s, Hungary ended up the only country in the EU with a governance that was pompously self-proclaimed as illiberal – and which is not ashamed to adopt measures characteristic to ‘social conservatism’ (some kind of fake conservatism) and to Putin-style ‘sovereign democracy’. Some of these measures include adopting an election system that can make it very difficult to change the governing party, by ensuring it (and a small satellite party) a supermajority of 2/3 of the parliamentary seats.

After 2010, the justice sector was gradually moved under the Government control, most of the independent media outlets were either taken by players close to the power or were closed, a large part of the economy was nationalised **and non-government organisations that promote democracy and civic rights were classified as foreign agents**, hostile to Hungary, and their activity was seriously limited. As regards human rights protection, Hungary has been falling behind the European Union quite rapidly. The quite hostile attitude of the Hungarian Government against migrants in 2015-2016 lead to paroxysm; also, with the help of the authorities a ‘civic guard’ was established, which together with the army forces patrolled the country’s borders, raising involuntary associations with fascist and Nazi totalitarian regimes that existed during the interwar period.

At the same time, the topic of LGBT minorities was transformed in an anti-Western scarecrow. From the economic point of view, Fidesz Government rather resulted in a stagnation than growth – which allowed a country like Romania, for example, which years ago was lagging much more behind Hungary in terms of personal income, to get very close to the latter.

The measures taken by the Hungarian authorities in March were criticised by representatives of human rights organisations such as Amnesty International, by representatives of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition, as well as by certain members of the European Parliament. The worries concern both the danger of an authoritarian governance and of imposing tougher repressive measures against the remaining independent media. Specifically, the authorities could use the new provisions of the law in order to accuse independent journalists of ‘anti-governmental’ actions by disseminating news that are regarded as fake by authorities. This opens the way toward self-censorship, that is, Hungary risks to go back where it began in 1989 – a totalitarian political reality.

On 18 June, the law offering extraordinary powers to the Prime Minister was abolished and a new law was passed, stating that a new state of emergency based on governance by decrees adopted by the Prime Minister, may be imposed by the Government without consulting the Parliament, at the recommendation of the country’s chief epidemiologist, appointed by the Government. Specifically, the law provides that the state of emergency and governance by decree may be introduced without any vote in the Par-

liament if the Government declares first ‘state of public health emergency’. Note that this law does not set any deadline until when the democratic governance will be suspended – this is to be established for an unlimited period of time, until new circumstances would justify its annulment (according to the Prime Minister, of course).

Thus, at present, the Budapest Government has one more tool that can destroy the democracy, in addition to those created since 2010. Orbán regime used the pandemic crisis to successfully test what seem unachievable: establishing a de facto dictatorship. Now, by the law enacted in June, Fidesz obtains the red button it can press any time, after inventing some reasons for doing so, and thus throw the country’s constitution and laws in the garbage bin. The Hungarian Prime Minister is currently enabled to legally turn off the democracy and then to turn it back on whenever he feels comfortable. In an European Union Member State, this is something unthinkable and is against at least one of the Copenhagen criteria that should be observed by all EU Member States.

ALEKSANDAR VUCIC ACCUSES ‘FOREIGN AGENCIES’ FOR NOT LETTING HIM BECOME A DICTATOR

During the second part of March, Serbia followed the example of its Northern neighbour, Hungary, and instituted an unusually tough for Europe state of emergency. The President Aleksandar Vucic, the de facto leader of Serbian Progressive Party, the governing party, announced the establishment of state of emergency on 15 March 2020, without indicating the duration of this measure. Just like the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Vucic gifted himself the prerogative to rule the country through decrees, going around the Parliament. Representatives of Serbian opposition drew the attention to the fact that President Vucic manifestly goes beyond the prerogatives provided by the Serbian Constitution, which are mostly ceremonial. A huge hall for exhibitions from Belgrad was transformed in a makeshift hospital with about 3,000 beds, which caused fear among the population. President Vucic said he was happy that people were afraid because they would observe the orders to stay at home.

Starting with May, the state of emergency was lifted and the President is not ruling any more by decrees. However, the successive relaxation measures were accompanied, since July, by a growing number of Covid-19 cases, like almost in the entire Europe. Thus, at the beginning of July, the Serbian Government and president Vucic announced their intention to reintroduce the state of emergency and all the provisions that it contained between March and May, including governance by presidential decrees. The same moment, the country engulfed in protests, which degenerated in violent confrontations between protesters and security forces in front of the country’s Parliament building. When the Parliament was about to be taken down by protesters, President Vucic announced that he dropped his intentions to re-establish the state of emergency. At the same time, he accused the protesters of being controlled by foreign secret services, extremists and murderers.



They had to organise violent protests in order to force Vucic give up on his intentions, but this does not mean that he will not repeat this at the first opportunity. The President's party is leading a coalition that controls over 2/3 of the Parliamentary seats (188 of 250), which means that he can amend the text of the Constitution anytime he wants. Serbia has been facing a decline of democracy since 2012, that is, since the current Government is in power.

'PROVIDENTIAL FIGURES' WHO ESTABLISHED A DE FACTO DICTATORSHIP

This is the main common element of the evolution of political life in the two countries addressed in this article, Hungary and Serbia – in both of them political parties that came to power in a democratic way limited the democracy by subordinating independent institutions (justice system, media) and established de facto authoritarian regimes led by 'providential' figures. This spring, Viktor Orban and Aleksandar Vucic 'tasted the prohibited fruit' of dictatorship, and now they are waiting for the right moment to re-introduce the governance by decree. If the pandemic crisis worsens this autumn and winter, and at the beginning of the next year, both leaders will identify opportunities to implement their plans.

'A LITTLE BIT OF A DICTATOR?'

It is important that these two anti-models are not taken by other states in the region. We all know a character, who is very close to us and who became president by accident and worships leaders like Lushchenko, Putin or Orban. It is known that this character would like a lot to have the possibility to feel 'a little bit of a dictator'. Maybe, if he manages to win the presidential election in November and to gather a parliamentary majority, his dream will come true. To the detriment of the country's people who have the bad luck of having him as their leader.

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Source of the photos: Reuters and Deutsche Welle

Source: <https://www.lidmoldova.org/en/news/dictatorii-de-langa-noi-cum-au-folosit-liderii-autoritari-criza-pandemica-pentru-putere>



ZOOM REVOLUTION. REINVENTING BUSINESS DURING THE PANDEMIC

DUMITRU PETRASCU
MANAGEMENT, BUSINESS
AND NEGOCIATION EXPERT

[ANALYSIS Bulletin No 6] Dumitru Petruscu | This analysis focuses on the pandemic crisis and its effects on the business management model during this complicated period. Despite the necessary and compulsory support by central authorities, I intend to approach this period on the basis of 'bottom-up' principle – from the perspective of the realities created by the pandemic for business environment, of the need to adapt to the 'new normality' and of the 'investments' needed to overcome the damages related to the crisis. Together with all the challenges, the pandemic brought forth the need to transform the business management method, as well as the need to develop a hybrid ecosystem in every business to face the future challenges.

