

## Testing by coronavirus COVID-19

*About the priorities of the authorities of the ex-USSR countries. History will be kepted all decisions and evaluate them strictly: and those politicians who selflessly saved their people, and those who had the opportunity to help people and did nothing.*

The main duty of the authorities of any civilized country is the protection of their citizens. In the period of global pandemic, when everyone has the same trouble, people can compare the actions of their government with others. History will be kepted all decisions and evaluate them strictly: and those politicians who selflessly saved their people, and those who had the opportunity to help people and did nothing. And here are showing significant differences between democracies and authoritarian regimes.

Authoritarian regimes are the legacy of the great Soviet empire - the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. After its collapse, far from all the states of the former USSR chose the democratic path. And although the authorities of these states look like democratic, are called democratic, have democratic rhetoric, in fact such they are not.

Many countries of the former USSR act in the usual way - according to the "Chernobyl scenario": denial of disaster; imitation of activity on rescue of people during the expansion of the scale of the disaster; solution of all problems at the expense of citizens; justification of their actions through propaganda and self-promotion.

One of the main signs of authoritarianism is "government by means of presidential decrees, which take precedence over laws adopted by parliaments. Draft laws are at least first discussed in committees and at parliamentary sessions. Decrees are prepared in the backwoods of the presidential apparatus and reflect the personal position of the president, so that society is very much dependent on the moods and highly probable misconceptions of the sole ruler. " But even these decrees may be not published, giving rise to legal confusion. Obviously, this is necessary to blur the legal responsibility to the future. Therefore, instead of the classic regime of state of emergency (situation), which determines the rights and obligations of citizens (favorable conditions and the right to protect life, health and personal property), authoritarian authorities can introduce regim of "self-isolation", "special quarantine regime" and so on. Moreover, the punishment for non-compliance this regim may be disproportionate to the income of citizens.

Very often authoritarian regimes manipulate statistics, neglect the opinions of citizens, severely punish criticism to their address, use self-PR and propaganda, and use the image of an external and internal enemy. Their main priorities are the preservation of power, the economic interests of a narrow group of rich people (oligarchs). The worst thing is that all this translates into neglect of the health and life of millions of people in global disasters.

An important circumstance is the desire of the authoritarian regime to extend all restrictions of the state of emergency for citizens as long as possible, by extending and expanding them.

## Turkmenistan

The authorities of Turkmenistan do not recognize the presence of coronavirus in the country, but take preventive measures to combat it. In March, officials practically didn't mention the world pandemic. In the recommendations for the prevention of viral diseases has disappeared any mention of coronavirus. The police could detain citizens only for talking about the epidemic. The President called for the disinfecting by red pepper and by smoke of harmala (uzerlik), according to the recipe of his book. Concerts, conferences and meetings were held throughout the country. A mass bike-ride was held in honor of Health Day with thousands of participants. The national football championship is resuming.

On April 8, after a lengthy silence, the President spoke publicly about COVID-19.

Now Turkmenistan is getting ready for mass testing for the presence of COVID-19 in schools and preschool institutions. At the same time, the country's leadership denies even the possibility of suspicions on the presence of COVID-19 in the territory of country, but continues to tighten controls, impose restrictions, while prohibiting the population from protecting themselves from infection by wearing masks and prosecuting for the mention of coronavirus. The authorities call the actions

prophylactic, and the measures taken are preventive to prevent the spread of "acute viral infection that has spread across the planet".

To go to the hospital, people need to bring not only medicines, but also soap, laundry detergent and disinfectants. Teachers must donate money for medicines, schoolchildren must to bring disinfectants to school and donate money. The problem of food shortages and cash escalated.

Foreign embassies switched to remote mode. Borders are closed, entry to foreigners is prohibited. The President called on businessmen to help trade, transport agencies and others. Direct cash payments to citizens are not even discussed.

### **Tajikistan**

Officially in Tajikistan no coronavirus . Authorities are taking preventive measures. In April, they turned to other countries and international organizations to help fight the virus (masks, individual protection means, tests, etc.). Germany, the USA, Russia, China and others transferred money and provided humanitarian aid to country. The borders are closed, there is no emergency regime, the prices of garlic, lemons and ginger rose at 3-7 times. They say that people do not have money, because most of the migrants who were in Russia and have send money stayed in the country for self-isolation. No one is talking about direct cash payments to citizens.

