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Emergency Situation Management in the New Context of the Pandemic Covid-19 Crisis

Mohammad JARADAT[1], **Marius-Anton STUPAR**[2]

[1] "Valahia" University of Târgoviște, jaradat_hadi@yahoo.com
[2] "Valahia" University of Târgoviște, stupar_marius@yahoo.com

Abstract: The current COVID-19 pandemic has led to a vicious circle in which public authorities must choose between saving the economy or saving lives. The more governments try to isolate citizens, the more it increases the risk of severe economic problems. Thus, public authorities need to learn to balance both health and economic measures. The purpose of this article is to underline the measures taken by the Romanian government in its fight against the COVID-19 crisis.

Keywords: *epidemics, pandemic, emergency situation management.*

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1. Introduction

The communities in which we live must be prepared to respond promptly and effectively to threats that could result in loss of life and significant material damage: fires, terrorist attacks, accidents, medical emergencies, earthquakes, landslides, explosions, floods, contamination, epidemics, etc.

Mankind is currently facing the COVID-19 pandemic, confirmed by the World Health Organization, which has infected more than 5.5 million people by the end of May 2020 and has killed more than 350,000. The pandemic is, however, "controllable", according to the WHO, if the governments of the affected countries take this threat seriously. Romania established a state of emergency through its President on March 16, 2020. In theory, this concerns crisis situations that require exceptional measures to be instituted in cases determined by the emergence of serious dangers to the defense of the country and national security, constitutional democracy, or to prevent, limit or eliminate the consequences of disasters (Florea, 2017).

2. Understanding emergency situation management and epidemics through the Romanian legislation

The risks to which the legislation on emergency situations in Romania refers can be natural (meteorological phenomena, fires, avalanches, etc.), technological (accidents, damages, explosions, water pollution, collapses of buildings, falls of objects from the atmosphere, etc.) and last but not least biological (epidemics, epizootics). Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic was included by the Romanian executive in the category of epidemics.

Epidemics are mass diseases to which the population is exposed due to pathogens (bacteria, viruses, rickettsiae, fungi, protozoa). (Georgescu, 2012)

Endemic disease is a disease constantly present in a certain area (such as malaria, tuberculosis, sleeping sickness). The pandemic is an epidemic that affects an entire continent or even more. (Georgescu, 2012)

The term epidemic can be applied to any significant increase in the number of diseases for a particular disease, not being applied only to sudden outbreaks of the disease. Contagious (transmissible) diseases have the main feature of the ease with which they are transmitted from one being to another. (Stan & Enache, 2013)

Transmission of COVID-19 can be done either directly, immediately by contact (touch), or indirectly, through air (air contaminated with droplets or dust particles carrying pathogens) and through vectors (acting as an intermediary). Among the diseases with respiratory entry gate can be mentioned scarlet fever, diphtheria, measles, whooping cough, flu.

With a digestive tract (pathogens enter with water, contaminated food or if the minimum hygienic-sanitary conditions are not observed) are poliomyelitis, typhoid fever, dysentery, cholera, food poisoning, epidemic hepatitis.

In the category of vector-borne diseases (they inoculate people, through stings, pathogens taken from contaminated persons and which subsequently multiplied in their bodies) can be listed exanthematous typhus (vectors are fleas and lice), malaria (vectors - mosquitoes), yellow fever (vectors - mosquitoes), plague, tetanus, sleeping sickness (vectors - mosquito bites). (Stan & Enache, 2013)

Contagious diseases can lead to epidemics. The occurrence of epidemics is favored by a series of conditions such as poor hygiene (floods, earthquakes, other agglomerations and poor hygiene conditions); disorganization (war, periods of deprivation).

The general causes that lead to epidemics are:

- poor hygiene conditions;
- urban development without ensuring the appropriate sanitary conditions;
- lack of health education of the population;
- increasing the number of individuals traveling (both inside and outside the country);
- changes in the structure of the disease (changes in the microorganism related to the adaptation to drugs and vaccines that fight it);
- increasing the number of people assigned to a medical center (which cannot cope with the situation);
- poor quality urban services (water, sewerage, garbage, rodent control, insect repellent);
- poverty;
- increasing the number of community animals (dogs, cats);
- favored by some natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods that cause displacement of the population and its concentration in disaster camps.

