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Management of the Risks of Covid-19 - the Role of the Slovene government and National Assembly during its First and Second Wave in 2020 and 2021.

Abstract



This paper explores the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health of the population, having also strong effects on the national economy and social situation of large groups of population. In extraordinary circumstances a huge shift of power between constitutionally determined branches of power occurred demanding changes in the fulfilment of their functions. The paper is presenting the factors which contributed to the relatively successful adaptation of the government and National Assembly to pandemic during the First and Second Wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, it is pointing to particularly strong political polarization leading to diminishing stability of the government. The paper addresses deficiencies in communication between the government and National Assembly and the citizens, as demonstrated by the dramatic decrease of the positive evaluations of both sides. This could be a potential sign of a process of 'deparlamentarization' in a longer period, as similarly displayed in other Central European countries. The paper is a contribution to the

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research of the disastrous consequences of the pandemic on contemporary states and provides comparative material for future research on the new field of political science.

Keywords:



Covid-19 pandemic, risk management, government response, Slovenia

Introduction

Amongst the potential unprecedented events that could have strong effects on contemporary states, pandemics are one of the most dangerous. Historical experiences, such as the 'Spanish flu' at the end of World War I, have proven that ignoring or underestimating a pandemic could have catastrophic consequences for an entire population's health. (Cirillo and Taleb, 2020: 7). Pandemics have disastrous effects on a state's economy and social conditions, whilst bringing shifts of power between parliaments and the executives. Containing such diseases demands a responsible management of great risks, by preparing appropriate procedures and taking timely measures with efficient control of their implementation (Flivjberg, 2020: 3).

In the 21st Century governments and national parliaments were unprepared for an outburst of a pandemic. Though epidemiologists predicted it, the pandemic COVID-19 caused a panic reaction (Flivjberg, 2020: 5). A number of governments reacted on the basis of their individual constitutional emergency powers to take urgent independent and authoritative measures to prevent the pandemic's spread and alleviate its consequences. Parliaments adapted to this situation by passing appropriate legislation using fast-tracking procedures, intended primarily to keep a national economy working and alleviate social problems within

the population.² In some countries like Serbia, where the parliaments were subordinated or were temporarily closed a form of serious 'deparliamentarization' occurred (Orlović, 2020: 77), while in more developed countries such as Norway and Sweden, the power of parliaments did not diminish dramatically.³

The outburst of Covid-19 in Slovenia commands particular attention since it is one of new states in East-Central Central Europe. Our investigation is based on the main hypothesis that the effects of the pandemic on a contemporary state depended on the relative level of economic development, quality of democracy and state of law. The second hypothesis is that the Covid-19 crisis strongly affected power relations - while the government in the circumstances of epidemic increased its powers, the role of the parliament (National Assembly) diminished, which in the long term could harm democracy (Pirnat, 2020: 5). At the same time, the outburst of Covid-19 had also a strong impact on government stability, considering political polarization measured by the ideological distances among political parties. The third hypothesis is that the pandemic strongly influenced the manner of communication between a parliament, government and their citizens. The example of the Covid-19 in Slovenia simultaneously enables an evaluation of its complex effects an appreciation of the efficiency of the Slovene government and parliament, in the management of the risks brought by the pandemic. The First Wave of Covid-19 Epidemic in Slovenia

An evaluation of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on individual states and the responses taken against it, must take into consideration that Slovenia is one of the countries on the crossroads between the Central Europe and the Balkans. The former northern republic of Yugoslavia (until 1991) has after a short and successful transition, established new political and economic system, while simultaneously lacking democratic tradition and efficient democratic control (Ferfila, 2010: 29). While the new and renewed political parties were efficient in the first period after independence (Jambreč and Rupel, 2018: 368), they lost substantial support of the voters during the great economic crisis in 2008-2012 when the Slovenian GDP dramatically dropped. As in some other European states, a number of new political parties were formed (Mouri and DeGiorgi, 2015: 2) promising quick solutions for the economic and social problems, thus gaining substantial support of the disappointed voters. Consequently, the capacity of the parties to take parliamentary responsibilities and form stable coalitions diminished (Zajc, 2015: 757).

On the Eight Elections in 2018 to National Assembly (Državni zbor), composed of 90 deputies, based on proportional electoral system with 4% threshold (determined in the Constitution of RS, Art. 80), nine parties

[2] Source: Euroactive, Non-political pan-European Network (www.evroactive.com).