RETROSPECTIVE

The novel virus COVID-19 started in Wuhan (China) in December 2019, developed timidly in the beginning and later on ballooned to the proportions of an international pandemic in the broad sense of this word. I am not an expert in virology and I don't pretend to analyse the virus itself. The reality though is that this virus could be exported from China without difficulty. The first case of COVID-19 registered in Europe



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was confirmed in France on 24 January 2020. Starting with February 2020, countries like Italy, France, Germany, or Spain with strong Chinese Diaspora, were among the first affected in the Europe. Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine or the Republic of Moldova were part of the second stage of its spread – in these countries the first cases of infection were reported among citizens who came back from highly industrialised countries after seasonal work, or among people who travelled as tourists in Italy, France, Greece.

Following the evolution of the pandemic in each country, central authorities (taken by surprise or not) imposed state of emergency with special measures aimed to limit the spread of the pandemic – suspension of the free movement, suspension of pre-school, general and high school education, restriction of cross-border movement for tourists and restriction of economic and trade activities. The reality though is that as of 18 March 2020, 250 million Europeans were under a full lockdown, certain of their constitutional were restricted, but at the same time these measures were necessary to stop the spread of the pandemic.

In the Republic of Moldova, the state of emergency was declared on 13 March 2020 with the display of the army forces on the streets of Chisinau (we all saw the Hummers with guns of the National Army strategically positioned in visible places at the crossroads from Chisinau) – probably to stir up fear of the virus and to show the organizational abilities of the authorities in the fight against this ruthless virus (SIC!). Leaving the irony aside, kindergartens, schools, universities, and markets stopped their activity following the declaration of the emergency state by the authorities and the activity of business entities was limited to the maximum.

THIS IS WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

ZOOM Revolution or ‘work from home’ represented the know-how of 2020 – a new model of managing everyday activities during the crisis. Educational institutions turned to ZOOM which forced children and their parents to become dependent on a new way of conducting educational activities. Companies with developed IT infrastructure transferred rapidly the office operational processes to ‘work from home’ in order to maintain the workflow in the most important departments. Some of the employees that did not fit ZOOM Revolution entered a process of professional transformation (if the company provided this opportunity), were subject to a complex system of process and duty optimisation or were dismissed (due to the uncertainty created in relation the economic activity of the company).

During this period, various companies acknowledged the importance of a positive cashflow in the activity that they managed, the need to keep at maximum the employees and the capacity to reorient the business processes depending on the current needs of the ‘economy’ – production of masks/face shields, production of ethanol for disinfectants – in a word, maintaining the economic activities of the company afloat.

Although it seemed to be an exclusively medical crisis, the decisions taken by the Government to stop this pandemic had an enormous impact on the economy, particularly on business management during this complicated period. The way this virus spreads as well as the restrictions imposed determined the need to reinvent the business itself. The biggest challenge was to adapt rapidly to the new realities and the fast transfer of economic activities online. As a

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-  Diversificarea piețelor de desfacere și scalarea acestora.
-  Reinventarea modelului de business prin digitalizare și automatizare a modelelor operaționale existente.
-  Crearea unui ecosistem hibrid al afacerii (prezența offline și online).
-  Diversificarea portofoliului de produse.
-  Echilibrarea politicii financiare a companiei pentru obținerea unui cashflow pozitiv.
-  Investiția în dezvoltarea brand-ului personal.
-  Investiția în resurse umane calitative și menținerea acestora.
-  Interacțiunea cu business-ul regional pentru a determina trend-urile actuale.

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result, the pandemic provoked the ‘ZOOM Revolution’ and acted as a catalyst in the e-Everything transformation. The effects of this transformation should have a positive impact on the private sector and on the activities of state institutions given the stringent need and the opportunity to remove bureaucracy by digitalizing the services provided. Due to the panic generated artificially at the beginning of the pandemic the consumers started to behave inadequately and as a result, significant increases in the sales of large retail outlets were reported. However the e-Commerce ‘explosion’ was phenomenal and during this period an increase of 30% in sales was reported.

DIRECTIONS FOR ADAPTATION AND REINVENTION

HoReCa companies were the most affected as they rely on the presence of clients in their premises and on catering services for events. Some owners were forced to develop a personal delivery system or start working on an outsourcing basis in order to maintain the company’s activity afloat. This enhanced the companies’ online presence and resulted in the establishment of delivery companies. Although the intention was to relax the restrictions, the relaunch of the

activities in this sector did not allow to go back to the pre-pandemic state of affairs due to consumers’ precautions and partial restrictions maintained by authorities. As a result, delivery of products is now a strength in maintaining the activities of companies in this field. A smart upgrade was registered in the field of selling agricultural products due to the opportunities to reinvent the entire process of selling via social media, thus developing communities that support local farmers. The need to develop this direction has been discussed for a long time.

Due to the restrictions imposed by the Government regarding the movement of people during the pandemic, the companies in the field of passenger transportation were also affected and had to reassess their internal processes and adapt to the new realities. Moreover, to face the decrease in the number of orders they were forced to reinvent their portfolio of services provided by developing certain complementary services that are necessary on the market.

A significant emphasis is put now on consumer’s contact with local brands and on the change of the behaviour in order to make them interact directly with them. The pandemic revealed the need or even the obligation of brands to respond to the crisis and the expectations concerned the solutions they can currently offer. Another important factor is the communication and the interaction via social media and about the brand and the consumer getting closer, thus establishing specific communities. As a result, we note that lately, the consumers have increasingly developed their confidence in brands, despite the government institutions.

Also, the brand protection and activity moved from the internal environment in an area with national and international impact. This process generates and develops complex policies of social responsibility. During this period, brands were involved in volunteering activities and provided their own resources in order to fight the pandemic and as a result, they learned about the trends and the affinities of the communities they operate in.

REVOLUȚIA ZOOM.

REINVENȚAREA BUSINESS-ULUI ÎN TIMP DE PANDEMIE

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-  **RETROSPECTIVĂ**
Republica Moldova a făcut parte din a doua fază a răspândirii virusului. Aici, primele cazuri de îmbolnăvire au fost raportate la cetățenii care s-au întors de la munca sezonieră sau din vacanțe. Starea de urgență a fost decretată în data de 13 martie 2020, prin etalarea forței armate din dotare pe străzile din Chișinău.
-  **DE AICI A ÎNCEPUT TOTUL**
Natura răspândirii virusului, dar și efectele create în urma restricțiilor au determinat necesitatea reinventării business-ului în sine. Provocarea cea mare a fost adaptarea rapidă la noile realități și transferul rapid a activităților economice și sociale în online.
-  **DIRECȚII DE ADAPTARE & REINVENȚARE**
Pentru a face față scăderii comenzilor, afacerile s-au văzut nevoite să-și reinventeze portofoliul de servicii prestate prin dezvoltarea unor servicii complementare necesare pieței. Acestea au pus accentul pe contactul consumatorului cu brand-ul, au trecut comunicarea pe rețelele de socializare și și-au dezvoltat capacitățile și politicile interne de responsabilitate socială.
-  **PREVIZIUNI & NECESITĂȚI**
Cele mai importante tendințe și investiții în tehnologiile de azi vor juca un rol important în depășirea și adaptarea la crizele de mâine. Criza s-ar putea sfârși, însă efectele economice vor continua. Trebuie să fim pregătiți să facem față noilor provocări. Relansarea sau gestionarea cu succes a afacerilor în viitor va depinde de capacitatea fiecărei companii de a se adapta la noile realități și tendințe.