An epidemic can only be defined in a broad context or at the time of onset but can include the following characteristics (Stan & Enache, 2013):

1) introduction and spread of the disease in the population;

2) the perspective of a large number of cases;

3) sufficient severity to lead to serious disability or death;

4) the risk of social and / or economic ruptures;

5) the national authorities cannot control the situation due to the lack of: - technical or professional staff; - organizing experience; - the necessary equipment and materials (medicines, vaccines, etc.).

6) the danger of the international spread of the disease;

7) a single case of severe infectious disease in an area where it had been eradicated.

3. Tackling the COVID-19 pandemic internationally and in Romania

Taking into consideration all the above mentioned classifications it`s easier to understand how COVID-19 has spread so fast and has led to an almost global shutdown.

Thus, the control measures for such a virus are (Jawad, 2020):

- preventive vaccination of the population, once the testing will be completed;
- educating the population towards preventing the spread of the virus;
- hygiene measures in communities;
- checking the appliance of the bacteriological norms regarding the distribution of drinking water and food;
- informing the population about the symptoms and ways of occurrence of COVID-19 by approved specialists;
- immediate presentation to the doctor once the first symptoms appear or once the condition of the patient has a negative evolution (depenting of the public response towards tackling the virus);
- disinsection campaigns in different areas of the cities.

In Romania the role of combating the biological risks produced by the COVID-19 epidemic belongs to the National Emergency Management System. All the committees that compose it have the tasks to:

- prioritizing the protection and saving of citizens' lives;
- ensuring protection and prevention measures while respecting human rights;
- cooperate at national and local level to manage protection and prevention against the spread of the virus;
- ensures the operability in their collaboration.

Therefore, the given emergency situation represents an exceptional non-military event, which by magnitude and intensity threatens the life and

health of the population, the environment, important material and cultural values and to restore normalcy it is necessary to adopt urgent measures and actions, allocating additional resources and unitary management of the forces and means involved. (Popescu, 2020)

In order to be able to manage such a situation, the Romanian executive must therefore divide its action coordinates into three main directions:

a) improving the health system so that it can meet the challenges;

b) reducing human interactions to prevent the spread of the virus;

c) economic measures to reduce the effects of the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. (Fraser, 2020)

In reality, the management of these 3 directions of action implies an extremely necessary balance since:

- the state can exceed its budget loses if it allocates too many resources to the field of health;

- reducing human interactions can prevent the spread of the virus, but at the same time can ruin the economy which in turn can no longer provide public budget revenues that can be used to finance the health system

- the relaxation of human interaction measures can restore the economy but at the same time can endanger the lives of citizens.

4. Challenges and shortcomings of the Romanian authorities and their response to the COVID-19 pandemic

The Romanian authorities and in general the global ones face the same challenges at the level of public administration. In the management of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Romania has had even from the beginning certain problems:

a) Since the beginning of the spread of the virus in Romania, there were voices saying that Romania does not have the capacity to process the tests, and on average around 300 new cases / day will be detected which will not indicate the real number of infections in the Romanian society;

b) the inability of the management bodies of the hospitals to impose a unitary practice in the field of protection of medical staff against the virus, which will lead to the closure of medical units;

c) the endowments of the sanitary system - beyond the lack of beds equipped with intensive care equipment (their total number being

approximately 1700), the medical staff in Romania has faced and still faces the lack of daily protective equipment;

d) the declaration of the state of emergency made far too late and the poor management of the control of the persons returned to the Romanian borders - from the confirmation of the first case of coronavirus (on February 26, 2020) until the declaration of the state of emergency by the President of Romania three weeks later, much precious time has passed, that could have given administrative and legislative capacity to the authorities to isolate Romanian citizens returning from other countries or adopt serious measures to ensure that social distancing is being respected.

