

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"



Faculty of Philosophy

Department: "Political Science"

**"The Covid-crisis: institutional communication and legitimacy
- Bulgaria and the EU"**

ABSTRACT

of a dissertation for the acquisition of an educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.3 Political science, doctoral program, "Political science" - International relations

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The dissertation is 243 pages long and includes an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, an appendix and a bibliography.

The bibliography covers 178 used sources, of which 142 in English and 36 in Bulgarian.

Keywords: COVID-19, crisis, theory, institutions, communication, legitimacy, power.

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General characteristics of the dissertation work

Relevance of the topic

The crisis caused by COVID-19 has no analogues in our time and can only be somewhat compared even to the great flu epidemic after the end of the First World War, which claimed the lives of tens of millions. The upheavals caused by the coronavirus are multidimensional, affecting the entire world, the manifestations of the pandemic have changed all aspects of our lives.

Highly developed communications have brought the problem into every home mostly through television and internet media. In many countries and cities, the normal rhythm of everyday life has been disrupted, both during work and during leisure time. The economy at the national and international level has faced serious challenges, both related to the existence of wage labor and the logistics chains of production and the supply of markets.

Individual sectors related to gathering more people in one place were directly and severely hit, which in itself led to serious macroeconomic shocks. But at the same time, other economic activities were stimulated, related not only to the production of medicines and medical supplies, but also to communication technologies in conditions in which the role of digital communication has increased enormously.

Different models of crisis management were implemented in countries with different political systems and political regimes. Even in countries with a reputation for developed and stable democracies, more severe mandatory restrictive measures were applied. Within the European Union, for the first time since the end of the Second World War, in almost all countries, citizens were severely restricted in their movement, even within the settlements in which they live. The free movement of people within the Union was called into question. There were also examples of different and less restrictive approaches to fighting the pandemic. But in some countries there have even been decisions on compulsory vaccination, which have given rise to very serious debates about the limits that should not be crossed when it comes to violating human rights. In some countries the approaches were changed more than once.

There is no clear answer as to which model is correct. Each new situation requires a new style of management and policy making. Precisely because of this, the topic is extremely relevant and significant for political science and should be studied and analyzed in detail.

Objective of the dissertation. Formulating research questions

The main research question contains the following elements:

1. Has the pandemic created a new kind of crisis and led to the development of communication models that contribute to its effective management at international, European and national levels?
2. What is the role of communication in the management of the covid crisis at the national and European level?
3. How did the quality of communication affect the legitimacy of national and European institutions?
4. Has communication during the pandemic affected the relationship between the nation-state and its citizens?
5. What is the role of communication on the ability to adapt at national and European level?

The main research hypothesis contains the following elements:

1. The pandemic is causing a social and economic crisis of a new type. Both nation states and supranational institutions are not prepared to deal with it.
2. The pandemic is a test of the sustainability of the liberal order, democracy, freedom and civil rights, leading to a reassessment of the entire political debate about human rights and freedoms and the cases in which their limitation is allowed
3. The pandemic and related health, social and economic crises create conditions for strengthening the role of the national state and its power over the economy, but also over people's lives.
4. The communication of the national and European institutions during the crisis should be evaluated thoroughly and comprehensively, considering both the positive and the negative and sides
5. The communication of national and European institutions is a key factor for trust in them and for their legitimacy in the eyes of citizens.

Object of the study

The object of this study is institutional communication as a tool for managing the covid crisis and preserving the legitimacy of national and European institutions.

Subject of the study

The subject of the research are the ways of communication between national institutions and citizens, European institutions and citizens and between national and European institutions, as well as the role of health diplomacy as a specific communication tool.

Purpose of the study

1. To identify the effective communication models at national and European level during the pandemic and evaluate their positive and negative sides for dealing with the crisis
2. To identify the role of communication on the relationship between the state and citizens, as well as on the protection of their rights
3. To identify to what extent the lack of communication strengthens the control of the state over its citizens and limits the rights and freedoms of the latter
4. To establish the potential of communication as a power resource.