[3] Parliaments in the Pandemics, Research Committee of Legislative Specialists of IPSA, Working Paper No. 1, April 15 2021.

entered the NA, contributing to the considerable fragmentation of the main chamber (the second chamber National Council has limited powers). A minority government was formed by four centre-left parties (Social Democrats, AB Party, LMŠ) and the Democratic Party of Pensioners (DeSUS), with the support of radical leftist party (Levica), which deviated significantly from what the citizens expected and violating the basic assumptions of how a democratic parliament operates. It soon proved to be unable to realize its' own goals and collapsed at the beginning of 2020 because of internal conflicts and poor leadership. Prime Minister M. Šarec resigned in February 2020 and the epidemic Covid-19 had been officially declared on 12th March 2020. The new (fourteenth) coalition government stepped into office on March 13, composed of the four right wing and centre parties Social Democratic Party (SDS), New Slovenia (NSi), Party of Modern Centre (SMC) and DeSUS, under the leadership of the experienced SDS leader J. Janša.

Table 1: Party Composition of the National Assembly of RS in 2018

| Political Parties | % of Votes | Number of Deputies |
|---------------------|------------|--------------------|
| NSi | 7,1 | 7 |
| SDS | 24,9 | 25 |
| SD | 9,9 | 10 |
| DeSUS | 4,9 | 5 |
| SNS | 4,1 | 4 |
| SAB | 5,1 | 5 |
| SMC | 9,7 | 10 |
| LMŠ | 12,6 | 13 |
| Levica | 9,3 | 9 |
| National Minorities | | 2 |
| | | 90 |

Source: Report on the Functioning of the National Assembly in the mandate 2018-2022; First Year.

The new coalition government and National Assembly took the fighting against epidemic as an utmost priority and established close cooperation with the National Institute for Public Health (NIJZ), which has been controlling the epidemiologic situation in Slovenia. On the basis of its constitutional powers and responsibilities determined by the Law on Government (Grad et al., 2016: 497) and the Law on Infective Diseases (passed in 1995), the government immediately took urgent measures to limit the effects of the pandemic on citizen's health. This was in the form of decrees, imposing strict limitations on public life, bringing also severe encroachments on the rights and liberties of the citizens. The first lockdown began on 16th March with the government issuing a decree closing schools, unessential shops, restaurants and public transport. The government also prepared a number of 'intervention' laws for the pan-

demic, introducing them to the National Assembly to be passed mainly by fast-track procedure.

The National Assembly quickly adapted to the pandemic by taking prevention measures including the wearing of the masks and keeping distances among the deputies during the sessions (rearrangement of the sitting order). Parliamentary party groups reached an agreement about the organization of the extraordinary sessions (regular sessions required longer preparations and more efforts) while staff were instructed to work from home. The most important role in this process of adaptation, had the Advisory body of the Speaker composed of the leaders of deputy groups, taking decisions on the type of legislative procedure and the duration of the sessions.⁴

On 7th April 2020 the National Assembly also passed the changes to the Standing Orders allowing to convene sessions by distance with the help of information technology, the National Assembly, thus becoming one of the first 'zoom parliaments' in the EU. On the same session, it passed with an overwhelming majority (66:8) the novel to the Law on referendum, banning the calls for popular voting on most important matters dealing with epidemic which had to be passed and implemented without delay.⁵

Fulfilling its functions under extreme pressure the government introduced step by step several packages of laws. The first package of 'intervention laws' consisting of five different laws, was passed in the National Assembly by fast-track procedure with great majority on the 32nd extraordinary session on 20th March (the National Council restrained itself from using a veto). Among these were the Law on the Extraordinary Measures Regarding the Salaries and Contributions (ZIUPPP), the Law on the Measures Regarding Public Finances (ZIUJP) allowing easier settlement of tax duties, the Law on the Measures Regarding the Agriculture and Food (ZIUPKGP), the Law on Short Term Measures Regarding Judicial and Administrative Actions to Control the Epidemic (ZZUSUDJZ) and the Law on the Measures Intended to Delay the Payments for Credits (ZIUPOK).⁶ On the next 33rd extraordinary session on April 2nd the National Assembly passed by the fast track procedure an additional Law on Intervention Measures to Maintain Working Places (ZIUZEOP), making possible also the compensations to the workers left without active jobs, being on the waiting lists, including the contributions to the social security funds.

