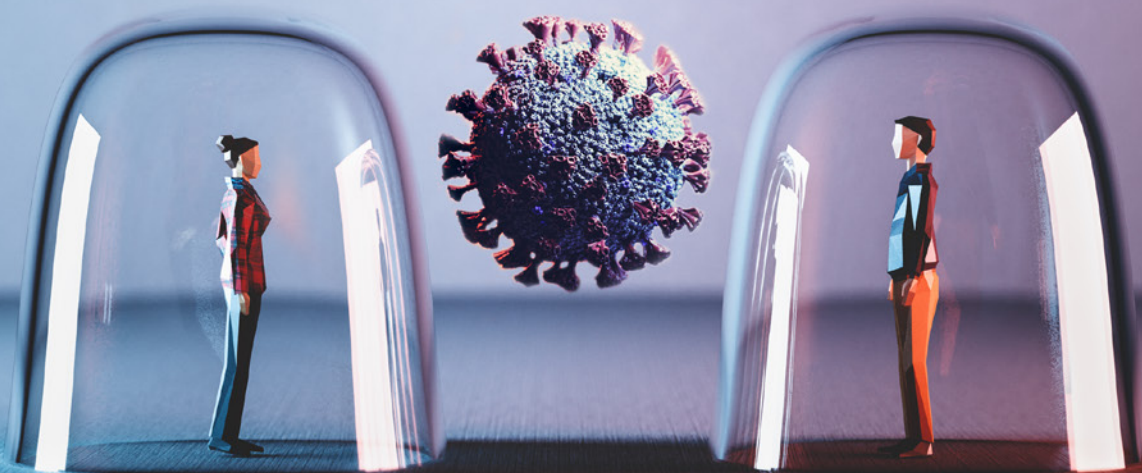


COVIDOCRACY

AN ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES ABOUT
THE PANDEMIC IN THE FUNCTION OF
CAPTURING THE STATE

Srđan Hercigonja and Jelena Pejić Nikić



BCBP

Belgrade, June 2021.

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Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic¹ found Serbia in an advanced process of state capture, with the country's ranking falling over the years in various global indices in the areas of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and freedoms². The state capture implies a deliberately and gradually developed system of deep and widespread corruption in which institutions are abused, by legal and illegal means, to extract public funds into private pockets, to the detriment of citizens' rights and freedoms and the public interest, while the façade of democratic processes is formally retained.³ The management of the pandemic unmasked that façade as well. The country suddenly found itself in a "war", which was a framework narrative in which the key messages that were used to conduct and justify state capture, came to the fore even more.

Although the analysis covers the entire year 2020 and the beginning of 2021, the greatest attention was given to the state of emergency in the spring of 2020. The construction of the narrative was facilitated in the conditions of excessive presence of government representatives in the media, at almost daily press conferences, addresses to the nation, and numerous appearances of the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, doctors from the government's Crisis Response Team and several ministers on television. In addition, access to authentic information on the consequences of the pandemic was largely denied to the public. In that narrative, the holders of power, the President of the Republic in particular, were presented as skillful and dedicated saviors of the citizens from the plague. The elderly population, the functionality of the healthcare system and the economy took turns as priorities (victims) that needed to be protected.

Since March 2020, when the first case of coronavirus was recorded in Serbia, the narrative that the country is at war with the pandemic has been strongly emphasised. Almost all the determinants that are a constituent part of the narrative about the war are present in the statements of the relevant actors. It is clearly emphasised that "we" are in the war, that "we" will win, that "we" are better than others. Doctors working in the red zones of COVID hospitals are "front line fighters"; COVID-19 vaccines are "the strongest weapon in the war against the coronavirus"; medals and ordeals are awarded for successful participation in the "war against the coronavirus", while the army and police "walk down" the central streets of the capital.