Theoretical approaches and research methods

The research methods used in the dissertation are enriched with theoretical approaches that offer different perspectives for understanding the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on society and institutions. These theoretical frameworks help to deeply analyze and interpret the events and trends related to the pandemic:

1. **Functionalism and Structural Functionalism:** This approach views society as a system of interrelated parts that work together to maintain stability and equilibrium. In the context of COVID-19, the analysis focuses on the role of institutions and their ability to adapt and respond to the crisis to keep society functioning. This approach emphasizes the importance of effective institutional response and coordination in the fight against the pandemic.

2. **Conflict Theory:** Sees society as an arena of conflict between different groups with opposing interests, emphasizing inequality, power, and social injustice. In the context of the pandemic, this approach reveals how the crisis has increased existing social and economic inequalities and led to a struggle for resources, thus affecting social structure and relations.

3. **Symbolic Interactionism:** Focuses on small interpersonal interactions and the meaning people attach to these interactions and social symbols. In the context of COVID-19, analysis can look at how the pandemic has changed everyday social practices, communication and perceptions, leading to the rewriting of social scripts and the adaptation of new norms of behaviour.

4. **Social Exchange Theory:** This approach examines social interactions as an exchange of resources where participants seek to maximize benefits and minimize costs. In the COVID-19 situation, theory can help understand adaptations and reciprocity in social relations, including how individuals and communities agree to certain constraints and measures for the common good.

Combined, these theoretical approaches provide a multidisciplinary framework for analyzing the complex and multilayered impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, enabling a deeper understanding of the social, economic, and political dynamics unfolding as a result of the pandemic.

Research methods

- qualitative analysis
- comparative analysis
- descriptive analysis
- analysis of the content of publications, reports
- analytical-synthetic method of analysis
- speeches and statements of politicians, internationalists and analysts.

CHAPTER ONE: EXPLANATORY CONCEPTS AND TERMINOLOGY

1.1. Defining "crisis"

In the first chapter of the dissertation, I analyze key concepts for the purposes of the research, including: "crisis", "political crisis", "crisis of democracy", "crisis management".

Text 1.1. presents a multidisciplinary analysis of the concept of "crisis", examining its meaning from etymological, philosophical, sociological and political perspectives.

The term "crisis" is derived from the ancient Greek word meaning "judgment", "decision" or "decisive moment". In various languages, such as French, German and English, the term preserves its connection with the Greek root. In medicine, it is used to describe the critical moment in the course of a disease that determines the future development - life or death of the patient.

The crisis can be viewed in multiple contexts - cultural, economic, political, etc. The modern concept of crisis is related to a wide range of phenomena that make us aware of our interconnectedness and responsibility to the community.

Sociology sees crisis as a moment of discrimination, choice, and decision, which may include conflict resolution. The term is often applied as a catch-all category to various types of negative events, such as disasters, accidents, incidents, and emergencies.

The text cites several studies by several authors, among them: Krumenacher, Litte, Tsoiopoulos and Schönplflug, Karus, and also modern researchers such as Milatinovich and others, who contribute to expanding and detailing the concept of crisis.

1.2. Defining "political crisis" and "crisis of democracy"

A political crisis is seen as a critical moment that leads to significant changes in the structures or functioning of the political system. The crisis of democracy is related to challenges to democratic institutions and processes. The text discusses the views of various scholars such as Philipp Schmitter, Leonardo Morlino and Adam Przeworski, who analyze various aspects of the crisis in democratic systems.

Types of crises in democracy according to Philip Schmitter:

- The crisis of governance includes problems with the effectiveness of governance, political fragmentation and societal complexity.
- Identity crisis is related to internal conflicts and problems due to globalization, multicultural societies and alienation.

- The crisis of participation reflects the declining participation of citizens in the political process.

Leonardo Morlino and the Crisis of Legitimacy:

According to Morlino, the crisis of legitimacy occurs when citizens lose confidence in political institutions and processes. The factors that cause it are institutional inconsistencies, corruption, unfavorable economic conditions and social alienation. An important aspect of the political crisis is the question of the legitimacy of the political system or the state. Crises of legitimacy and effectiveness are seen as central to the emergence of political crises.