[4] Standing Orders of the National Assembly of the RS, N. A. Ljubljana 2014 (Art. 21).

[5] The novel (Art. 21.a) prohibits the referendum on the laws dealing with the defence of the state, national security and natural disasters, including infective diseases.

[6] Source: www.dz-rs.si: Državni zbor (National Assembly), Zakonodaja (Legislation), Sprejeti zakoni (Passed laws).

The government soon prepared and introduced to the National Assembly the second package of three 'intervention' laws intended to manage the effects of the pandemic – the deputies passed the laws on 35th extraordinary session on April 28th by fast-track procedure. The first was the Law to Assure the Additional Liquidity of Economy (ZDLGPE), the second was the Law on the Changes of the Law on Intervention Measures to Restrain the Pandemic and Limit its Consequences (ZIUZEOP-A) with intention to enlarge the number of the persons entitled to get some material supports like most vulnerable groups and the third was the Law on the Changes of the Law on Short Term Measures Regarding the Judicial and Administrative Matters (ZZUSUDJZ-A), bringing some new measures regarding the judicial system and administration. Successful implementation of the measures taken independently by the government and the intervention laws passed in the National Assembly allowed Slovenia to limit the first wave of the pandemic. Based on the professional evaluation of the NIJZ, the government cancelled extraordinary measures on the 15th May and proclaimed the end of the pandemic.

Considering that the measures brought by the first two packages of intervention laws would expire on 31st May, the government quickly prepared the third package of three 'intervention laws' which were passed by fast-track procedure on the 38th extraordinary session of National Assembly on 29th May. The first was the Law on Intervention Measures to Soften and Abolish the Consequences of Pandemic (ZIUOOPE) which made possible the prolongation of state subventions for the employed with shortened working time until the end of 2020. State subventions were extended to the workers waiting for re-opening of their temporarily closed jobs in all economic branches. The second was the Law on the Measures to Dismiss Obstacles for Realization of Important Investments for Restarting Economy (IZOOPIZG). The third was the Law on the Guaranties of the Republic of Slovenia in the European Instrument for Alleviation of the Risks of Unemployment in Extraordinary circumstances – SURE, after the outbreak of epidemic (ZPEIPUTB). As a preparation for possible future challenges the government prepared quickly the fourth package consisting of the Law on the Intervention Measures for Preparation for the Second Wave of Pandemic (ZIUPDV). The law made the prolongation of existing measures possible until September 2020 and transferred the payment of subventions for the quarantine of the workers from employer to the state. The law was passed by fast-track procedure with majority on the 19th regular session on July 9th, the last before the parliamentary summer holidays. The next day the National Assembly adopted a decision banning the claims for referendum on the law.

During the First Wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, starting on March 12. and lasting until May 31, the National Assembly passed 33 laws, among them 13 'intervention' laws prepared by the government in a short time and passed mostly by fast-track procedure on extraordinary session; thus limiting the possibility of in-depth debate or adding addi-

tional amendments.⁷ All of them were of crucial importance for the prevention of the spread of the pandemic, giving particular attention to the medical care of infected persons and to the functioning of the key sectors of economy such as: the preservation of working places and social security to a great number of citizens. These intervention laws and measures were to a great degree, proportional and comparable to the legal acts adopted in the other EU member states, based on their positive effects on the health of the citizens or protection of their national economies (Akirav et al., 2021: 18). The European Commission had all the measures and incentives for the restart of the economy considered as positive.⁸

However, these measures and 'intervention' laws could not dismiss all negative effects of the epidemic on the health condition of entire population, neither eliminate its various influences on economy and social security of citizens in a short time. Sudden shrinking of the economy and an increase of unemployment contributed to the growing dissatisfaction with government and its management of this pandemic. A part of the population reacted by organizing public demonstrations and protests with radical slogans against the urgently implemented, harsh measures and intervention laws. Some anti-vaccination groups verbally and even physically attacked the deputies while they were entering or exiting the National Assembly. Adversarial attitudes also increased in the National Assembly, where the deputies belonging to opposition party groups started debates on the responsibility of the government, for the alleged mismanagement of the epidemic and controversial strategy of vaccination. In order to appease discussions and protect the dignity of the deputies, on 12th June 2020 the Advisory Body of the Speaker on June 12th 2020 unanimously accepted the Ethical Codex of Parliamentarians. The Codex determined the lines and borders of tolerable discussions altogether with some sanctions. Political party groups of oppositions which had little opportunity to present their views or offer amendments to the intervention laws, were also critical of government actions which aimed to control various agencies such as the Slovene Press Agency and the media. During the first wave lasting 80 days, the opposition in the National Assembly used several means of control, in particular debates, and 256 parliamentary questions and two interpellations.⁹

Severe measures taken against the pandemic and a number of 'intervention' laws determining most urgent actions brought positive results and allowed Slovenia to exit the First Wave of pandemic. The government declared its end on 31th May 2020.