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FORECASTS AND NEEDS

Taken by surprise by the lockdown and by the restrictions imposed during this period, it could be risky to make provisions for the following period, let alone for 2021. It is certain though that nobody predicted such a scenario and the events that happen this year. However, the lesson that we all have to learn is that the most important trends and investments

in the technologies of today will play an important role in overcoming and adapting to the crises of tomorrow. The economy registered a rising trend in terms of digitalization and automation of the existing businesses and operational processes, thus allowing certain cross-border and creative businesses to develop. The pandemic, which is far from ending, created opportunities for development and reinvention of the economy in general. Given all the difficulties regarding the management of this health crisis, the restrictions imposed by the authorities had a catalyst role in changing the concept of 'doing business' at personal level by creating opportunities we should use in the following period.

At this stage, we distinguish the directions that we should focus our efforts on to build sustainable businesses in the future:

- Diversify and scale up the sales markets.
- Reinvent the business model by digitalising and automating the existing operational models.
- Create a hybrid ecosystem of the business (offline and online presence).
- Diversify of the product portfolio.
- Balance the financial policy of the company in order to obtain a positive cashflow.
- Invest in the development of the personal brand.
- Invest in quality human resources and maintain them.
- Interact with regional business environment to determine the current trends.

As a result, we should note that this pandemic crisis may end, but the economic effects will continue. We have to be prepared to face new challenges and the successful relaunch and management of businesses in the future will depend on the ability of each company to adapt to new realities and trends.

Let's not forget that any crisis can create new opportunities.

Dumitru PETRASCU is member of LID Moldova Council and is specialised in management, businesses, and corporate negotiations. He has an experience of more than 17 years in sales, management of key customers and development of corporate relationships. Over one year he has been involved in the development of operational processes under the biggest start-up of urban mobility from Romania, Bucharest.

Source: <https://www.lidmoldova.org/en/news/revolyuciya-zoom-pereizobretenie-biznesa-vo-vremya-pandemii>



LESSONS OF THE PANDEMIC FOR THE MOLDOVAN CIVIL SOCIETY

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LINA GRAU

JOURNALIST & SHOW PRODUCER

[INTERVIEW Bulletin No 6] Lina Grau | Civil society almost completely replaced the state on the social and supply side, but did not put pressure on the authorities to rethink their approaches.

What were the lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic for civil society and how much of what the authorities fail to manage can be put on the shoulders of volunteers and active people of our society? To what extent can the effort and mobilization of society be aided by the appropriate messages from the authorities or, conversely, compromised by their vagueness or incompetence? Are we on our own in this crisis or not? And what can volunteers and civil society continue to do to reduce the dramatic effects of this pandemic on Moldovan society (RM)?

We discussed the subject with volunteers and activists who, since the beginning of the pandemic, have had impact-driven initiatives to support the medical system in the fight against Covid-19.

Ana Racu is a member of the UN Committee against Torture. Together with businessman Anatol Untura and Victoria Dunford, president of the non-governmental organisation Moldova AID, Ana Racu initiated the first fundraising campaign for those involved in fighting Covid-19, when, at the beginning of the pandemic, doctors in hospitals did not have the necessary means of protection, medicines and equipment. Among the beneficiaries of the 'Together for you!' initiative there were social workers, police and prison staff.

Within a few months, the three volunteers collected over MDL 4.5 million in cash donations, buying with that money 29 items of medical equipment, including two mechanical ventilators, tens of thousands

of masks, protective suits, face shields, 16 tons of disinfectants and soap, plus food and other goods.

Carrying out this campaign meant personal effort and time dedicated to a cause. 'The pandemic makes us all equal – whether you are a minister, a sweeper, a president or a student, we are all in the same boat. Respectively, the response to the pandemic had to be one of general mobilization', Ana Racu said.

How come that a campaign launched by three civic activists had more credibility on the part of those who donated than the fundraising announced by the authorities?

The answer seems to be obvious. 'All our procurements were transparent and we published all the financial statements', says Ana Racu. Besides, we paid a lot of attention to the quality of the products we purchased, so we personally checked them at the manufacturer when we made purchases on the domestic market, to make sure that the products the hospitals receive are in accordance with the standards'.

Another feature of the campaign was that most of the protective equipment was purchased from the local producers. The campaign started during the general lockdown when nothing could be imported. Some of the protective masks were made in Rusca's penitentiary, very good quality protective coveralls were also sewn in the Republic of Moldova; we worked with local producers of disinfectants and soap.

'There were more people like us. And I am glad that back then there was this wave of mobilization and solidarity with the medical staff. We heard from many doctors that the masks and the protective coveralls they received mattered to them, but that the solidarity of the society mattered even more. What happened later, under the influence of fake news and conspiracy theories, is another drama that we are all going through at the moment', Ana Racu pointed out.

What was the influence of the contradictory messages sent by the authorities that were supposed to manage this crisis?

Crises always show where the strengths and weaknesses of a state lie, Ana Racu emphasised. 'There were initiatives and things done well and with good intentions, but there were also many contradictory things and insufficient efforts, in situations when it was not about money, but about informing or setting positive examples that should have come from political leaders. The fact that the country's leaders did not themselves comply with the conditions they imposed generated a series of negative examples in society that were followed very quickly.'

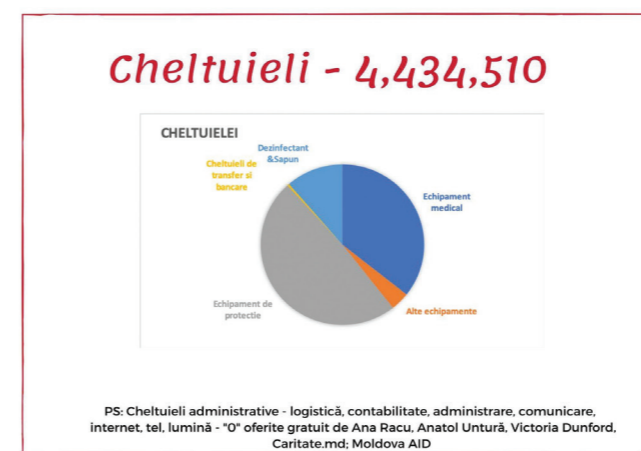
Against the background of distrust towards the authorities of different levels, the chances are that the



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Ventilator Hamilton C-1 va fi livrat	5 ECG MAC 800 cu Interprețarea și ECG 12 leads IMPS Spitalul Clinic Bălți - 1 unitate 2. IMPS Covid-19 - 5 unit.	Monitor-Defibrilator 1. IMPS Covid-19
Ventilator Hamilton C-6 Institutul de Medicină de Urgență	Analizator Hematologic-1 Spitalul Toma Ciorbă	Videolaringoscop 1. Spitalul Clinic Bălți 2. Spitalul Comrat
Concentrator de oxigen 1. Spitalul Comrat 2. Spitalul de boli contagioase copii La Spitalul Arhanghelul Mihail 4. Spitalul raional Drochia	Pulsometru H100B-3 Pulsometru de buzunar- 10 1. Spitalul de urgență 2. Spitalul din Comrat 3. Spitalul clinic Bălți	



civil society will fill certain failures or gaps of the authorities. 'In our situation, when things are literally "between life and death", it is just like in the saying that God helps those who help themselves.' But how much strength does the Moldovan society have left to help itself, in the conditions of an almost general depression and apathy that was also felt among the civil society?