Although certain constituent parts of the war narrative may have a positive effect, in terms of mobilising citizens to show solidarity, adhere to measures to prevent the spread of a highly contagious virus, and be patient in an unprecedented global crisis, there are at least two problems in connection with this way of communication. First of all, one cannot be at war with the virus; war implies the interests and motives of the parties involved, something that certainly cannot be identified with the virus, nor with the disease that the virus causes. Secondly, the "state of war" is a very fertile ground for the violation of human rights and freedoms, which was recorded in Serbia, primarily during the state of emergency.⁴

Finally, managing and handling the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic using the narrative of war is risky for states where institutions are already weakened and captured. In "extraordinary circumstances", the government very often usurps the crisis

to concentrate formal and real power in its hands, control the flow of information, spend public resources in a non-transparent manner and deal with its critics as enemies of the state. In addition, an atmosphere of uncertainty and confusion among the citizens was maintained by constantly changing the messages of intimidation and relaxation.

POLITICISATION OF PUBLIC HEALTHCARE – “I AM HERE TO DEFEND THE COUNTRY FROM THE VIRUS AND THAT’S ALL”

From the moment when the first case of COVID-19 was recorded in Serbia, and especially since the unconstitutional declaration of the state of emergency,⁵ the central figure in the “war” against the pandemic was taken over by the President of the Republic. The role that the President assigned to himself in this war is not only to make decisions, but also to announce those decisions himself. As the war lasts longer, so does the commander-in-chief retreat into the background, while other institutions take over the place of spokespersons, primarily of the COVID-19 Crisis Response Team. The war was “declared” on 15 March, during the address of the President to the citizens of the Republic of Serbia after the state of emergency was declared. It was then concluded that Serbia had not yet recovered from the wars of the 1990s, the wars in which Serbia had participated since the establishment of the modern state were listed, allies were singled out – the People’s Republic of China, while the “European solidarity” was declared dead.

“Today, Serbia is at war against an invisible enemy, a dangerous and wicked enemy, and our country must win.”⁶

In the same speech, the President pointed out the goal of the war:

“Surrender was never an option for Serbia. We will fight and we will win. Long live Serbia!”⁷

Comparatively speaking, the leaders of most European countries addressed the public during the introduction of strict measures after the sudden spread of the coronavirus in Europe at the end of February and the beginning of March 2020. However, the narrative of the leaders of the states, especially those states with which the President later compared himself during the pandemic, is quite different in relation to the narrative about the war. (On 29 March 2020, the President stated on Prva TV that “our health care system is better than the one in the European Union.”⁸) For example, the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Angela Merkel, stated that the country had not faced such a challenge that required joint and united action ever since World War Two.⁹ Similar messages came from other European leaders. However, the goal of these messages is to call for solidarity and patience, something that was not noticed in the President’s first speech after the introduction of the state of emergency. Also, the tone with which the actor performing the securitisation act (social construction of a threat) addresses largely determines the nature of the threat narrative. The tone and gestures of the President himself largely shaped the narrative of the pandemic as if it were a war.

The Serbian Progressive Party declared its first victory in this war in April 2020,¹⁰ which should be analysed in the context of the election campaign for the parliamentary elections held on 21 June 2020, when almost all measures against the pandemic were withdrawn.

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, it is surprising that many things did not comply with the applicable 2016 Law on the Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases. This law already envisages the establishment of the National Expert Commission for the Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases, which would have in its competence the consideration of the current epidemiological situation in Serbia, as well as the adoption of conclusions and recommendations for the adoption of measures.¹¹ In fact, all decisions concerning the crisis management caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in Serbia are concentrated in the hands of the Crisis Response Team, which, in addition to the “medical part”, also has its “political part”. The big question is whether the Government of the Republic of Serbia decided to form a Crisis Response Team in order to maintain political control over the management of the crisis, because the Commission, if formed in accordance with the Law on Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases, would be composed exclusively of medical professionals.