[7] Report on the Activity of the National Assembly from January to December 2020. Ljubljana, Državni zbor RS, 2021.

[8] European Commission, Economic forecast for Slovenia, November 5th, 2020.

[9] During the first wave of epidemic in 2020 the parties of opposition introduced interpellations against the ministers - the first on May 4th against the minister for economy Z. Počivalšek and the second on June 9th against minister for internal affairs A. Hojs). Both interpellations were rejected.

Management of the Second Wave of Covid-19 Epidemic

While in the summer of 2020, the First Wave seemed overcome in most European countries, a Second Wave unexpectedly came in autumn. Sudden increase of infections, demonstrated by the exponential growth of the number of the infected persons, created new problems in Slovenia. This demanded new and more efficient measures and 'intervention' laws for protection of public health, functioning of economy and alleviating social problems of large groups of population, especially the most vulnerable including the elderly and unemployed.

Due to their experiences from the first wave, The National Assembly and the Government continued their battle against the epidemic by taking new urgent measures and passing new 'intervention' laws. In September 2020, the government prepared the fifth 'package' intended to protect the national economy and labour market. The Law on the Temporary Measures to Soften and Dismiss the Effects of Covid-19 (ZZUOOP) which was passed in National Assembly by fast-track procedure on the 46th extraordinary session on 15th October ensured the prolongation of subsidies for persons waiting for employment, for self-employed persons remaining without work and additional payments to the overburdened health care workers. Taking in account the increase of infections also occurring in a number of other European states, on 16th October 2020 the government closed schools, limited the movement of people only within counties, closed the pubs and shops with unessential products and stopped public transport (second 'lock-down'). After the meeting with the Advisory group at the Ministry for Health the government on October 19th 2020 proclaimed state of epidemic again. Since there were no signs of improvement, the government extended these measures on 12th November.

To limit the pandemic and reduce negative effects on the economy and social care, the government prepared the sixth 'package' of measures (worth of one billion of EUR). The Law on the Intervention Measures to Soften the Consequences of the Second Wave (ZIUOPDVE) extended the subventions for the persons waiting for active jobs until the end of January 2021, exempted the employed from paying the contributions to pension funds and introduced subventions for the companies and moratorium for credits. This most important law which introduced also drastic sanctions for the organization of public gatherings was passed in National Assembly on the 49th extraordinary session by urgent procedure on November 25th. The government had on the 3rd of December, again prolonged all other measures against the epidemic, and at the same time announced the program of loosening some of them under certain explicit conditions.

In anticipation of possible aggravation of the epidemic the government with the help of the Advisory group at the Ministry for Health

prepared the seventh package of measures. The Law on Intervention Measures to Help the Mitigation of the Consequences of epidemic (ZIUPOPVE), intended to accelerate the formal procedures for obtaining state subsidies and bringing new appropriate measures for regulation of the companies' liquidation procedures, passed in the National Assembly on the 55th extraordinary session on December 30th 2020. Since the deputies decided that the law must enter into force as soon as possible, they passed at the same time with sufficient majority (50:16) a decision banning the demands for a referendum. The law made possible a change in employment legislation (possibility to discharge the employees when they reach requirements for retirement), extended the financing of the fund for non-governmental organizations (NVO) and secured the financial support to the Slovene Press Agency (STA).

In the middle of the worsening of epidemiological situation, the government prepared the key instrument of every government - the State Budget Proposal (2021-2022). The proposal was development oriented but foresaw great deficits in the next years. After an extended debate in the National Assembly, the Law on the Realization of the Budget for Two Years (ZIPRS21/22) was passed by fast-track procedure on the 48th extraordinary session (by distance) on 18th November with majority (49 votes for and 32 against). It passed without amendments from the opposition, criticising the government for its unclear sources of finances and poor control of expenditures. In the same session, the deputies discussed the proposal of the Law on the Finances for the Slovene Armed Forces in the Period 2016-2022 where the opposition expressed critical views regarding the increase of financial means for the army in the time of the pandemic. It was perceived that additional funding was justified as the Slovene army had been insufficiently financed for some time and the law passed on 20th November 2021 (48 votes for and 36 against).