'This feeling of *learned helplessness* prevails in the Moldovan society – no one wants to do anything anymore because they feel that the effort is in vain. The good part is that there will always be people who will try to inspire – a responsible mayor, a community leader or a priest who conveys the right messages. Examples of successful projects are needed to prove that 'it is possible' and to encourage other initiatives. Besides, people need to understand that they have a personal responsibility for the state of affairs around them', says Ana Racu. The activist notes that one of the criticisms she received in connection with this campaign was excessive media coverage and the fact that 'charity should be done without attracting too much attention'. 'I would agree with this opinion if it were exclusively my money. But we received donations from a lot of people who placed their confidence in us and just wanted to make sure their money were spent accordingly. So we paid a lot of attention to the transparency of every penny. In addition, charities of this kind encourage other initiatives, mobilize other people who want to help, prove that 'it is possible', points out Ana Racu.

What else can the civil society do at present?

There are many things that can be done in a professional and smart way. Starting with awareness-raising campaigns and shows, generating discussions to combat conspiracy theories or fake news and trying to open a dialogue with the most fanatical and lost in their theories of scepticism against Covid and finishing with charitable actions for lonely old people, people with advanced chronic diseases, other categories that even before the pandemic were not cared for by the state; provision of social services...

'Therefore, I believe that we still have reserves of enthusiasm and, of course, energy. The magic of a warm lunch, of a good word, of emotional support is the solution, even for overcoming this seemingly all-encompassing depression in the Moldovan society', concluded Ana Racu, one of the initiators of the 'Together for you!' initiative.

The Ave-Copiii Association, located within few minutes walk from the Chisinau Emergency Hospital, was forced to close its day patient facility for children and adolescents immediately after the pandemic outbreak. A few weeks later, doctors from the emergency hospital moved into the deserted house with

the inner courtyard, which has since become Covid hospital. In this way, the non-governmental organisation decided to support the medical system and its employees who could no longer live at home because of the risk of infecting their family members. Thus, the association's premises provide to date up to 15 accommodation places for the frontline doctors.

Mariana Ianachevici, director of the Ave-Copiii association, says that helping doctors is one of the great moral satisfactions of the team she leads, in addition to supporting over 130 children and young people she monitors and the 14 teenagers in the care of the association who graduated from vocational schools this year.

'For us, it was a moment of satisfaction that we were able to lend a helping hand to the frontline doctors in this crisis. In March, we had to rethink our projects for working with children and adolescents, moving them online. At one point we started wondering about how useful and efficient what we do really is – if all we are doing is just 'moving the papers around'. So the offer we made to the doctors was a project from the heart.'

'I learned to understand the evolution of the pandemic judging by their faces. There is no need for me to ask them how things are and how many infected people they have. Or if they are over-exhausted, too tired. For example, if the doctor is standing outside with an absent look drinking his coffee, then it is clear that things are not going very well', Mariana Ianachevici said.

Ave-Copiii's director says that the initiatives of the civil society, welcome and desirable, should have been an effort made at the beginning of the pandemic. They should have given the authorities time to organise themselves and think about a more effective crisis management. This, however, never happened. We took on a lot, we quickly solved a multitude of problems that the state takes much longer to solve. However, we were far too silent and did not demand of the authorities maximum mobilization. We should have made the time to talk much more about what we were doing and to demand of the Government a concrete plan of response to the pandemic and concrete actions', Mariana Ianachevici pointed out.

'We did not make time to have a dialogue with the authorities and to tell them frankly: "We can now, as a matter of urgency, take upon ourselves many things that you won't manage to do. But in the meantime you, the authorities, need to reconfigure your budget, procedures, processes. And for that you only have a month or two."

We, however, have stepped up and completely replaced the state on the side related to social aspects, supplies... The authorities can count on the resources of civil society and its flexibility, but only for a short time and during this time must have the ability to reconfigure their procedures. For example, we have case management for the social side related to children, which is a working algorithm for the social worker.

As part of it, social workers should have been provided guidelines for situations like, for example, when children are left alone at home because their parents were hospitalized with Covid-19. And we found that the social worker assigned to them only called them, because they were in quarantine themselves. So there were no clear procedures for such unusual but real situations that affect the lives of concrete people.

Another example: in Chisinau, the Street Aid Service did not work during the two months of the spring emergency. In my opinion, this is a service that should have worked like 112, given that the street children continued to live on the streets', Mariana Ianachevici said.

'So, we should have had a say in relation to authorities and, probably, to say it a little louder, in a clear-cut manner. And the authorities, who generally do not pay much attention to what society has to say, have become accustomed to the fact that we, the civil society, are obedient and silent and do our job', the director of Ave-Copiii said.



Regarding the confusing message of the authorities, especially when it comes to wearing masks and complying with the quarantine rules, Mariana Ianachevici said that very strict rules were imposed from the beginning in her organization – the obligation to wear masks and gloves, use disinfectants, working remotely and trying to avoid public transport. 'We are lucky to have these great partners in Italy, who told us frankly from the beginning: "This is going to last. Until the vaccine comes out – we're not getting out of it. It is important that you take care of yourselves!" But for people who do not have much access to information and who are eager to put someone on a pedestal, the messages of the authorities were particularly harmful', Mariana Ianachevici said.

As for the things the civil society can do in the current context, the activist said that Ave-Copiii intends to continue the projects started before Covid, only that its activities will have to be adapted to the new reality. 'Let us not end up thinking that we no longer need to help poor children go back to school. Let us not end up thinking that there is no need for much information, awareness-raising about violence. So, we put on gloves, we wear masks, we keep our distance, we always bring the disinfectant with us, we move online.'

Mariana Ianachevici also has suggestions for the authorities. 'They must adapt to new realities as soon as possible and minimize physical contact and avoid printed paperwork if electronic options are available. We should have scolded them a long time ago.'

The Tax Inspectorate is long overdue to issue a number of new work instructions and methods, not simply "keep your distance from the counter", because that is not the (only) important thing. It is important, for instance, for accountants that in the conditions of the pandemic the delivery and acceptance certificate could be developed electronically and not mandatorily in paper format.'

I also asked Mariana Ianachevici why many people in Moldova have the feeling that 'we are left on our own'.