### **Belarus**

There is no quarantine and state of emergency regime in Belarus; borders are controlled. Football championships are held. Preparations are underway for the May 9 parade. State television channels claim that the virus is a biological weapon of the United States, the whole world envies Belarus, that there is no quarantine, and so on.

On March 19, the President called the pandemic "nothing more than a psychosis" and advised to be treated it by "a bath, vodka and a tractor." Today, if necessary, he is ready to join himself in the fight against coronavirus.

On March 31, the President said mass isolation during a pandemic "kills people".

On April 3, the President considers excessive "hype" about the four deaths from the coronavirus in the country and emphasizes that "the virus attacks the weak". "305 people (infected with coronavirus) across the country - this is a scant!"

On April 13, the President of Belarus announced that there were no deaths from COVID-19 in the country and promised that these statistics would remain for a long time. According to him, Belarusians are dying from chronic diseases that develop against the backdrop of COVID-19. According to the Ministry of Health, on April 13, 29 patients died in Belarus, whose coronavirus was confirmed, the total number of infected reached 2919 people.

Instead of supporting the business, the authorities established unscheduled inspections and total price control, which allows closing stores that violate it.

Of the support measures: the postponement of the payment of non-key taxes and a rental vacation for tenants renting property from the state. Direct financial support measures are not provided. On the contrary, the business pays donations to fight COVID-19. According to forecasts, about 1.3 million citizens may lose their jobs. No one even is talking about any support measures or direct cash payments to citizens. In Belarus the Decree "On the Prevention of Social Dependence" is still in force, the so-called tax on people "parasites" (tax on unemployed). At the same time, the country's foreign exchange reserves as of April 1, 2020 amounted to \$ 7 billion 786,5 million.

On April 11, World Health Organization (WHO) called on the Belarusian authorities to ban mass events, to ensure quarantine for those infected with coronavirus, as well as for contacts of the first and second levels, as the country is "entering into difficult times."

### **Kyrgyzstan**

Kyrgyzstan introduced the state of emergency on March 21. Prohibition of entry of foreigners. Business activity in the country is almost completely frozen, many enterprises are closed, except for food and medical. Food prices rose slightly. The government sees help to business only in the search for sources of financing, there is no exemption from taxes and social contributions, there is no lending

at no cost. The International Monetary Fund approved the allocation of \$ 120.9 million to Kyrgyzstan to fight the virus. The USA, Germany, Russia are helping with cash, also the funds of billionaire Jack Ma have provided humanitarian aid. Authorities collect money from businesses and citizens. An online resource has been launched for filing electronic applications for food assistance. Citizens are given humanitarian aid and products (flour) from the state reserve for two weeks. Since the beginning introductions of the state of emergency, the crime rate has decreased, but the number of child suicides has increased - only from 18 to 28 March, 7 minors committed suicide. In Kyrgyzstan, there are no special services that could help parents in the psychological education of children.

The government said that it "will not be able to repeat the experience of developed countries in the provision of non-repayable loans and write-offs of taxes." At the same time, "Kyrgyz rich people allocate small amounts to fight against coronavirus and they're doing PR on this, while in neighboring Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, oligarchs contribute millions of dollars to the funds". Critics urge the President to call forth in "the residence of the rich, who have plundered the country for 30 years and raise from them 50-100 million dollars. They got rich on smuggling, state orders and at the expense of international assistance". Due to the high level of corruption, citizens have doubts about the sufficiency of state aid and government measures: in words, the government declares support for business and citizens, but not really. The authorities announced their readiness to "go for a serious reduction in the costs of state bodies and state-owned companies".

It is not talking about direct cash payments to citizens.

## **Uzbekistan**

In Uzbekistan, the so-called "self-isolation regime" has been introduced, borders are closed. Limited movement around the country, including on cars. Officials began wearing "virus blockers." The country provides humanitarian assistance to Tajikistan. From April 1, individual charity events to help vulnerable categories of citizens are limited, everything goes through unified centers for coordinating assistance to the poor. The prosecutor's office of Uzbekistan asked citizens from April 6 to start keeping diaries with records of their contacts and movements. There is a shortage of cash, there are huge lines near banks. As in Turkmenistan, for antiviral disinfection, fume (besmoke) by grass of harmala (uzerlik) is popular.