In the continuing Second Wave, on 3rd February 2021 the National Assembly passed the eighth 'package', containing the Law on Additional Measures for Mitigation of the Effects of Covid-19 (ZDUOP). This allowed citizens the prolongation of rights while waiting to resume their jobs, and subventions to persons on reduced working time. In early summer, the government finally prepared the ninth 'package' composed of two 'intervention' laws - The Law on the Intervention Measures for the Help to the Economy and Tourism (ZIUPGT) and The Law on the Urgent Measures on the Field of Health Care (ZNUPZ). Both were passed in National Assembly on 7th July 2021 on extraordinary session by urgent procedure. During the Second Wave of the pandemic, October 2020 - July 2021, the National Assembly passed a total of 97 laws, among them six 'intervention' laws.¹⁰

These new urgent measures taken by government brought severe limitations of public life which encroached on human rights. Without due

[10] <https://iusinfo.si>

government explanation, such measures were ill received by citizens.¹¹ These new intervention laws failed to assure sufficient short-term functioning of the economy and an improvement to social situation of large groups of citizens, thus increasing political opposition. Demonstrations against the harsh measures occurred, mirroring the public protests happening occasionally also in other EU countries (Spain, France, Italy etc.). Adversarial positions strengthened in the National Assembly between party groups of coalition and opposition, blocking the possibilities of political bargaining to find positive solutions in common interest.

The government received majority support in the National Assembly until the end of the 2020 when the coalition partner DeSUS suddenly stepped out on 17th December, unsatisfied with its' role in the government and the dominance of the SDS within it. Though the government formally turned into a minority government, it was further supported by the members of DeSUS, Slovene National Party (SNS) and the two deputies of national minorities. Stability was tested again by the constructive no-confidence motion, introduced by the four left wing parties (KUL) on February 2021. However, the motion was rejected at the extraordinary session of National Assembly on 15th February. The operational capacity of the minority coalition government was demonstrated by the election of a new Minister for Health J. Poklukar, by a majority (50: 31 against) on 23rd February 2021. Several new interpellations were introduced by the parties of opposition in March, intending to overthrow the government and call for new elections, however they failed to get sufficient support.¹² Meanwhile, the stability of the government was questioned when three deputies of SMC party, members of coalition government, stepped out of the party and established a new deputy group on 30th March. Since the Speaker of the National Assembly (I. Zorčič) belonged to this group, the coalition introduced the motion to dismiss him. Following two failed attempts, a particular cohabitation appeared among the Government and the Speaker belonging to an independent deputy group. As a result of growing political differences regarding the handling of the pandemic on 2nd April 2021, the opposition parties introduced the motion of impeachment of the Prime Minister which did not get necessary support. The operational capacity of the Government was finally demonstrated in the Spring 2021 when two new ministers were elected in the National

[11] Regular monthly research of public opinion showed dramatic decrease of positive evaluations of the government and National Assembly – positive evaluation of the government diminished from April 2020 to April 2021 by half, while the positive evaluations of the National Assembly diminished even more. Institute for the Research of the Market and Medias, d.o.o., Ljubljana, July 2021.

[12] The first interpellation was against the Minister for education and sport dr. Simona Kustec, rejected on the 65th extraordinary session on the 15th of March. The second was interpellation was against the Minister for work, family and social conditions J. Cigler-Kralj, rejected on the 66th extraordinary session on the 18th of March and the third was against the Minister for culture V. Simoniti, rejected on the 67th session on 23rd of March.

Assembly - a new minister of Justice M. Dikavčič (15th June) and new minister for digitalization M. Andrijanič (15th July).

Since a number of measures taken against the pandemic did not bring expected results, new even stronger temporary measures were taken closing public life from 1st April - 12th April 2021 in a third lockdown. As per the reduction in positive Covid-19 test results, the restrictions started to be lifted. In April and May, Slovenia slowly moved towards the green zone, while the state of epidemic was formally dismissed after 239 days by the decree of the government on 15th of June 2021.