'Because we are really left on our own. Patients are often not hospitalized or are admitted too late when their lungs are already affected. Because the messages of the authorities are confusing, contradictory and not-well-thought-out. Because the authorities prefer to use a dry, formal language, which the common man does not understand. That's why we feel left on our own... Because the authorities do not do things right, because they talk badly to people, because they give confusing messages. And then, how do they want people to follow the rules, when they themselves do not follow them, if they themselves promote the double standard? Half-measures yield half the result or even less. So we are where we are now', concludes Mariana Ianachevici, director of the Ave-Copiii association.

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Images sources: Facebook pages of the campaign **Together for you!** and of the Association for Child and Family Empowerment 'AVE Copiii'

Source: <https://www.lidmoldova.org/en/news/lectiile-pandemiei-pentru-societatea-civila-din-republica-moldova>





ELECTORS VS VOTERS – THE US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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VLAD LUPAN
INDEPENDENT EXPERT.
EX-DIPLOMAT

[ANALYSIS Bulletin No 6] Vlad Lupan | The US election enters homestretch. On November 3rd, not only the US President is going to be elected, but also a third of the Senate, as well as all the delegates from the House of Representatives – the ‘lower’ chamber of the American parliamentary system. The Republicans are considering electoral and post-election options, including holding repeated elections. The Democrats currently follow the traditional campaign formula, although, in our opinion, they show interest in the influence that protests in US can have on voters.

Online voting in federal elections is prohibited. In-person voting will take place on 3 November. One subject of disagreement in these elections is mail-in voting. This type of voting begins on 24 October and has already been declared ‘a rigged election’ by President Trump, as early as this spring, long before the election. In addition, and in line with the traditional Republican ‘justification’, the President

‘just asked’ whether the election day could not be postponed due to the pandemic – the justification used implies that he could only ask because he has no legal authority to change that date. So, according to Republican supporters, we must conclude that any speculations about a possible wish for such an undemocratic transfer are just speculations. The pandemic is indeed dangerous and could justify such a transfer. But taking into account that President Trump ‘just asked’ if doctors can give chlorine to COVID-19

patients, it is clear that he is not aware of all ins and outs, either medical or legal, of such “questions”, yet he would have wanted such a development. We could assume that, through such ‘questions’, the President could undermine his credibility and, therefore, the actual chances for such a voting date transfer.

There are two other obstacles – firstly the possibility of electoral losses due to an ‘anti-democracy’ image among undecided voters and, secondly, due to legal matters, a factor we will explain in the conclusions. In our opinion, this ‘just asking’ was, in fact, putting out fillers and it is absolutely obvious that it is a part of the electoral tactics of the Republican leader. Let us also note, from a chronological perspective, that the ‘question’ regarding changing the election date was posted on Twitter immediately the day after George Floyd’s death, i.e. before the widespread media coverage of the case and the mass protests and violence during these protests.

Although the leader of the Republican Party declared in advance the elections as rigged, this party actually controls the US Postal Service – not the electoral commissions though and, most importantly, the votes of electors and voters. As mentioned earlier, the electors “chosen” by vote ultimately decide who will be the President of the United States. As to the “rigged elections”, it is obvious that there could be no evidence of a presupposed future fraud. Anyway, even if such an ‘electoral-preventive’ statement is characteristic of the current Republican leader, it is based on a problem in part related to some difficulties in identification of voters by mail, and even those voting in person – only 2/3 of the US states require an ID at the voting polls.

However, there are other legal nuances that diminish such concerns – such as a number of rules in place in various States that minimize fraudulent voting. Still, even if we put aside the mail-in voting issue, president’s voters blindly believe what he says – we witnessed a dialogue in a mall, where a young Orthodox religious voter, supporter of the Republican party, could not explain to a pro-Biden Hispanic voter why there was a possibility of fraud, but he still believed in it. For this reason, the Democrats have tried to portray the Republican party cohesion as a ‘cult’. Of course, the Democrats have somewhat similar cases, as well as discipline, but they are supported by most of the media in the United States, which limits the negative impact on the party they support. Nonetheless, the conspiracy theories propagated by Republicans can easily create a much worse impression than democratic ‘interpretations’, some of which are often reasonable and correct as things stand now.

However, there is a new and real concern, rightly mentioned by Republicans, about mail-in voting – the complications of verifying and counting all the mail votes, since their number is going to be bigger than usual. Let us return, however, to the fraud that does not yet exist – such a statement is nothing more than a ‘preventive’ communication, part of the electoral strategy of Donald Trump’s team. This shows that he discussed several electoral and post-election options, even ‘bypassing’ the election results, and prepared the ground for such options. On the other hand, Joe Biden’s campaign is run in quite a usual way, including the condemnation of Antifa and the violence during the protests that began with the death of George Floyd, whose family Biden visited. This act was immediately repor-





ted in the media, in the middle of the election campaign. However, in our view, what really is really happening behind the showdown, is that a morally correct movement of peaceful protesters opened the door to street violence and banditry, sometimes among far-left Democrat voters, no matter how 'out-of-ordinary' they may be.

Thus, the election campaign was running its course against the backdrop of ongoing protests and violence in a number of American cities. As it was easily predictable, Floyd's death and racial discrimination indeed became one of the main electoral topics in the 2020 US elections. But the goal of the contending parties remains the same – victory in elections. They need to strengthen their electoral base and win the votes of swing states and they cannot achieve this only by addressing the issue of racial equity. Respectively, in August the candidates launched or relaunched their electoral programs, with the help of broadcast conventions, without the presence of public, four days each. To avoid describing the whole four days of electioneering, we will report just some important elements, as a message or as a contrasting view. The programs contain elements related to minorities, topics derived from protests, as well as economic or even electoral matters. Democrats' supporters said the GOP (Republican Party) did not have a new party program at its pre-election convention and focused on supporting the leader, not the principles, compared to the Democrats.

We can see that in this way, without a program, the Republicans may call to mind the image of a personality cult. It is, still, somewhat expected from a ruling party not to come up with an absolutely new program, however the examination of the main topics of the Republican convention shows that the GOP has actually adjusted its previous program, at least in a way.

One of the interesting elements of both conventions was the presentation of voters, who moved from one electoral camp to another or even defecting politicians, implying possible moral and political shortcomings of the opponent party. We will only briefly mention that both the quantity and the 'quality' of the opponents were relatively equal on both sides in terms of the produced effect – although they addressed topics important only for their traditional voters, not the parties they defected from.

As predicted, the Republican election campaign stressed the President Trump's ability to ensure the economic recovery of the United States, especially before the pandemic. At the same time, the GOP capitalized on the population's fear of the violent protests. Here is an example of a strong message, by creating an 'image' of armed violence – the wife of a former police officer killed by criminals in St. Louis saying among other things that her husband was retired and that the looters streamed her husband's execution. Strong emotions were thus elicited. The verification of this shocking statement showed that the former policeman was helping someone to ensure the security of a store, when it was being robbed by bandits. The criminals were black men, the ex-officer too – such an image targets several audience groups, in-

cluding the black people community, police and any voter unsure about these protests, confused about the differences between protesters and criminals. However, the so-called execution video shows the ex-officer already shot, lying on the sidewalk, although still alive – it is filmed post-factum, apparently spontaneously and the recording person is from the Afro-American community, shouting emotionally at the criminals that the policeman is someone's father. Not exactly a streamed execution – but the diffusion at the Republican convention of an aggregated image of 'executions' on the street induces strong emotions and a level of insecurity for any voter who would rather prefer the security offered by the police, which the President's administration supports. The death of the black ex-officer is a tragedy, but, from the point of view of political strategy we find that it was also used in electoral purposes.