Even the “medical part” of the Crisis Response Team over time became “infected” with the war narrative, and some doctors began to explain certain actions as if the state was actually in a state of war. Thus, a member of the Crisis Response Team, Predrag Kon, at a press conference in January 2021, answering a journalist’s question regarding the interpretation of his statement that some doctors become infected during their coffee breaks, and the stormy reactions of some of the doctors, answered:

“Then they tell me I’m not coming to the dialogue, and he puts me on the dock, threatens me that he will come out of the dark, or I should go out to a dialogue with the one who calls me names, calls me a man who got into the autocratic regime. I don’t belong to anyone! It is high time to remember that. I’m here to defend the country from virus and that’s all. I don’t care about anything else.”¹²

Finally, the President of the Republic repeatedly defended doctors (people on the “first line of the front”) from criticism directed at the Crisis Response Team. When 700 doctors signed a petition against the Crisis Response Team in July 2020, the President said during a guest appearance on the national TV broadcaster RTS:

“I will not allow the attack against the best of us remain without a response. It is someone’s job to destroy everything that exists in Serbia. It’s not a problem at all, Aleksandar Vučić may be the worst in the world, but leave the doctors at peace, leave those great people.”¹³

However, in every war there are “traitors” in their own ranks. It seems that, when it comes to public health, the biggest “traitors” become the medical staff who informed the public in various ways about the situation in COVID hospitals, or the doctors who joined the “United Against COVID” association. Thus, only at the Military Medical Academy, and according to media reports, several chiefs were replaced due to their support to one of this association’s statements.¹⁴ The capture of the health care system has been further

intensified by the dismissal of doctors in chief positions, because the practice before the beginning of the pandemic shows that people close to the government were appointed to the position of hospital director.

One kind of proof that we are at war is the presence of the army and military police on the streets of cities in Serbia. Namely, the President announced in his speech during the declaration of the state of emergency that the army would guard the hospitals. In the following days, it was noticed that members of the army were patrolling the central streets of Belgrade, so the big question was whether the purpose of bringing the army and military police to the streets was to show power, when it is actually a matter of other authorities and services.¹⁵

CONFUSING THE PUBLIC WITH INCONSISTENT MESSAGES: FROM THE FUNNIEST VIRUS TO SMALL CEMETERIES

Serbia's war against the coronavirus was also marked by the alternation of contradictory messages and Orwellian denial of earlier statements. At a time when little was known about the new virus, politicians boasted of Serbian scientists, announcing the development of a vaccine, and a prominent member of the medical staff of the Crisis Response Team even ridiculed the virus.

"I want the citizens of Serbia to know, Serbia with its experts is ready today – we can make that vaccine."¹⁶ (Minister of Health Zlatibor Lončar on TV Pink, 30 January 2020)

A month later, a prominent doctor, as a non-political figure, stated in front of other members of the Crisis Response Team:

"I can't believe that the people who survived the sanctions, the bombing, all kinds of harassment, are afraid of the funniest virus in the history of mankind, which exists on Facebook." "Estrogens definitely protect women, they have mild forms and do not die from this virus. Therefore, women, you should feel free to go shopping in Italy because I hear that there's gonna be big sales there, because no one on earth would go to Italy now."¹⁷ (Dr. Branimir Nestorović, press conference, 26 February 2020)

Shortly afterwards, after it was announced that the first cases of infection had been registered in Serbia, the narrative quickly turned upside down, and it was necessary to forget that it had ever been claimed otherwise.

"Do not lie, no one said it was the funniest virus. No one! The people just said there was no need to panic."¹⁸ (Aleksandar Vučić, press conference, 11 March 2020)

The President soon declared war against the coronavirus, at a time when there were only about 50 infected people in the territory of Serbia, and strict measures of banning movement were introduced. These measures, whose constitutionality is disputable, were almost absolute for persons older than 65, which is justified by the patronising attitude of the state towards this group of the population.