On April 3, the president signed a decree on measures to support the population and business. For small and medium-sized businesses, deferrals are mainly provided in the payment of various taxes and loans. The government does not lose this amount, but agrees to receive it later. In its pure form, indirect government subsidies, mainly in the form of lower taxes, duties and excise taxes, will amount to 220 million dollars. These measures will ease the position of the business, but are unlikely to relieve it of major losses.

For the population, measures are provided for families with children - to them simply prolong the payment of benefits. The size of these benefits is, on average, in hard currency, \$ 20 per month (and for families with children under 2 years old - \$ 41). Deferred payment of individual income tax is also allowed. Banks are advised to introduce credit holidays for citizens for 3 months, which many cannot use. In a word, in terms of supporting the population, direct and indirect government spending is even less than for small and medium-sized businesses. 13,4 million people who are forcibly sent to the "self-isolation regime" are not provided with any compensation. Some of the citizens were not quarantined, there is a suspicion that such exceptions are making for large businesses owned by members of the ruling elite and other influential people, the so-called oligarchs.

The authorities are limited to calls instead of help (to lower rent, provide a deferral of loans to banks, finance small businesses, lend to the agricultural sector, etc.).

At the same time, the government has a significant gold and foreign exchange reserve of the country of \$ 27 billion. Moreover, all this amount will immediately return to the economy in the form of consumer demand and revitalize trade. Using it to help citizens is not planned.

The authorities are trying with all sorts of tricks to obscure their responsibility for the well-being of citizens, a responsibility that is dictated by the principles of social justice and the laws of the country. And in order to obscure their legal obligations to citizens, they avoid the publication of documents authorizing the introduction of quarantine restrictive measures and shift the obligation on

business to keep at their own expense people in quarantine. Then it turns out that there is no de jure regime of forced “self-isolation”, but de facto it operates. This paradoxical situation is very similar to the practice of forced labor in the country's cotton sector: the laws of the country prohibit this practice, but in practice it is widespread, systematic.

Russian oligarch Alisher Usmanov allocated \$ 20 million to fight coronavirus in Uzbekistan and transferred them to the government.

Distribution of cash to everyone is discussed mainly by young economists (Botir Kobilov). The government is not considering such an option.

## **Azerbaijan**

Azerbaijan introduced the so-called “special quarantine regime”. Borders are closed, movement within the oil producing country is limited. The enterprises are closed.

Since April 5, a permissive system of movement has been introduced in the country: one category of people will be able to move freely, the other by preliminary online registration, and the third after receiving permission by SMS. Activists saw in these measures a violation of fundamental freedoms. Issue permits for movement in electronic form, but the country often has problems with electricity and the Internet.

It is not clear how much is allocated to support the population and business: the official version is from 1,0 billion manat (\$ 600 million) to 2,5 billion manat (from 1,2% to 3% of GDP, at least 4,14% of the state budget revenue). At the same time, in January-February, the state budget surplus amounted to 2,5 billion manat (\$ 1.5 billion), there is the State Oil Fund, the total foreign exchange reserves exceed \$ 50 billion.

The plan of assistance to the population is confusing, bureaucratic and technically difficult, including due to official statistics: officially in February there were 86,000 unemployed, in March the government recognized the presence of 200,000. But this is not a real numeral. In developed countries, unemployment reaches 8-10%, while in Azerbaijan, it turns out 2%. According to critics, it is 30%, so the benefit covers 2% of the population (60% of the economically active population). The allowance for the unemployed for April-May 2020 will amount to 190 manat (\$ 112) with many restrictions (only to one of the spouses; refused to the owners of the land, full-time students, members of farms, etc.). An analysis of the rules for unemployment benefits shows that restrictions on benefits have been deliberately increased. The main goal of introducing many restrictions is to prevent access to allocated funds, critics of the government say.

The financial support program for micro and small entrepreneurs will cover 30% of all taxpayers in the country: during 2 months they have received the right to reduce tax payments and tax holidays, state guarantees, subsidized rates, compensation of wages to certain sectors of the economy (tourism). Bureaucratization, closeness of the process and corruption make it difficult to payouts.