Undoubtedly, the family of the deceased police officer considers such a warning, using an image of an 'execution', being true and correct. No one should go through what they did. At the same time, few Republican voters would have verified this information, and even if they did, there is no certainty that they would have taken these nuances into account when making a decision. They might think along the lines that a decent man was intentionally killed by criminals during the protests, not that there wasn't a streamed execution, and would certainly rally around President Trump. As it is often said, 'fear is a powerful motivator' and the Republican party has used it effectively in this context.

As we mentioned earlier, the democrats chose a more traditional platform, the central topics being related also to the economy, i.e. progressive taxation depending on income, thought also focused on access to the health system, justice in the racial context (of course), education and the return to the system of partnerships in international relations.

However, it were not the positive aspects of the electoral programs that determined the political dynamics lately, rather negative elements of the campaign did. The so-called *political dirt*, including the self-inflicted one, seems to have quite strong effects in the 2020 campaign. This development partly repeats the style of the 2016 campaign, when President Trump ran against the Democrat candidate Hillary Clinton. But, this time, there is an additional element – the self-inflicted 'dirt'. In 2016, the Republican candidate claimed that the Democrat violated laws, starting with keeping confidential emails on a private server to transferring US shares from a Canadian uranium mining company to the Russian nuclear energy corporation Rosatom, for example. Then and now Trump resorts to political name-calling, accepted by a part of his electorate as easy-to-use election slogans, difficult to counter if repeated without the right of reply, in the style of the GOP candidate. This hyper-competitive attitude, labelled by the left and long before the elections by former Republican experts as man-child like, did not produce the same results in 2020. At least not as expected.

Even before the election debates some Republican senators, as well as journalists from the pro-Republican channel Fox were extremely critical of Trump – after the debates, the situation became even worse. Before the debates, a number of Republican representatives expressed their opinion that the party would have lost the elections in all three electoral institutions if the elections were to take place in August. Then two self-inflicted disasters followed – the media critical towards Trump reported that the US President, who apparently rejected the idea to visit an American cemetery in Europe because of the rain, supposedly called the American soldiers killed in wars 'losers', thus partially alienating an important part of his traditional electorate – the military and their families, through a disastrous message revealed before the elections.

The second disaster, the one of the first televised discussion between Trump and Biden followed – that is if Trump's frequent and caustic interjections, including shutting up the moderator from the Fox channel, can be considered discussion.

What is more, during the debates, the US President also poured gas on fire that already has shaken the country, fleeing the explicit condemnation of white racist groups, fact heavily criticized by the Fox correspondent at the White House. In his turn, Biden is hit by his son's emails scandal, as Biden jr was previously employed by a Ukrainian energy company under investigation. We mentioned earlier that the Ukrainian authorities would most likely prefer to avoid falling between the hammer and the anvil in the political struggle between the GOP and Democrats. Kyiv would not want to lose both parties' support for US military assistance, while Ukraine is fighting a war. Yet, the scandal erupted after an email disclosure, according to which Joe Biden's son arranged meetings for an employee of that company already under investigation, to meet his father, US Vice President at that time, i.e. an attempt of influence peddling. Interestingly, the emails regarding the involvement of Biden's son with the Ukrainian company 'Burisma'

were recovered from a laptop, dropped off at a repair shop, somewhere in New Jersey. The owner of this laptop, says the pro-Republican newspaper New York Post, never came back for his laptop and did not respond to requests for its retrieval. We do not know how true these statements of the NY Post are, but the laptop's hard drive was sent to Rudi Giuliani, Donald Trump's lawyer. The former Mayor of New York City, as well as the former head of the pro-Russian Yanukovich's election campaign, both had direct contact with the Russians. More than that he was encouraged by presumed FSB agents, regarding the disclosure of these emails. Furthermore, Twitter and Facebook blocked the emails' publication by the pro-Republican newspaper New York Post on their platforms, to avoid the publication of material that the social media platforms deemed as obtained through cyber-attacks. NY Post obviously countered that by saying that it was obtained as a result of a laptop abandonment. In the end of all this "X said vs Z said", we conclude that after the publication of this electoral 'dirt' some people in Moscow are pleased, and, at the same time, the original article in the New York Post, disclosing the emails, was viewed five million times.

The above developments demonstrate the turns, mistakes and political tactics of the campaign. Since an election campaign is a living process, here are some conclusions we could draw on this last hundred meters.

I. NO BUSINESS AS USUAL

To begin with, apparently the Republican victory in 2016 came after two democratic governments, on the wave of traditional 'fatigues' of the electorate after any two consecutive governments. However, the Republican election campaign was different, more populist. The fact is that obviously a pro-populist voting, observable around the world, denotes a more serious problem – the voters are tired of formal 'politics as usual', a good part of which often eludes the uninformed voter. However, this does not mean that politics should be populist. To make this conclusion more understandable, we'll remember the Russian Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, who used to go to election meetings, where he spoke about Russia's macroeconomic growth and provoked a remark of a simple voter to a correspondent of the Russian newspaper Kommersant, if we recall correctly, according to which Gaidar 'speaks nicely, it's a pity I don't understand anything'...

II. THE DANGER OF KEEPING TO THE LETTER OF THE LAW, BUT NOT TO ITS SPIRIT

Secondly, one of the messages at the Republican pre-election convention was: let no one tell us, from outside or inside, how to elect and be elected – the current system has provided us with free elections for a very long time. In the current context, the history of segregation was not mentioned. This message of preserving the electoral system and respectively the laws governing it, launched at the August convention, provoked our curiosity. Later we found out about the option to 'bypass' the election results, since the law allows such an option and the convention statement "clicked" into place

Those who have worked in election campaigns know that any political force discusses electoral options, as diverse as possible, in order to find possible, even unusual, ways to win. However, in President's Trump campaign context, we will also mention the aspect of the law in the construction business in New York – where the US President comes from. In the past, while we were still holding an official position in New York, we have witnessed the demolition of a building next to a diplomatic mission, without the consent of the representation or in line with the ecological permits of the municipality. Following discussions with a group of dedicated lawyers, who decided to help the mission pro-bono, we learned that the construction business representatives generally do not mind to violate regulations and legislation, then paying fines, only to make sure that the lot or construction is handed over quicker and the profit is earned faster. Therefore, such secondary legislation for these businesses is not the supremacy of the rule of law preached by American diplomats, albeit in a different context. At this point I would suggest an important observation - thus, some of these businessmen do not seem to see an important distinction between the secondary, construction related, and the national or international legislation and its violation, having the classic New York answer at the ready: 'and what can they do to me?'