Adam Przeworski presents a minimalist and electoralist view of democracy

Democracy is perceived as a system in which the people have the opportunity to choose and remove the rulers through elections. Signs of crisis include the erosion of traditional party systems, the rise of xenophobic and nationalist parties, and declining support for democratic ideals.

This analysis highlights the diversity and complexity of crises in democracy and capitalism, emphasizing different theoretical approaches to understanding and solving these crises.

1.3. Defining crisis management

The text presents a detailed analysis of crisis management, looking at the historical context, theoretical approaches, methodologies and strategies for dealing with crisis situations in different spheres.

Crisis management emerged as a serious scientific discipline and practice in the second half of the 20th century, with origins in the political sphere, particularly at the time of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, when President Kennedy used the term to describe emergency management. A crisis is seen as a serious threat to the basic structures or fundamental values and norms of the system, requiring critical decisions to be made under pressure. Two main issues are addressed in the study of crisis: the causes of crisis and crisis management. The crisis approach embraces a variety of theoretical perspectives to answer these questions, borrowing ideas from across the social sciences. Crisis management is seen as theory-driven applied management involving processes for identifying, analyzing and predicting crisis situations, as well as creating means to prevent or deal with the crisis. A crisis management approach includes prevention, preparation, mitigation and recovery, requiring the modeling of actions, agreements and decisions that affect the course of a crisis.

Authors such as Deon Canyon and Bruce Dayton present different definitions and approaches to crisis management, emphasizing the importance of preventive action and the need for proactive and reactive management. Effective crisis management requires early recognition, reflection,

decision-making, coordination, accountability and training. The psychological constraints and stress of the crisis can seriously affect information management and decision-making. Crisis management is a complex and multifactorial phenomenon that requires an integrated approach and the combination of different strategies and methodologies to deal with unknown and unpredictable situations. Crises can offer lessons for future planning and preparation, highlighting the importance of the resilience and adaptability of societies and organizations.

1.4. Conclusions from the first chapter

A universal explanatory concept of the concepts "crisis" and "political crisis" cannot be developed. However, a set of conditions can be identified that make its occurrence and development likely. The general conditions for the presence of a crisis is a sudden event or problem that causes harm and challenges the affected parties to find a solution.

A political crisis is expressed in the inability of the government and state institutions to find a solution or deal with an unexpected and unforeseen problem of a political, economic, financial, health, international or image nature.

The political crisis has the following functions:

1. leads to changes in the forms of social life,
2. questions the legitimacy of the government,
3. threatens with the disintegration of management and manageability,
4. causes serious image damage,
5. creates a prerequisite for the emergence of protest movements and revolutions,
6. tests states and existing alliances – economic, military or political,
7. breakdown of inter-state relations – severance of diplomatic relations, imposition of embargo, declaration of war,
8. escalation of the situation to a change in the form of government.

CHAPTER TWO: COMMUNICATION AS POWER AND POWER AS COMMUNICATION

2.1. Communication as power and power as communication in the theoretical concepts of Hannah Arendt

The second chapter explores communication as power and power as communication, focusing on the theoretical concepts of Hannah Arendt. It sees power not as coercion or control, but as collective action and shared commitment rooted in the freedom and reciprocity of human relationships. She criticizes traditional notions of power that equate it with force, control or dominance and emphasizes the difference between power and violence.

Arendt sees power as something that is realized in the public sphere through communication, persuasion, and reason, not through violence or coercion. She uses ancient Greek democracy as a model, where power is exercised in the public space of the agora through dialogue and debate. This public space allows citizens to express their identities and participate in the collective formation of the common will.

Arendt also criticizes contemporary trends for the privatization of public space and the reduction of active political participation, which leads to the degradation of democratic processes and the strengthening of totalitarian tendencies. It emphasizes the importance of active civic participation and public engagement in maintaining the vitality of democratic institutions.

In conclusion, Hannah Arendt emphasizes that true power derives from the ability of people to act together in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding, thereby creating the basis for a political community that celebrates freedom and pluralism. Such a conception of power challenges traditional notions and emphasizes the importance of communicative power in political life.