The president pardoned part of the prisoners, some opposition politicians were arrested. In this connection, a wide discussion of direct financial support for citizens is difficult.

## **Armenia**

Armenia has introduced a state of emergency. From this moment on, the media in the country and abroad are prohibited from publishing any information about COVID-19, which contradicts the official one.

To date, the situation has stabilized, stay restrictions on free movement and some types of economic activity. From April 13, many types of economic activity and business are allowed, except for public transport. There is a tendency to lower prices for a number of food products and diesel fuel. There is a significant reduction in the number of crimes.

The new government approved 10 programs to counteract the economic consequences of coronavirus: six - economic assistance to business (agriculture, tourism, small and medium enterprises, microbusiness and other industries), four - social support to various groups of the population. All events have significant limitations in scope and in amount. Small businesses have a facilitated lending procedure ranging from 2,5 million drams to 50 million drams (\$ 100,000), depending on the turnover for 2019 (up to \$ 1 million).

In the framework of the 4th direction - the provision of one-time social assistance to families with children whose parents were dismissed during the introduced emergency regime: all those families in which there are minor children and one of four conditions is present.

In the framework of the 6th direction - allowance for pregnant women whose husbands were fired from work due to restrictions during the emergency regime or died during the emergency regime. The amount of one-time assistance of 100 thousand drams (more than \$ 200) will also be received by pregnant women whose husbands does not work on March 30, 2020.

In the framework of the 7th direction, financial support will be given to employees who were fired due to restrictions during the state of emergency: citizens who were in labor relations on the basis of an agreement or a decision on hiring from January 1 to March 13, 2020 or were re-hired on the condition that the transition to a new job did not exceed three business days, but were relieved of work from March 13 to 30, 2020. This support will not be able to take advantage of those citizens whose salary in the preceding 2 months dismissal exceeded 500 thousand drams, as well as those who were in labor relations before March 30 and with another employer or with the same, but on the basis of a different agreement.

In the framework of the 9th direction - to alleviate social problems by a family with children under 18 years old, if the parents were not registered employees or were not taken into account in the assessment system for dysfunctional families. Support is provided to one of the parents.

Social support of 45 million drams (\$ 92 thousand) was allocated from the budget of the Municipality of Yerevan to two thousand single pensioners who did not have heirs: products and other household goods (about 30 kg of a basket, the calorie content of the transferred products was equal to the monthly norm).

The Public Services Regulatory Commission of Armenia, in cooperation with the commandant, up to the completion of the state of emergency, recognized the situation as force majeure, which impedes the payment of the population for the supplied electricity, gas and water. In such conditions, the supplier companies are not entitled, if citizens-subscribers do not fulfill their payment obligations, suspend the supply of electricity, gas and drinking water to them. However, the above does not exempt consumers from paying for utilities.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Armenia will issue certificates of force majeure to companies bound by international contracts.

The circle of social support is expanding - the involvement of new target groups, ensuring resource targeting and new areas of support are being discussed.

The government in the framework of the 11th direction to some consumers will reimburse 50% of the fee for gas and electricity for February 2020.

## **Moldova**

Moldova has introduced a state of emergency, a “red code” is in effect. Cafe, shops are closed, all cities are closed. 300-400 thousand Moldovans are expected to enter technical unemployment, and then they will enter permanent unemployment.

This is one of the few countries where the term “minimum guaranteed income” is fixed by law (\$ 62 as of April 12, 2020).

On April 7, a law was passed under which the government assumed responsibility for supporting business and the public during a pandemic. The law provided for:

- Increase in unemployment benefits to 2775 leu (\$ 154);
- Reduction of VAT for the HORECA sector from 20% to 15%;
- Increase in the minimum guaranteed monthly income from 1107 leu to 1300 leu (\$ 72);
- Increase in the minimum guaranteed monthly income for each child from 553 leu to 975 leu (\$ 54).

For those who have suspended their activities:

- Compensation of 100% (or 60%, depending on circumstances) of personal income tax, social contribution, medical contribution - that is, 44-45% of the salary fund;
- Exemption from payment of patent holders;
- Deferred payment of local taxes until July 25.

