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Global quarantine V

While the Czech Republic imposed strict measures, Turkey counts on donations and Tanzania on prayers against Covid-19

Read our first part of 'Global Quarantine' with perspectives from Russia, Vietnam and Argentina; and the second part with perspectives from Singapore, Bulgaria and Colombia; and the third part with perspectives from Brazil, Palestine and Benin; and the fourth part with perspectives from France, Ecuador and South Africa.

Read this article in German.

Turkey

In Turkey too, the corona crisis has been ignored for far too long. As in many authoritarian countries, there was no transparent reaction to the outbreak from those who are politically responsible. On the contrary, critical reports on social media were deleted and the authors arrested, so in order to prevent unrest among the population. First, it was argued that everyone should provide for their own quarantine: the state was not responsible. Employees in particular were therefore faced with a dilemma: if they don't show up for work, they lose their job. If they go to work, they risk their health.

With increasing numbers of cases, however, the attitude of the Turkish government changed. Massive measures have now been taken to contain the virus. Accordingly, public life in Turkey has largely come to a standstill. Initially curfews were imposed on people over the age of 65. At the weekend, President Erdogan announced that young people under the age of 20 must immediately begin observing a curfew. Train service has been suspended, there is an international and national ban on flights and long-distance buses are no longer allowed to operate. Moreover, people are also now prohibited from driving private vehicles into or out of the 31 largest cities. Wearing a face mask is mandatory in all shops and markets.

The number of infected persons was 38,226 on 09 April, and the number of fatalities 812. By far the hardest hit is Istanbul, with nearly 9,000 infected. The current official figures are now being published daily on Twitter by the Minister of Health. However, so far only 228,868 tests have been carried out. As a result, there are a large number of undetected cases of both infected and fatalities. Initially, only a few government hospitals were entrusted with caring for corona patients. In very little time, they were completely overloaded. Doctors in these hospitals are talking about a much higher infection rate and chaotic conditions, while warning of an impending health disaster.

The overcrowded prisons are of great concern. If the virus spreads there, the consequences would be terrible. For this reason, the government has decided on an amnesty for one-time offenders. The opposition and civil society have criticised the fact that political prisoners and journalists were excluded from this amnesty.

The virus has done what neither the West nor other forces involved in the Syria conflict have been able to do so far: the Turkish military wants to withdraw largely from Syria and Libya out of concern that its soldiers could be infected. The movements of soldiers in the neighbouring country are to be reduced to a minimum and patrols carried out only in the most necessary cases.

The Turkish economy is likely to be hit much more severely by the effects of the virus than in other countries. Tourism, which only now has begun to flourish again – after the various terrorist attacks, attempted coups and political tensions with the West – has come to a dead stop. Unemployment is exploding and the state lacks the resources to take countermeasures. The President's appeal to the population to use private donations to combat the serious social impact of the crisis became a huge target of mockery. His appeal gives the impression that the state does not want to and should not care for its citizens the way that other countries do, but instead it's the other way around: in Turkey the people must now save the state.

Felix Schmidt, FES Istanbul

Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, the government coalition led by Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, with the participation of the Social Democrats, reacted very early to the impending danger of the Covid-19 spreading. Air traffic between China and the Czech Republic was discontinued in early February and in later that month a travel warning about the coronavirus

was issued regarding the severely affected areas in northern Italy. This soon resulted in a quarantine obligation for travellers returning from these areas. On 12 March, a 30-day state of emergency was declared. Most schools and kindergartens had already been closed by then.

After that, one thing followed another. All restaurants and all shops that are not necessary for essential goods were closed. A country-wide curfew was imposed that permitted only trips to work, the pharmacy, and grocery stores, as well as visits to the elderly and other people in need (with the exception of hospitals, nursing homes, and retirement homes). Wearing face masks outside of one's own home became mandatory. Special shopping hours for older people were introduced. The 'smart quarantine' pilot project for the use of mobile phone data is currently underway. By using mobile device pings to carrier antennas and data from payment cards, all those people who were in contact with Covid-19 sufferers are determined and then examined for the virus by a test team within a few hours. If the pilot project in southern Moravia is successful, it could be expanded to the entire country after Easter.

The Czech Republic also led the way in border closures. Czech citizens and foreigners with permanent residence are not allowed to leave the country until further notice. Czech commuters can leave the country if they remain abroad for at least three weeks; when they return, they must undergo a 14-day quarantine. Medical personnel are exempted from this.

These early restrictive measures may have worked. Out of the population of 10.6 million, as of 9 April, 5,335 were ill, 104 died, and 243 recovered. Relative to the size of the population, this indicates significantly fewer cases than in Germany, although it should be borne in mind that in the Czech Republic significantly fewer tests are probably carried out. The increasing number of cases is a major challenge for the underserved health system. Only 7.5 per cent of GDP goes to the health sector. Because of low salaries, many doctors and nurses are looking for employment in other European countries.

The economic situation in the Czech Republic has been good until now: in recent years, growth rates have fluctuated between two and three per cent; at 32 per cent, the debt rate is the fourth lowest in the EU and unemployment is the lowest in the EU at a mere 2 per cent. But the shutdown will plunge the export-oriented country into a deep economic crisis. Experts expect an economic slump of four to ten percent. The Czech koruna has already fallen 8 per cent against the euro.

The Social Democratic Minister of Labour has presented an 'antivirus' package. According to the proposal, employees would receive a short-

time allowance and employers would get a maximum government subsidy of 80 per cent. Since the Czech Republic is still one of the low-wage countries and even before the crisis, the income of the vast majority of employees barely allowed them to meet their basic needs, this short-time work benefit will throw many into a serious struggle for survival. Unemployment could rise to eight per cent. The 'Covid programme' was adopted for companies, thereby providing small and medium-sized companies with interest-free loans and giving small, one-time support to businesses left without income.