2.2. Communication as power and power as communication in the theoretical concepts of Jürgen Habermas

This section of the text examines the notion of communicative power in the theoretical concepts of Jürgen Habermas, deriving it from the ideas of Hannah Arendt and integrating it into the broader framework of deliberative democracy. Habermas understands communicative power as the basis of popular sovereignty, which stands in contrast to administrative and economic power, using shared beliefs and intersubjective recognition of validity claims.

Based on the division between systemic logic and the lifeworld, Habermas identifies power as arising from everyday communications and interactions enabled by natural language, in contrast to systemic mechanisms of social integration such as money and administrative power. It adds to

systems theory the idea of communicative power, which is based on the presumptions embedded in natural language, and seeks to rescue the normative ideal of popular sovereignty in the context of complex and systemically governed modern society.

Through his core-periphery model of deliberative politics, Habermas presents how open debates in the public sphere can influence empowered decision-making bodies, turning public opinion into political power. He views communicative power as a combination of normative and empirical dimensions of politics, where the 'communicative' aspect reflects normative ideals of communicative action, while 'power' relates to empirical decision-making ability.

Habermas also considers communicative power in the context of institutionalized democratic procedures, where it becomes a component of political power when it influences the beliefs and decisions of the political system. It emphasizes the role of the public sphere as a site for the emergence of communicative power that can be transformed into political power through institutionalized procedures.

In conclusion, Habermas presents a vision of communicative power as an essential component of the democratic process, where communication and reasoned debate in the public sphere form the basis of political legitimacy and power. It emphasizes the importance of casual communication and intersubjective understanding as essential elements of democratic political culture, thereby expanding and complementing traditional understandings of political power and democracy.

CHAPTER THREE: The covid crisis - a crisis of legitimacy or effectiveness?

In the third chapter, I empirically test whether the crisis caused by COVID-19 will meet the criteria I have developed for a political crisis. For the purposes of this research, I also conducted 10 in-depth interviews with journalists covering the COVID-19 crisis, working in news agencies, radio and television.

To make the research more representative, I also conducted a survey with the same closed-ended questions with 1,142 people on social media. It is clear from it that public opinion regarding the effectiveness of communication between institutions and society in Bulgaria during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic is diverse and mostly inclined towards a more negative assessment.

We start from the first characteristic - did the crisis lead to changes in the forms of social life and how did this affect our civil rights.

How has COVID-19 changed the forms of social life?

COVID-19 has dramatically turned the world upside down and entered every aspect of our lives, including the way we socialize and interact with each other. Social distancing measures and quarantines have encouraged the use of technology to keep in touch with loved ones and friends. Virtual meetings have become the new norm, with people using various video conferencing platforms to communicate, work and study.

Pandemic restrictions have also transformed public gatherings and events. Concerts, festivals, weddings and other celebrations have been cancelled, limited or re-directed to online formats, limiting opportunities for in-person contact and communication. Many people switched to working and studying from home, which meant less physical contact with colleagues and classmates.

Online shopping and home deliveries have become more popular, with many avoiding brick-and-mortar stores to reduce the risk of infection. This also contributed to a decrease in personal contacts and social interactions.

How has COVID-19 challenged the legitimacy of governments around the world?

COVID-19 is not just a health crisis; it also caused political and social storms in many countries around the world. In trying to manage the crisis, governments faced unexpected challenges that undermined confidence in their legitimacy and competence.

One of the main factors that affected the legitimacy of governments was the way of communication and the level of transparency. In many countries, information was either withheld or

presented in a way that created confusion and uncertainty. The lack of clear and consistent information undermined trust in institutions and their authority.

Decisions related to the management of the pandemic, such as quarantines, border closures and restrictions, have also been subject to criticism. In many cases, the swift and drastic measures were perceived as inadequate or too strict, which sparked opposition and protests.

The management of the crisis had profound socio-economic consequences that also damaged the legitimacy of governments. Many people lost their jobs, businesses suffered, and social inequalities deepened, causing public discontent and instability.

COVID-19: A threat not only to governance but also to governability?

COVID-19 has challenged not only the stability of governments, but also the very concept of governability of states and their ability to respond adequately to crises.