Conclusion

a) The pandemic outburst of Covid-19 at the beginning of 2020 brought great risks to modern states and their political elites. It affected the health of entire populations, caused shrinking of national economies comparable to the economic crisis in the period 2008-2014 (Zajc, 2015: 175) and affected the functioning of political systems. The pandemic exposed the difference between liberal democracies and the increasingly autocratically ruled countries (China, Russia). The responses of individual states to the pandemic depended on background factors such as levels of economic development (wealth expressed in GDP), degrees of freedom and democracy and respect of law; and taking into account the type of governmental system and the institutional character of parliament (Akirav et al.; 2021: 4). Countries took various approaches and steps to handle the pandemic with their governments taking different measures in the form of decrees and orders, trying at the same time to increase their power. The parliaments passed legislative acts or packages of acts (laws), preventing the virus spread and dismissing the effects of the pandemic on different fields of work. Most of the parliaments actively performed their control function, while positive communication with citizens was difficult and inefficient.

b) Slovenia which experienced painful but successful transition from the former communist system to an independent state at the beginning of the nineties, was among the European countries strongly hit by the epidemic. This unexpected shock affected multiple areas and produced a substantial transfer of power from the National Assembly to the government, comparable to the shifts of power in some other developed countries measured by GDP. Slovenia's government and National Assembly adapted to the new situation by immediate organizational adjustments and procedural changes including online participation. Restrictions and limitations were passed and implemented in a formal way by democratic procedures. However, the extraordinary-circumstances of the pandemic were also used to increase the formal power of the executive. Such attempts of 'power grabs' occurred similarly to the attempts made in other countries (Akirav et al.: 2021: 6). Because of the urgency of responses,

many measures were adopted without time to carefully consider the possible alternatives, or foresee all possible negative consequences, in some intervention laws changes were added having no connection with the disease. Planning of the sessions and procedures was efficiently managed by the Advisory body of the Speaker. Legislative output of the National Assembly in these extraordinary circumstances was remarkable – from March 2020 until July 2021 it passed 130 laws, among them 19 intervention laws, intended to provide sufficient health care for the entire population, support the functioning of economy, keeping working places functioning and alleviate complex social problems.¹³ This data can be compared with the legislative output of all parliaments in other affected countries. Because of the complex and long-lasting consequences of pandemics, some ‘intervention’ laws were passed after the first or second wave of epidemic were formally declared as ended.

Table 2: Legislative activity of the National Assembly in the time of Covid-19 – legislative output during First and Second wave of epidemic

| First wave | Second wave | Together |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| March 12. – May 31. 2020 | Oct. 19, 2020 – June 15, 2021 | |
| All laws Interv. Laws | All laws Interv. Laws | All laws Interv. laws |
| 33 13 | 97 6 | 130 19 |

Source: National Assembly of Slovenia, Reports on the Functioning of the National Assembly

Because of the extraordinary circumstances demanding immediate answers to the pandemic, the time between the legislative initiative and passing of the laws was shortened. A great number of laws were passed much faster than in the ordinary legislative process- either by fast-track procedure allowing to join three phases of legislative procedure into one or by shortened procedure. In order to adjust to the quickly changing health situation, the National Assembly was often meeting on extraordinary sessions (50) prevailing over regular ones (10) what was typical for a number of parliaments of the affected European countries, which had to process more legislative work.

[13] Report on the Activity of the National Assembly from January to December 2020. Ljubljana: National Assembly (Državni zbor RS), 2021 and Report on the Activity of the National Assembly from January to July 2021. Ljubljana: National Assembly (Državni zbor RS) 2021.

Table 3: Legislative activity of the National Assembly in the time of Covid-19 - legislative procedures during First and Second Wave of the pandemic

| | First wave March 12. - May 31, 2020 | Second wave Oct. 19, 2020 - June 15, 2021 | Together |
|----------------------|---|---|----------|
| Regular procedure | 7 | 48 | 55 |
| Fast track procedure | 15 | 23 | 38 |
| Shortened procedure | 11 | 26 | 37 |
| Together | 33 | 97 | 130 |

Source: National Assembly of Slovenia, Reports on the Functioning of the National Assembly