“If you listen to such proposals [for a slight relaxation of measures], neither the whole new cemetery at Bežanijska kosa, Lešće, New cemetery, nor the Central cemetery will be enough for us. All cemeteries will be too small to accommodate all of us if you listen to other people’s suggestions, so please listen to your state.”¹⁹ (Aleksandar Vučić, press conference, 25 March 2020)

The inconsistency can be explained to some extent by the uncertain situation and insufficient information about the novel virus, and the new disease and its treatment, as well as the “fine” direction of public opinion – intimidation to discipline when people do not adhere to measures, appeasement with empty promises when the situation becomes too difficult. But these messages were often inappropriate and extreme, unjustified by the real state of affairs hidden from the public behind the scenes of daily conferences broadcast by almost all media and closely followed by the majority of the population.

During the “war”, citizens were expected to blindly trust the state, regardless of the fact that it alternately gave contradictory messages, at a time of disinformation and hiding information. Those who asked or revealed more than what was presented to the public were marked as malicious enemies of Serbia (see below).

The dynamics of the pandemic and the alternation of conflicting messages were closely connected with the then upcoming regular parliamentary, provincial and local elections in the spring of 2020. Not only did the pandemic affect the holding of elections and the dynamics of the election campaign, but it was also the other way around. The elections were originally announced on 4 March for the end of April.²⁰ Only after nine electoral lists collected and verified signatures, a state of emergency was declared, which enabled the suspension of electoral activities. After the end of the state of emergency in early May, 21 June was set as the new election date.

Although the unofficial election campaign of the ruling party continued during the 52 days of the state of emergency through a series of activities typical of political promotion, now with far greater media coverage,²¹ the narrative subsequently adjusted in preparation for the June general elections. The measures were relaxed, and the dominant message was that Serbia wins the war against the virus.²² Although the title of the Information Booklet of the Serbian Progressive Party for March-April 2020 stated that “Serbia has won a battle against the dangerous virus,”²³ which is what the doctor from the Crisis Response Team said in mid-April, the Prime Minister later claimed that no one had said that.²⁴

The football match in front of thousands of fans was held in Belgrade on 10 June 2020, without any physical distance. The absolute victory of the Serbian Progressive Party in the elections at the end of June was celebrated in the election headquarters without any delay and with the violation of epidemiological measures in front of the public. Already at the beginning of July, President Vučić announced the tightening of measures and the reintroduction of curfew, as well as the difficult upcoming autumn.

“With this speed with which they are being filled, we no longer have hospitals. Today is the most difficult day in our country since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. (...) We’ve made a lot of mistakes, we relaxed too much, we all thought it was over, it was said that the virus would subside over the summer, and that is why we are all individually to blame.”²⁵ (Aleksandar Vučić at the press conference on 7 July 2020)

A spontaneous protest rally in Belgrade followed, which the authorities, along with violent incidents, characterized as “extremely frivolous and irresponsible behaviour.”²⁶ On 10 July, 386 newly infected people were officially registered, while 18 people died. Half a year later, when groups of people were brought to the unveiling of the monument to Stefan Nemanja on 27 January 2021, in addition to the ban on gatherings, ten times more newly infected people and 20 died were recorded.²⁷ In March and April 2021, citizens who oppose epidemiological measures, masks and vaccinations gathered around this monument and danced the *kolo* folk dance. Although at that time the number of infected people increased by more than 4,000 a day, and the number of deaths on a daily basis was over 30, the Prime Minister expressed regret and not condemnation because of this unreported gathering, noting that there was no state reaction because the gathering was peaceful.²⁸

Apart from the inconsistent messages, whose shift went along with the (pre-) election dynamics, the attitude of the authorities towards different actors was also inconsistent, depending on whether they are opposition or pro-government.