In the debates about suitable measures to combat crises, the trade unions are making themselves heard rather strongly. The ČMKOS umbrella organisation (the Bohemian-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions) is also represented on the newly convened economic policy expert committee advising the government. It attaches great importance to making short-time employment as generous as possible and to generally maintaining the purchasing power of the population. It has come out in favour of suspending loan repayments and advocates preventing the usual high capital outflows abroad in order to cover the additional costs.

Prime Minister Andrej Babiš presents himself as a European pioneer in the fight against the coronavirus. In principle, the population accepted all the measures introduced without much criticism, but its critics are finding fault with inadequate crisis management. Many do not trust Babiš to get this crisis under control. Minister of the Interior Jan Hamáček has been head of the crisis team since the beginning of April. He is also the leader of the Social Democratic Party. It remains to be seen whether the Social Democrats will be able to gain any political capital out of this or whether they will be held liable for the crisis management of the at times rather polarising Babiš. If the Czech Republic fails to get a grip on the crisis, Prime Minister Babiš will have a ready scapegoat.

The Czech Republic did not comment on the call for European solidarity between Northern and Southern Europe. Even if the country is not currently a poster boy when it comes to democracy and the rule of law, solidarity for those affected must also exist between East and West, precisely because the value chains here are particularly closely linked.

Anne Seyfferth, FES Prague

Tanzania

With the official confirmation of the first people infected with the coronavirus on 16 March, the Tanzanian government under President John Magufuli called for 'social distancing' and imposed several measures

to contain the virus. He prohibited public events and closed educational institutions such as schools and universities for 30 days. He limited the maximum number of passengers in the 'dala dala' taxi minibuses, which are the primary form of transportation in the city and in the country. He ordered stricter hygiene regulations and hand washing requirements everywhere. The Uhuru Torch Race, a publicly celebrated nationwide torch relay and national symbol of independence, has also been suspended for the first time since 1961.

However, markets and religious institutions are completely exempt from such restrictions. Magufuli even grants religious faith a central role in the fight against the virus and encourages people to continue to flock to Sunday masses and Friday prayers to seek divine support. Meanwhile, this approach is coming right before the Easter fairs and without regard for the way that it contributed to the spread of the virus in other countries such as South Korea. This trust in God symbolises a self-contradictory policy that tries to close off some sources of danger but knowingly allows others.

With currently 22 cases on the Tanzanian mainland and the associated semi-autonomous Zanzibar islands, the country is at the lower end of the global infection scale and in the middle of the range for Africa. The government is committed to presenting the situation as under control, pointing to the low official number of cases. As in other countries, however, these figures are put in perspective by considering the small number of tests carried out. This number is in just the middle three-digit range – in a country with the population of Italy. As part of an Africa-wide donation from the foundation of the Chinese entrepreneur Jack Ma, Tanzania obtained 100,000 protective face masks, 1,000 protective suits and 20,000 test kits. This stands as an indicator of inadequate protective and test equipment in the country as well as China's soft power on the continent.

While some of the neighbouring East African countries selectively imposed strict curfew and restrictions on contact, Tanzania takes a much milder approach. Obviously, the concern about the negative economic consequences of far-reaching restrictions outweighs that of the pandemic itself. It is not by chance that Magufuli publicly announced that the nation was not going to be led away from the path of economic development because of the virus; everyone would have to continue to work hard.

Tourism, one of the central economic and employment sectors and also a primary source of foreign exchange, has slumped and will hardly recover because of the global situation, certainly not this year. Tougher political

measures would further exacerbate the economic situation and affect, among other things, the construction sector, which contributes significantly to the high annual economic growth of 6-7 per cent of GDP on average. Economic industrialisation remains the core element and political promise of Magufuli, who will stand for re-election in October. He needs to have left a pandemic as far and potentially impactful as the coronavirus far behind him, at least for the time being.

In any case, the social view of the virus is more fatalistic than in the countries of the global North. This may hardly come as a surprise in a country where, according to the WHO, around 20,000 people still die from malaria each year. In addition, the population is extremely young – half of them are under 18 – which is an important factor in the risk assessment by the government and its consideration of further measures.

In addition to the government's acute crisis preparedness and management, the social and social impact must also be kept in mind. Around 85 per cent of the working population in Tanzania earns a living from their household in informal and precarious employment – as day labourers and small businesses without any reserves and social security. In their extremely vulnerable socio-economic situation, they are confronted with two evils. Namely, if the government decides to prohibit contact and impose curfews and rigorously enforces these, the people are deprived of their basis for survival from one day to the next and must fear starvation. If such measures fail to materialise, they are more likely to be infected from the inadequate water supply in densely populated settlements, the lack of affordable protective clothing, and the crowded markets and buses.

The external shock of the coronavirus highlights the vulnerability of a development model in which far-reaching social protection and support for the poorest sections of the population is not provided for as an elementary component of economic promotion and levelling social inequality. There is a very acute and real danger that the successes of the past decade in reducing relative poverty may slow down and possibly even be reversed, due to the pandemic and subsequent long-term global recession. The trend of growing social and economic inequalities threatens to be exacerbated by the coronavirus.

Andreas Quasten, FES Tanzania



Felix Schmidt
Istanbul

Felix Schmidt represents the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Turkey. He has also worked for the foundation in Kenya, Zimbabwe, Vietnam, India and Germany.



Anne Seyfferth
Prag

Anne Seyfferth heads the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's (FES) office in Prag. Previously, she has headed the department for Western Europe and North America (WENA) of the FES in Berlin.



Andreas Quasten
Dar es Salaam

Andreas Quasten heads the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's office in Tanzania and previously worked for the FES in Berlin and in South Africa.