The crisis exposed numerous weaknesses in the governance structures of various countries. In addition to specific governance issues, COVID-19 has also raised more general questions about the governability of states. Conditions were created for the spread of misinformation, conspiracy theories and political instability, which undermined trust in institutions and the possibility of rational management of society.

Trust in institutions is a key factor for the successful governability of any country. COVID-19 has put this factor under severe pressure, with confidence severely damaged in many countries due to conflicting information, lack of a clear strategy and inadequate measures to address the crisis.

Image damage from COVID-19

One of the main image damages was related to the transparency and communication of governments. Some countries have been criticized for information delays, inaccurate data and a lack of a clear communication strategy. This undermined citizens' confidence and reduced the effectiveness of public health measures.

Different strategies to deal with the pandemic also had a significant impact on the image of countries. While some countries were praised for their quick response and effective measures, others were criticized for being unprepared and inadequate.

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the image of countries around the world in various aspects, from transparency and communication to social responsibility and technological readiness. Lessons learned from this period should serve to prepare and strengthen the image of states for future global challenges and crises.

COVID-19: Prerequisite for protest movements and revolutions?

COVID-19 has not only exposed the global health crisis, but also changed the social and political realities in many countries. The strict measures implemented by governments, combined with the economic and social consequences, have created conditions that can stimulate protest movements and even revolutionary sentiments. Pandemic lockdowns and restrictions have led to mass unemployment, business bankruptcies and economic instability. These factors contribute to increasing public dissatisfaction and can serve as a basis for protest movements.

Social distancing measures and other restrictions imposed to limit the spread of the virus have been seen as an assault on individual freedoms and rights, which could also fuel protest sentiment.

COVID-19 is undoubtedly creating conditions that can fuel protest movements and social unrest. However, whether they can escalate to the level of revolutions depends on multiple factors, including historical, cultural, and political contexts in particular societies. In any case, COVID-19 will go down in history as a significant factor affecting socio-political processes at the beginning of the 21st century.

COVID-19: A Test for States and Unions - How to strengthen international security and cooperation?

COVID-19 has severely affected the global economy, disrupting supply chains and straining economic unions. Different regions and countries were affected to varying degrees, which created tensions within economic blocs and required a new strategy for economic recovery and cooperation.

Although not directly related to hostilities, COVID-19 has affected the operations and priorities of military alliances. The pandemic has highlighted the need for improved biosecurity and health emergency response preparedness. The pandemic has exposed the imperfections and weaknesses in international political alliances and cooperation. A lack of coordination and cooperation in the early stages of the crisis undermined efforts to combat the spread of the virus.

COVID-19 and Interstate Relations: Decay or Reformation?

Some countries did implement restrictions and embargoes, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, aimed at protecting national interests, health resources and medical supplies. These measures were temporary and focused on protecting the lives and health of citizens.

The pandemic did not, by its very nature, lead to a declaration of war between states. However, existing conflicts continued, and in some cases, related to COVID-19, further exacerbated the situation.

COVID-19 has had an impact on interstate relations, in some cases reformulating traditional approaches to diplomacy and interstate cooperation. The pandemic was not a direct cause of collapse, embargoes or military conflicts, but it further complicated some aspects of foreign policy and interstate relations.

Managing the COVID-19 crisis: Different forms of governance in focus

The crisis caused by COVID-19 has severely tested various forms of governance around the world. From authoritarian to democratic regimes, every form of governance has had to formulate and implement strategies to weather the storm created by the pandemic. In this analysis, we'll look at how different systems fared and what lessons we can learn from their response.

Authoritarian rule: Monitoring effectiveness

Authoritarian regimes have often demonstrated effectiveness in implementing swift and drastic measures. With the ability to control and restrict information and civil liberties, they were able to impose and enforce strict restrictions, quarantines and contact tracing. However, this approach created conditions for human rights violations and a lack of transparency.

As the epicenter of the pandemic, China quickly mobilized its resources, implementing strict isolation measures, mass testing and contact tracing. The authoritarian nature of governance allowed for swift and decisive action, but also raised questions about transparency and respect for civil rights.