LESS AND LESS TRANSPARENCY – “IT’S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS HOW I DO IT, I HAVE MY WAYS”

In the “war” against the pandemic, the government’s aspiration is to present the state and its fight against the coronavirus as one of the best in the region and beyond. On the occasion of the Day of Reconciliation in the First World War, the President stated:

“Today is the most difficult day officially for the Republic of Serbia, as far as the coronavirus pandemic is concerned, both in terms of the number of deaths and the number of infected, but with all that, when you look at the population, we are still among the top five or five in Europe.”²⁹

On the other hand, a part of the public was shocked by BIRN’s research³⁰ that the government, but also the central public health institution in Serbia, the Dr Milan Jovanović Batut Institute, knowingly falsified data on the number of deaths from COVID-19. The latter work of investigative journalists revealed that the number of deaths and the reported number of infected is much higher than officially announced. Statistical data on the total number of dead citizens of Serbia clearly show that there is a very large jump that cannot be explained by statistical criteria.³¹ Certainly, the unavailability of treatment for people suffering from other serious diseases affected a large number of deaths compared to previous years, but the statements of some doctors, as well as analyses of investigative journalists show that the number of deaths from COVID-19 is much higher than officially reported. Authorities repeatedly vehemently denied deliberately covering up the death toll. Explaining the methodology on the basis of which the records of the deceased are made, in June 2020 the Prime Minister of Serbia stated:

“For example, I have the symptoms, I go to the COVID clinic and there I get a positive result and they register me in the database there. I go to the Infectious Diseases Clinic and the bus runs into me. I am a deceased person registered in that database.”³²

On the other hand, a major problem with the information system that collects data on the number of infected and deceased from COVID-19 was also reported by a member of the Crisis Response Team Predrag Kon.³³ The President and the health minister also denied claims that the death toll was higher than officially reported. All this has created a confusing situation in which the right of the public to receive information of public importance is denied.³⁴

However, if it is really true that the government is deliberately covering up the number of deaths from COVID-19, there are two possibilities that can explain such behaviour. The first is to avoid panic among the population, which would be confusing, given that the government and the Crisis Response Team repeatedly spread panic in various ways, as was the case when sending text messages in late March 2020 in the late evening that the situation was dramatic and that we were approaching the scenario from Italy and Spain, or the President's statement from March 2020 about small cemeteries. On that occasion, the President expressed his satisfaction that the citizens were frightened by opening accommodation capacities at the Belgrade Fairgrounds, and added that he would "have to think of something even worse than the Fairgrounds"³⁵.

If we view these statements as statements that increase fear among citizens about the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, i.e., that the government actually spread panic, we can look for another explanation for intentionally covering up the exact number of deaths from COVID-19 in the government's intentions to present the successful fight against the pandemic, especially in its first months, to contribute to a better result of the ruling party in the June 2020 elections or to show that it is better at resolving the crisis compared to other countries, in the region and beyond. Whatever the reason for the large differences between the official number of deceased and the number mentioned by both investigative journalists and prominent medical experts, it is clear that this is an extremely low level of transparency in the work of competent state bodies, as well as misuse of data to achieve political points.

In wars, it is common for rival forces to manipulate numbers – the tactic of deliberately minimising one's own losses while exaggerating the opponent's losses is used to strengthen one's own morale and weaken the opposing side. In this "war against the pandemic", the question is whether the cover-up of the number of infected and deceased "reduced the morale" of the coronavirus, or whether the government is actually at war against its own citizens in order to achieve its own political interests.

In addition to the statistics of victims, the government also manipulated the number of ventilators, which are presented as a key tool in the fight against coronavirus. First, the Prime Minister publicly denied information about the number of ventilators in Serbia, claiming that it was a state secret,³⁶ and a few hours later, that number was announced by President Vučić. Later, however, he emphasised that citizens should not even know how budget funds are spent: "And don't ask me anymore how I procure ventilators." [...] It's none of your business. I have my ways."³⁷ With this statement, he showed that he was responsible for the purchase of ventilators, through his contacts and friends abroad, and later, in a typical pre-election activity (which formally should not have been), he distributed this equipment throughout the country, and stressed that a decade later it will be remembered that those were "ventilators that Vučić delivered".³⁸

COUNTDOWN WITH CRITICS AND SCEPTICISTS – “AS IF YOU PREFERRED THERE WERE MORE PEOPLE DEAD”

In the captured state, critics of the government and official policies are characterised as enemies of the national interest, all questions and re-examinations of the official narrative are interpreted as malicious, and any criticism of the measures introduced by the government is directed against the state and the President as its growing personification. This has also been the case since the beginning of the war against coronavirus.