So, the Republican idea of the appointment of electors by the US states, instead of them being elected, may be convenient, if there were suspicions that the number of pro-democrat voters in the 'red' Republican states would be too big. According to the US constitution, this would be legal, but if something like this were to happen in any other country, the American observers regardless of party affiliation, together

with their partners from other democratic states, in the International Election Observation Missions, would most likely find that such an approach corresponds to the letter of the law, but not to its spirit. Such a development would open the door for undemocratic states to conduct elections or intervene in the elections of others, if there are loopholes in the law, without departing from the letter of the law.

III. 'RISKS' EXIST IN BOTH POLITICAL CAMPS. HERE ARE SOME:

1) Republicans could continue the policy of partial self-isolation, a modified Monroe doctrine, in the name of the reasonable spending of US resources. Their country, they would suggest, cannot afford and is not able to defend everyone, nor should it, at least not without profit. The idea of US self-isolation is also popular in certain academic circles, which most seriously discuss it on both side of the political spectrum, without offering ideas on how, for example, democracies can grow, including economically, without partnerships. From our observations, as well as from empirical data, we see that such a growth or return to democracy and well-being of Post-World War II Germany would have been impossible. The same goes for the current EU member and NATO – Estonia – after the fall of the USSR. In the same way, the loss of US' European partners led Japan and Germany to the doorsteps of the US in World War II. But this risk is of an external nature, less important for the Republican electorate, which in 2018 launched the slogan 'better Russian than Democrat', ignoring the clearly visible and serious external dangers, for the sake of the internal logic of the party.

2) The risk associated with Democrats acceding to power is of a different, somewhat more internal nature. They are internationalists, with their peculiarities in that, yet Russia has attacked their candidate in 2016. So, they no longer actively support an almost unconditional resumption of relations with Moscow, as they did before. There are nuances in how they see their relations with, for example China or Iran, but at the same time there were also questions about their determination to help Syrians or Eastern Europeans with more than statements or sanctions in the past. However, the partial "risk" for the American voter is that domestically Democrats stick to the traditional policy of over-taxation and income redistribution, which we would exaggeratedly call "robinhoodian". Obviously, they have a strong argument about progressive taxation, depending on income, but the alternations of power in the world have often shown that when Social Democrats or Social Liberals departed from power, including in the US, the budget was left overstretched, and the business sector, including the small and medium enterprises, shrunken. There were exceptions, but the rule is generally valid, thanks to such a robinhoodian taxation program – in the end you can't take the same money more than once. To build hospitals you need to tax the businesses, which cannot be done if this sector is shrinking...

IV. SURVEYS ARE APPROXIMATE IN THE US AS WELL

The phenomenon of the margin of error higher than stated in public opinion polls is well known in Eastern Europe. Since 2016 it is a topic also discussed in the United States and in 2020 the media reported in all seriousness about a survey that showed that 52% of respondents did not believe polls were accurate. Ironic isn't it? The leading polling company, Pew Research, showed that there are cases where the margin of error in some polls can be twice higher than declared. For instance, in the 2016 election Hillary Clinton was winning in polls, but lost the electors' vote. For this reason, in our previous analysis we indicated that the American system would depend on the electors. We saw that the Republicans focused on such a scenario. We do not know if Democrats have prepared countermeasures.

A former Republican adviser mentioned in August 2020 that polls cannot take into account the real level of support for President Trump, which may be higher. However, we recall that in the meantime 'debates' were held, as well as that there was a blunder with military called 'losers' – things that apparently might scare off some undecided voters, causing a loss of popularity for Donald Trump. So, in short, without going into details about the comparative and quantitative analysis to determine voter preferences, we can suggest that the trends seem to be pointing to a certain winning margin for Joe Biden, at least for now. But the impact of the email scandal – as in the case of Hillary Clinton – is still unknown, as is the tendency of voters to support a President in office. There is a possibility that the scandal of Biden's son email leaks have been accounted for, yet the emails have only appeared now and didn't have time or a medium to spread. Hence, it is not clear if the email scandal is going to have a more serious impact on the swing voters.

It is possible that mail-in voting and vote counting errors could present challenges mainly for Biden, and somewhat less for Trump, perhaps even greater than the margins of error in the polls. The situation

remains unclear, and some media outlets, which we may be considered Democratic-leaning, expressed their concern that there are other hidden factors that could lead to a new Trump's victory – last minute voting in person of Republican voters or preventing mail-in voting by local courts.

Such elements as an electorate focused on a current leader figure, already in power, as well as the fact that they tend not to disclose their real position in the polls, are parts of the current US political culture, important to consider.

V. QUESTIONS – DO WE FACE THE RISE AND FALL OF A GREAT POWER OR NOT YET? OR WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE TO US?

The current American electoral system favors clear and simple messages from both sides of the political spectrum. Yet, the increasing role of political 'dirt', though present at any time in any campaign, still raises questions. These questions are related not only to the "quality" of the electorate, but also to American political elites, suspected of poor education, unfounded and dangerous strategic decisions or, on another side favoritism, so criticized by American diplomats in other parts of the world. Obviously, any such suspicion diminishes US's chances of being listened to, and not just 'because of the GOP'. The questions for those outside the US, but also for those in the US could be:

- Whom then the states in transition will 'listen to' and what about non-democracies? Do the regimes get free rein and what would such a future look like for US interests?
- What conclusions will the world draw from of all the 'dirt' revelations concerning the American left and right wing?
- With all these concerns, how can the situation be remedied – in the US or outside the US?
- Is there another stakeholder ready to take over the torch of the Statue of Liberty, or 'there is really no one to call in Europe', even if EU says otherwise.

Eventually, there is much more to say about the US elections. In the run-up to any elections the polarization increases dramatically and the extremes are more prominent. These mostly calm down after the elections. Perhaps we should not dramatize the current developments – however, we should certainly draw the necessary lessons from each election, including this one, be these elections in the US or elsewhere. In this context, let us recall the old Romanian proverb: 'Every bitter experience is a learning opportunity'.

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YOU CANNOT FIGHT DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY WITH RUBBER BULLETS: THE SURPRISING RISE OF THE PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT IN BELARUS

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[ANALYSIS Bulletin No. 6] Sven Gerst | In the early phases of the Internet, tech optimists predicted that the widespread availability of new communication platforms will eventually lead to a new wave of democratization and civic empowerment. However, recent developments have not only challenged this storyline; but shown reverse effects. Authoritarian regimes – most notably China and Russia – have used digital technology to extend their social and political reach and bolster surveillance, the persecution of citizens, and the spread of propaganda and disinformation.

And it could even be argued that it was precisely those digital technologies that allowed such regimes to turn declining democracies into the full-fledged autocracies that they are now.[1] However, these observations should also not tempt us to turn into tech pessimists. Because there is Belarus – where decentralized messaging apps gave rise to a democratic revolution in the most unlikely of all places.



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Of course, by now so-called Twitter Revolutions are nothing new. We have seen them all around the world – from Moldova to Taiwan to the Middle East. But there are some particularities that make Belarus a curious case study. Because one of the best explanations for this sudden (and certainly unexpected) formation of a large-scale pro-democracy movement can be found in the analysis of the intersection between political organization and technology.