e) economic measures – The government lead by Ludovic Orban announced several measures to support the population and companies, in the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Among them, the support with founds from the public budget of the companies that send their employees in technical unemployment or the postponement of the installments to the banks, for all of the population and also the delay of payment of certain taxes to the state, for the companies. In the long run, these measures could have disastrous effects on the economy, as many employees abused the legislative vacuum created and took advantage of the technical unemployment in order not to work even though they could have, with the Government providing them with a much higher percentage from the basic salary for all categories of employees and authorized individuals. At the same time, the postponement of the installments had to be corroborated with measures to assure the population that the interest on these installments would not increase on their subsequent repayment day.

f) non-transparency of the command structures within the National Emergency Management System

g) poor communication at the level of the central administration apparatus - often public officials (starting with the President and Prime Minister of Romania) issued contradictory statements regarding government policies to combat the crisis and the measures to be taken which led to public confusion. (Popescu, 2020)

From the perspective of each individual, the management of the COVID-19 pandemic by central and local public authorities must provide them with the personal capacity to (Assari, 2020):

- persevere in the development of personal projects (job, family, etc.)
- develop a spirit of self-discipline to help him/her persevere both in personal projects and in compliance with the measures imposed by the public authorities;

- character development, as the crisis generated by the pandemic reveals all the hidden characteristics that individuals have. Individuals must be aware that the health of others also depends on them and respect protection and prevention measures;
- solidarity, enabling individuals to support each other in the difficult economic and health conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic;
- cultivating positive emotions to help individuals maintain their emotional balance.

The current coronavirus pandemic therefore has given unprecedented challenges to humanity. Activities such as education, sports or professional work have gone online. Sectors such as manufacturing, tourism, agriculture or aviation have been severely affected by global blockages, accelerated layoffs, wage cuts, but also other factors, including declining investment.

Some main challenges and solutions that public organizations (central and local) are obliged to manage and apply can be identified:

Table 1. Challenges and solutions regarding the management of the COVID-19 pandemic by public central and/or local authorities
Source: Authors' own compilation

Challenges	Solutions
1. The number of infected people is growing exponentially as medical equipment is less and less qualitatively compliant and can be found less and less.	- increasing the production capacity of medical equipment - product quality control and testing ensures that medical equipment is in accordance with its intended purpose;
2. Increasing transport capacity difficulties while steadily increasing consumption and need for staple foods or especially medical equipment.	- trade plays an important role in ensuring the accessibility of staple foods, medicines and medical equipment so that states must cease competition in different markets and encourage production and balance in trade between them;
3. Businesses around the world are struggling to keep their gates open and to ensure the production of goods.	- standards of risk management and business continuity are essential to ensure the uninterrupted production of goods, especially essential ones;
4. Infrastructure must help mitigate the negative effects of the crisis and ensure	- quality infrastructure ensures the identification and use of relevant

the provision of essential services.	standards, accurate measurement and provides certification (accreditation) of reliable test results;
5. Millions of people around the world are on the brink of subsistence and were dependent on humanitarian aid even before the pandemic crisis. As it worsens, their situation becomes critical.	- International organizations must collaborate and provide first and foremost education on hygiene practices and safety standards in refugee camps. In addition, there must be an international consensus on the possibility of supplying them with food and medical aids;
6. More and more medical waste is being generated, some hazardous, which can contribute to the spread of other viruses or create other medical problems.	- standards for hazardous waste management and recycling need to be revised.

5. Conclusions

COVID-19 is therefore a virus that has paralyzed human interaction around the world. International cooperation is becoming more essential than ever. In order to mitigate the spread of the virus and to be able to rebuild society economically, states must learn to collaborate rather than compete for medical equipment or for the discovery and mass production of a vaccine that could help cure COVID-19.

The Romanian government has made significant efforts into limiting the spread of the virus, however it still lacks transparency in its measures taken and can improve its practices. The evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis is not only in the hands of governments but also in the hands of each individual and the measures each individual takes in order to limit the spread of the virus.

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