The government labelled various categories of citizens as “enemies” because of their words and deeds. Among them were Serbian citizens returning from abroad,³⁹ those who did not respect restrictive measures,⁴⁰ but also journalists⁴¹ and civil society organisations⁴² who asked too much questions, as well as opposition groups,⁴³ who questioned the justification of government measures or suggested a different approach to addressing crisis. The narrative of the government representatives also included the division into international friends and false friends who, in a situation of crisis, think only of themselves and leave Serbia in the lurch.⁴⁴

The daily conferences of the political or professional part of the Crisis Response Team, with a live broadcast, were first attended by journalists, respecting all epidemiological measures, and then they were instructed to send questions in advance by e-mail. Although one of the reasons was the concern for the health of journalists, the Minister of Health explained:

“I remind you that we organised expert conferences and went out of our way for the experts to answer, but they turned into political issues and attacks on Vučić.”⁴⁵
(Zlatibor Lončar, 11 April 2020)

The Crisis Response Team warned that journalists, with their critical reporting on the situation on the ground, spread panic and spent their precious time denying misinformation, and at the end of March 2020, the Government secretly banned all institutions and medical staff from providing information about the epidemic, establishing a monopoly of the Crisis Response Team on information. This measure led to the arrest of the journalist for publishing the true story from verified sources, which, along with the disputed constitutionality of the measure, led to violent reactions in the country and the international community, and it was abolished.⁴⁶ As a reason for withdrawing the Conclusion, however, the Prime Minister stated that she was doing so: “at the explicit, direct request of President Aleksandar Vučić and I understand why the President asked me... It is my stupidity and my responsibility, it is my stupidity that I did not explain it, when we passed it.”⁴⁷

When civil society organisations monitoring and promoting the fight against corruption highlighted the dangers of hiding information, acting out of procedures and non-transparent (public) procurement, the President rebuked them:

“Right... they start from themselves, they know how they would steal money from the people’s misery, so they think that others would do the same. No, I’m fighting for people’s lives.”⁴⁸ (Aleksandar Vučić on RTS, 7 April 2020)

When, immediately after the general elections at the end of June, investigative journalists discovered that the officially announced statistics on patients and deaths from the consequences of coronavirus were unreliable and more modest than reality, both journalists and civil society organisations tried to get authentic numbers in the months to follow. Their fight was again marked as unnecessary and malicious.

“You can’t get used to Serbia being one of the best with results. And I’m sorry that it looks like you’d prefer to have more people dead.”⁴⁹ (Zlatibor Lončar, 30 September 2020).

When in July 2020, over 700 medical workers, gathered in the informal initiative “United Against COVID”, condemned the concealment of information and politicization of the profession and demanded the removal of the Crisis Response Team, their appeal was interpreted as politicised and thus discredited.

“That’s how much this is about profession. Then a guy called Panić appears, a man who is the leader of a local front, a politician, abuses the union, the union is not even representative, or anything... There are people who were holders of the Democratic Party list in some previous elections, holders of the Dveri list in these elections and I don’t know which parties... It should continue to bring solidarity with them now of all those who were losers in the elections .”⁵⁰ (Zlatibor Lončar, 22 July 2020)

The protests of citizens who at the end of April 2020, by banging pots from their windows, expressed dissatisfaction with the actions of the authorities, without questioning the great efforts of health workers, were also marked as politicised, oppositional and financed by tycoons.

“They stole the thunder for the applause for doctors and medical staff to make noise. Now you don’t even have the applause for the doctors anymore. You politically abused the applause for those people who are on the front line of the battle.”⁵¹ (Ana Brnabić, 3 May 2020)

In response to “Noise against dictatorship”, torches were organised on the rooftops of buildings in several cities in the middle of the curfew, which was called for in the assembly by a member of the ruling party,⁵² in order to surpass and marginalise the sound of resistance and criticism.