On April 10, the Constitutional Court suspended the Law. Further steps are incomprehensible.

The Romanian Orthodox Church donated more than 4 million leu. Due to donations from citizens and organizations, 13 million leu have been accumulated in a special fund to combat coronavirus.

At the same time, the municipal authorities did not revise the budget and their priorities, therefore the Public activists call for "setting a priority for the costs associated with the fight against COVID-19" - "building fountains, planting flowers and some infrastructure projects could be delayed." The country has a high level of corruption.

The IMF is ready to allocate \$ 117 million to Moldova in the near future in the form of urgent financial assistance to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the economy.

### **Ukraine**

Ukraine was one of the first to introduce an emergency regime, many enterprises do not work, and public transport is limited. Authorities demonstrate information transparency. The USA, China, South Korea and others provide significant humanitarian assistance. The European Union allocates € 190 million, the World Bank € 150 million, including € 50 million to support vulnerable groups. It is not known when and how much money an ordinary citizen will receive, given the level of bureaucracy and corruption in the country. Authorities abolished fines for utility bills and exempted from liability for consumer loans, temporarily self-employed abolished the unified social contribution and introduced assistance for caring for children under 10 in the amount of a living wage. Despite the high hopes placed on the new President, measures to support citizens are clearly insufficient, bureaucratic and fragmented, and they are very late in time. There are few supporters of direct payment of money to citizens, one of the famous is the former Prime Minister of Ukraine V. Groysman.

### **Kazakhstan**

A state of emergency has been introduced in Kazakhstan. This is one of the few states of the former USSR that provides direct cash payments to needy citizens at 42,500 tenge (about \$ 100) in the amount of the minimum wage. Applications are made in electronic form, a limited circle of citizens can use the benefit. The procedure is very bureaucratic. Former President N. Nazarbayev - one of the first among the countries of the former USSR in March 2016 commissioned to study the possibility of introducing unconditional basic income. Although later he himself was an ardent opponent of "dependent moods", believing that "the state is already giving everything that citizens need," demand more is no need, more work is needed.

### **Georgia**

Georgia has introduced a state of emergency and strict quarantine from March 21, 2020. A curfew has been imposed and public transport has stopped working. Support for the tourism business (hotels, restaurants) - deferment of certain taxes for 4 months, refund of excess VAT to companies. Some banks deferred payments on loans for 3 months to individuals, small businesses and tourist facilities. The country plans to get help from the IMF. The European Union has allocated € 183 million. World banks will develop an anti-crisis assistance plan for Georgia. Billionaire Ivanishvili transferred \$ 31,5 million to the state. The government will pay utility bills to citizens with low consumption of electricity, gas, garbage and water for 3 months. A significant increase in unemployment is expected (current 11,6%), damage to the economy from \$ 1,7 billion to \$ 4,4 billion. The possibility of direct cash payments has not been discussed.

### **Russia**

In Russia, the so-called "self-isolation regime" has been introduced. By a presidential decree, powers to combat the pandemic were transferred to the subjects of the federation that do not have that kind of money, since in the conditions of a rigid vertical of power, almost all taxes are sent to the federal government.

Almost all of January, cases of coronavirus were not officially recorded in the country, there was an "abnormal seasonal surge" in acute respiratory viral infections and pneumonia. Only on April

13, the Ministry of Health recommended considering all cases of acute respiratory viral infections as a suspicion of coronavirus.

On January 29, the Prime Minister approved the headquarters for the fight against Covid-19. On January 31, two patients were identified in the Russian Federation. The official first death from coronavirus is March 18, when 147 cases were officially recorded. On March 26 (officially 840 patients), the President's press service assured that "there is practically no epidemic of coronavirus infection in Russia". From March 28 to April 5, the President declared non-working days with the preservation of wages at the expense of employers. He asked "to pay utmost attention to the recommendations of doctors and authorities", and also "for fairness" introduced 2 new taxes: dividend tax of 15%, on funds transferred to foreign accounts, and tax on income from bank deposits of 13% for citizens with deposits from 1,0 million rubles (53,3% of the total deposits in the banking system). The President also provided credit vacations for small, medium, microenterprises for half a year; tax deferral for 6 months; rental vacation for state property; short-term loans for business for minimum wage payments (\$ 164); reduced the rate of insurance premiums on salaries; reduced the time for receiving benefits for children from 3 to 7 years; increased unemployment benefits to a minimum wage (\$ 164); credit holidays for citizens.