The number and quality of the passed laws provided legislative continuity on a variety of policy areas. What confirms the first hypothesis is that the level of economic development and respect of the legal order and democratic procedures are important in the management of pandemics; while the number of 'intervention' laws demonstrates serious efforts to dismiss its consequences and re-establish normal conditions for everyday life of the citizens. The deputies in the time of the pandemic also preserved their legislative initiative as a great number of the laws were introduced by the government (93), the others by the deputies (27), the National Council (8) and the voters (2). However, frequent use of fast-track procedure during the First and Second Waves of the pandemic greatly deviated from the regular model of legislative process.¹⁴ The quality of parliamentary debate declined and the same time, the quality of deliberation suffered from limited possibility to present dissenting opinions (Bar-Siman-Tov et al., 2021: 114).

c) The Slovene National Assembly in the time of the First and Second Wave of the pandemic exercised intensive oversight over the government alike other countries affected by Covid-19. Opposition parties used all means of control in order to overthrow the government and possibly call new elections - especially parliamentary debates on the floor and parliamentary questions during the 'question time' on the regular and extraordinary sessions. In the time of Second Wave when political pressure increased, the opposition used several stronger instruments: interpellations of ministers, constructive no-confidence motion and even impeachment of the Prime Minister. This confirms the second hypothesis of increasing political polarization. Contrary to expectations, the government remained stable and operative even after the DeSUS party deserted coalition in December 2020 and formally became a minority government, despite three deputies of the SMC stepping out of their party in March 2021. It has received sufficient support from individual deputies of DeSUS (taking position of 'constructive opposition'), the Slovene National Party (SNS) and members of national minorities.

[14] Igličar, Albin (2021): *Zakonodajna politika (Legislative Politics)*. Ljubljana: GV Založba.

Table 4: The Means of Government Control used during the epidemic Covid - 19

| | First wave - 80 days | Second wave - 239 days | Number of Means |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| | March 12. - May 31, 2020 | Oct. 19, 2020 - June 15, 2021 | |
| Questions | 256 | 1161 | 1.417 |
| Interpellations | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| Cons. no-confid. Votes | - | 1 | 1 |
| Impeachment | - | 1 | 1 |

Source: National Assembly of Slovenia, Reports on the Activity of National Assembly

d) Our investigation confirmed also the third hypothesis that the pandemic strongly impacted the ways of communication between the government and National Assembly and the citizens. The National Assembly and the government did not display sufficient responsiveness to the citizens, failing to explain properly the measures taken and the laws and policies which were being formulated. The Slovene government and the National Assembly in the time of pandemic, overlooked the need to maintain positive and active communication with the citizens, its behaviour being frequently directive and even humiliating. A number of intervention measures and laws were lacking clarity and frustratingly, could not motivate the citizens to comply. Such communication did not correspond to the cultural and social behaviours and norms since Slovene citizens are inclined to respect rational decisions which are properly explained to them (Ferlin et al., 2021: 645). Consequently, a radical diminishing of positive evaluation of the main actors in the fight against pandemic occurred among the citizens. The government, leadership of the National Assembly and particular deputy groups made some efforts to improve their communication with the citizens, though the trend of decreasing positive evaluations of the government and National Assembly did not stop. As examples of some other states (Norway, Germany, Finland) show, the positive evaluations of the government and parliament depended on well-intentioned manners of communication, without threatening and the use of emotional intelligence.

e) Taking the lessons from Covid-19 pandemic, Slovenia should develop a greater capacity to foresee future risks of a possible new kind of epidemics and pandemics, which would occur anew, and not be limited to electoral periods or mandate. They should also be prepared for possible new disruptions such as a financial crisis, environmental catastrophes, climate changes or even terrorist attacks. New and possibly deadlier epidemics and pandemics could shake the political and economic stability of existing states and endanger health conditions of the population and harm the quality of social security (Flivjberg, 2020:5). Taking steps to prepare for such disastrous events demands overcoming historical and ideological divisions alongside an increased cooperation among political

parties on the national level and the strengthening of connections with all EU states based on mutual cooperation in the time of crisis.

f) The example of the management of the risks of Covid-19 in Slovenia showed how a smaller state could resist pandemics in modern times by diminishing its effects or alleviating its consequences. This short analysis is a small contribution to the attempts to evaluate very complex effects of the pandemic and efficiency of the responses taken by the governments and parliaments against it in order to prevent its spread and eliminate long-term consequences. It is evident that the judicial branch also had an important role by taking care of constitutionality of the governmental measures and legislation relating to human rights. Its intention is also to provide comparative material for future research on the new field of political science.

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