TRADITIONAL FORMS OF RESISTANCE UNDER AUTHORITARIANISM

Unlike in liberal democracies, opposition and dissident movements in authoritarian political contexts traditionally organize themselves under the banner of a leader figure. In other words, strongman leaders usually get challenged by other strong, charismatic leaders. This has various reasons. Most notably the fact that dictatorships tend to not only to consolidate power in favor of a specific position but also create a so-called Cult of Personality.[2]

In such highly personalized political environments, opposition movements are coordinated via hierarchical structures – where the leader figure is operating as the focal point of uniting collective political efforts. While such centralized structures allow for streamlined communication as well as effective and efficient coordination, they also suffer from their inherent reliance on individual leaders.

Therefore, it is unsurprising that authoritarian regimes have often countered such movements by attacking their central coordination points through preemptive repression and/or isolation of their leaders. In fact, such dynamics have dominated the political landscape in Belarus ever since its independence in 1994. Whenever potential challengers to Lukashenko were about to rise and gain traction, the regime channeled its efforts to remove those public leaders and most often forced them into exile.

THE EMERGENCE OF NETWORKED PROTESTS

While hierarchical movements remain the dominant form of political coordination in authoritarian societies, the advent of digital communication technology – such as social media platforms or direct messaging apps – gave rise to new forms of social coordination: **Networked Protest**.[3]

For example, the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine that sparked in 2013 were able to induce political change without traditional elements of centralized leadership. Instead, the movement heavily relied on the decentralized efforts of a widespread network of political, civic, and cultural groups loosely connected via digital communication platforms.[4]

While such non-hierarchical forms of social coordination often suffer from mixed messaging and a lack of formal representation, the Euromaidan movement was able to achieve what traditional hierarchical

structures were unable to accomplish. However, such success stories should not get us too hopeful. Similar protests in Turkey (i.e. Gezi Park Protests) and the Middle East (i.e. Arab Spring) were unable to deliver lasting change despite their ability to mass mobilize via Twitter and Facebook.

THE POWERS & WEAKNESSES OF NETWORKED PROTESTS

Obviously, there is much more to say about networked protests.[5] However, this short glimpse into the very nature of political action should have revealed that organizational structures play a crucial role in a movement’s ability to realize its goals. While hierarchical opposition movements have been able to pose serious threats to strongman leaderships, authoritarian regimes have adapted to those challenges and developed expertise, strategies, and capacities to counter such dissident movements effectively.

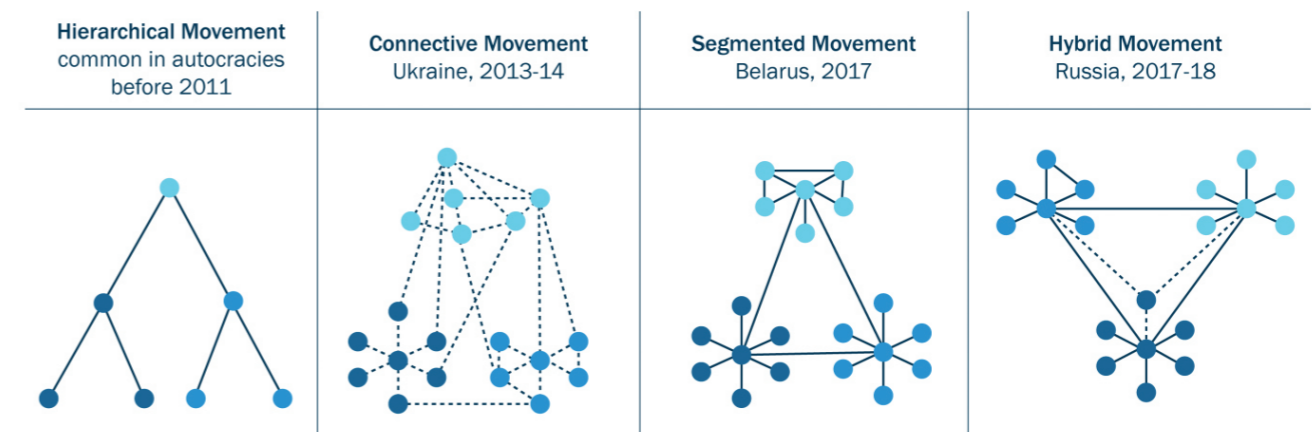
Networked Protests that are organized via multiple nodes of coordination and connected via digital communication technology do not suffer from such vulnerabilities. Due to their decentralized structures, they tend to be much more robust and less prone to be toppled by outside attacks. However, connective movements face other important challenges. While Networked Protests are a very powerful tool of mass mobilization due to the speed and reach of their digital infrastructure, it is this very disruptive potential that often conceal and distract from a lack of internal capacities.

Connective movements tend to overestimate their own capacities and are governed by constant ad hoc adjustments undermining the long-term outlook and prospects. It seems that in the age of social media, the amount of people that one can bring to the streets is not necessarily an indicator of the strength of a campaign anymore. Moreover, Networked Protests lack shared deliberation and decision-making experience and therefore tend to struggle at the first serious roadblocks – such as settling for a common agenda or spokesperson.

THE BELARUSIAN UPDATE TO NETWORKED PROTESTS: THE HYBRID MODEL

Now back to Belarus. Because what we have observed during the presidential race in Belarus in 2020 combines all these insights. When with Viktor Babaryka a new strong challenger emerged in the presidential bid this year, the Lukashenko regime countered this movement through the usual tactics – and detained Babaryka based on allegation of money laundering. However, the authorities (as well as political commentators) did not take into consideration that in meantime a powerful digital infrastructure has emerged in the country: Due to the infamous mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic by the government[6], Belarusians have created crowdfunding platforms and Telegram groups that connected regime-critical forces already prior to the presidential race.

Figure 1. Four Types of Movements.



Note. Nodes represent members or groups within a movement. Lines represent ties between members or groups such as decision-making powers, information exchange, visits, and flow of resources. Full lines show stronger ties. Dashed lines represent weaker or less stable ties. The latter can help a hybrid organization to recentralize its structure.

In the aftermath of the Babaryka arrest, these digital tools turned political. And the (more or less) accidental bid of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the wife of an also detained video blogger, was able to weaponize this digital infrastructure.

The biggest telegram channel NEXTA reached almost 2 million subscribers within weeks. What emerged can be best described as a hybrid model of decentralized communication hubs amplifying the message of a strong leader figure. This allowed Tsikhanouskaya to launch an unprecedented opposition campaign basically overnight. In addition, this pro-democracy movement was able to maintain its strength even when Tsikhanouskaya was forced into exile right after the elections due to its decentralized nature. Of course, removing the central figurehead led to internal disputes amongst the radical and moderate fractions of the movement; nevertheless, it was still able to bring hundreds of thousands of protestors to the street each week – to bridge the time before a new leading figure could emerge.

It is still too early to tell the tale, but the hybrid model of the Belarusian protests has shown how effective resistance in an authoritarian context can look like: combining traditional elements of political leadership with a decentralized digital communication infrastructure. And it is to be expected that more such structures will emerge in autocracies all around the world rather soon, as it is much needed.

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