CONCLUSION – “THERE IS NO PLACE FOR DEMOCRACY DURING THE STATE OF EMERGENCY”

The coronavirus pandemic found Serbia in the context of state capture. Precisely because of that, the decisions made by the government within the framework of “crisis management” protected the private and political interests of public office holders. The state of democracy in Serbia deteriorated drastically during the pandemic, as shown by data from relevant international organisations. Moreover, the representatives of the ruling party in Serbia directly pointed out that the state of the pandemic is equal to the “state of war”, and that in that context there is no talk of progress on the issue of human rights and the status of democracy. During the state of emergency, a prominent representative of the ruling party said during the parliamentary debate:

“Ms. Brnabić, you must not have withdrawn the decree on fake news and listen to Aleksandar Vučić not to arrest those who spread lies. Fake reporters are supported here. Everyone has the right to be a journalist, yet no one has the right to lie. There is no place for democracy during the state of emergency.”⁵³ (Vladimir Đukanović, 29 April 2020)

During the management of the crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, it can be concluded that the state capture affected its management in two ways. On the one hand, the current situation affected the decisions, as well as the way of communication regarding the pandemic, to be centralised, and that no one but the bearers of narratives about the pandemic as a “state of war”, created by the ruling party, has the right to present alternative proposals for resolving the crisis. On the other hand, the coronavirus pandemic served to strengthen the process of state capture, especially in the healthcare sector.

Although the coronavirus pandemic has negatively affected the state of democracy at the global level, the cases of states that do not have the status of “democratic states” or, in the case of Serbia, “partially consolidated democracies” are especially sensitive, because the crisis situation is very fertile ground for strengthening authoritarian tendencies. In the case of Serbia, the way the crisis was managed has deepened the momentum of state capture in a form that can be called “covidocracy”.

Endnotes

1 A few terminological notes should be borne in mind: the COVID-19 pandemic has never been declared, the reason being that there is no body authorised to declare a pandemic. On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation described the situation regarding the coronavirus epidemic as if it could be considered a pandemic. In this analysis, however, the word pandemic also refers to the coronavirus epidemic. Finally, it is important to distinguish between the terms coronavirus and COVID-19. Namely, COVID-19 is a disease caused by coronavirus, so we decided to use the phrase “coronavirus pandemic” instead of “COVID-19 pandemic”, which is also widespread in analyses and reports.

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4 See the report “Work of courts during the COVID-19 epidemic – an analysis and recommendations” prepared with the support by OSCE (<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/d/484163.pdf>) and the report of the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights “Human Rights in Serbia in 2020” (<http://www.bgcentar.org.rs/bgcentar/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Ljudska-prava-u-Srbiji-2020-za-web.pdf>)

5 Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, “Reminder: State of Emergency Declared Unconstitutionally in Serbia a Year Ago”, available at <http://www.bgcentar.org.rs/podsetnik-pre-godinu-dana-u-srbiji-neustavno-proglaseno-vanredno-stanje/> (accessed on 2 June 2021)

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7 Ibid.

8 “The President states results from the non-existing list?”, *Istinomer*, 3 April 2020. <https://www.istinomer.rs/analize/predsednik-saopstio-rezultate-sa-nepostojece-liste/>

9 ‘Merkel: Coronavirus is Germany’s greatest challenge since World War II’, *DW*, 19 March 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/merkel-coronavirus-is-germanys-greatest-challenge-since-world-war-ii/a-52830797#:~:text=Merkel%3A%20Coronavirus%20is%20Germany%20s%20greatest,of%20Europe%20s%20hardest%20hit%20states.>

10 “Serbia wins the fight against the dangerous virus”, *SNS Informator (Information Booklet of the Serbian Progressive Party)*, issue no. 83, March-April 2020, https://www.sns.org.rs/sites/default/files/sns_83_pdf_72.pdf, p. 3.

11 Law on Protection of Population from Infectious Diseases (*Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 15/2016, 68/2020 and 136/2020) https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_zastiti_stanovnistva_od_zaraznih_bolesti.html

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