When all the wishes of the President were adopted by law, it turned out that most of the population and business could not take advantage of these measures.

Real money was not directed to the economy and to the social support of citizens. The volume of business support measures amounted to 1,5% of GDP (Forbs). Only during the first non-working week announced by the President, 30% of the companies sent part of their employees on unpaid leave, and 49% transferred them on a part-time basis. Over 20% of enterprises reduced salaries, and 16% switched to layoffs. Critics say the authorities are using a pandemic to redistribute property: "This is a conscious policy to let healthy businesses weaken under quarantine and falling demand. When businesses will be accumulated debts, they can be cheaply bought up by those who remain in the period of the crisis with money".

At the same time, the country's gold and foreign exchange reserves as of April 3 amounted to \$564,4 billion; the country's budget surplus for 2019 is almost 2 trillion rubles, the surplus for the 1st quarter of 2020 is 12,4 billion rubles; funds of the National Welfare Fund on March 16 – 12,2 trillion rubles.

The budgets of state companies, the salaries of officials, the budgets of regions and municipalities were not reduced and redistributed. Only since the announcement of quarantine measures (at the same time as the President urges compatriots to have patience and tighten their belts from hopelessness), the Moscow City Hall distributes about 20 billion rubles for the purchase of granite borders. At the same time, the Moscow Mayor is opposed to direct cash payments to all Russians under forced quarantine: according to the Mayor, regional budgets will "crack" and will not be able to provide for the healthcare system and other needs. Throughout the country, billions of rubles are distributed to the needs of the friends of the President, officials, oligarchs.

Since the beginning of April 2020, China has tightened control in the border regions with Russia and expanded testing for coronavirus to curb the spread of coronavirus from Russia, which has become the second largest source country of imported cases in China. However, there is officially no such a large number of sick people cases in the border Russian regions.

Each region introduces its own restrictions, counts the sick and the dead, and is accountable to the federal government. The legal justification of the restrictions and the punishment for their violation raises many questions. Restrictions on the movement of citizens, tracking them through CCTV and geolocation cameras have been introduced. Passes have been introduced in some regions, a ban on the operation of the business. Due to the underdevelopment of the Internet, interruptions in electricity, the lack of computers and the lack of organization of the authorities, significant inconvenience is created for business and citizens, including training, health care, justice, registration actions, etc. The scale of the disaster became clear from the fact that the Ministry of Health allowed the diagnosis of coronavirus without tests, even on the basis of symptoms, as in the beginning of winter in China. There are no masks on sale, their trade is suddenly prohibited without a license.

Despite everything, the construction, oil and gas sectors and other businesses owned by influential people, officials and oligarchs work without restrictions or receive the necessary permits.

Russian oligarchs, according to their information, channel billions of rubles through their own or state funds for the purchase of medical equipment, personal protective equipment, payment to volunteers, etc. Due to the opacity of these actions and high corruption, it is difficult to talk about the reality of these costs and the effectiveness of this assistance to people. Russian oligarchs (favored by the authorities and persecuted) often spend significant amounts on donations and charity not in Russia, thanks to which they became rich, but in other countries (Israel, Great Britain, Uzbekistan, etc.). Self-PR is developed, the desire to look good in front of the authorities or frankly profiting on sorrow of people. Under the guise of “help”, illiquid or paid by the authorities assets (hotels, long-term construction, etc.) are offered, services are imposed (Sberbank — the need for cashless payments, Magnet — loyalty cards, Megaphone — paid subscription instead of passes, Mail.ru — expansion of social networks, Yandex - cloud services, promotion in social networks, etc.), minimum amounts are allocated that are not comparable with the volume of business, etc.

There is no wide discussion on direct cash payments to citizens in the country, the authorities do not want to discuss it with society. Moreover, the authorities are adamant: the head of the Central Bank does not see the point in distributing money to the population - “there is no such need”, she said; deputies consider this to be “looting” when citizens turn to the state for cash assistance during a disaster; "Budgets crack" and so on.