Democratic Governance: Consensus and Coordination

Democratic regimes have tried to strike a balance between protecting public health and respecting civil liberties. They focused on consensus, information and promotion of vaccination through education and access to resources. However, democratic systems often faced challenges related to coordination, consent and speed of response.

The EU, which characterizes a more liberal and coordinated approach, focuses on solidarity and cooperation between member states. While facing challenges such as uneven distribution of vaccines and differences in national health systems, the EU sought a common strategy and support.

The US, influenced by neoliberal ideas, initially focused on individual freedom and economic activity. Although the federal approach was decentralized, over time more coordinated efforts were adopted to deal with the pandemic, including incentives and vaccination campaigns.

Russia implemented a mixed approach, combining elements of authoritarian rule with a degree of decentralization. The creation and distribution of its own vaccine (Sputnik V) was a key element in Russia's crisis management strategy.

CHAPTER FOUR: The COVID-19 crisis through the prism of some sociological theories

The analysis of COVID-19 through the prism of different sociological theories reveals the multifaceted nature of the pandemic and its impact on society. Four key perspectives are summarized here:

4.1. The COVID crisis through the prism of functionalism and structural functionalism: the role of institutions in the fight against the pandemic

Functionalism and structural functionalism view society as a system of interdependent parts where each institution has its function in maintaining social order and stability. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the role of health institutions, education, the family and the workforce as key components in addressing the crisis. The effectiveness of these institutions in cooperation and adaptation to the new reality was essential to contain the pandemic and reduce its consequences.

4.2. Conflict theory and the interpretation of COVID-19: struggle for resources and social injustice

Conflict theory emphasizes the uneven distribution of resources, power, and influence that leads to social inequalities and conflicts. COVID-19 has exacerbated existing social divisions, such as in access to medical care, vaccination and economic resources. The pandemic has highlighted the need to address these inequalities and the potential for social change through mobilization and organization of affected groups.

4.3. COVID-19 through the lens of symbolic interactionism: rewriting social scripts

Symbolic interactionism focuses on everyday social interactions and the meaning that individuals attach to these interactions. The theory emphasizes the symbols, language, and other forms of communication that people use to give meaning to and shape their realities, identities, and worlds. New symbols and meanings created by COVID-19 are the masks - a symbol of protection and responsibility, the lockdown - a symbol of isolation and struggle. The pandemic has changed social norms and behaviors, forcing new forms of communication, work and education. Social scripts adapted to the new reality, reflecting the changed relationships and expectations between individuals.

4.4. Social exchange theory and COVID-19: adaptation and reciprocity in a pandemic

Social exchange theory views social relationships as an exchange of resources where individuals seek maximum benefit at minimum cost. In the context of a pandemic, concepts such as solidarity, cooperation and mutual aid have become particularly important. Communities and

individuals came together to support the vulnerable and share resources, showing the importance of reciprocity and mutual support in crisis situations.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE NATION-STATE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS

5.1. The Bulgarian model of managing the covid-crisis, different types of leadership

The fifth chapter begins with a historical overview of health care in Bulgaria. The following is an analysis of the different phases that the COVID-19 pandemic is going through in Bulgaria.

Initial Blast (March - May 2020)

- Phase 1: An initial introduction of strict measures was seen, including the closure of borders, schools and non-essential businesses, as well as the imposition of curfews in some areas.

- Challenges: Lack of personal protective equipment and tests, unpreparedness of the health system for the rapid influx of patients.

Summer Slump and False Hope (June - August 2020)

- Phase 2: After the strict lockdown, there is a temporary decrease in cases. Measures are being eased, the economy is starting to open up.

- Challenges: Underestimating the virus by society, increasing travel and social contact.

Fall Wave and Pressure on Healthcare (September - December 2020)

- Phase 3: Increase in cases after the summer period. The pressure on the health system is acutely felt.

- Challenges: Lack of medical personnel, overcrowded hospitals, difficulties in public health management.

Winter and Vaccination (January - March 2021)

- Phase 4: The vaccination campaign begins.

- Challenges: Skepticism towards vaccines, logistical problems with the distribution and administration of vaccines, the emergence of new variants of the virus.

Alpha and Delta Waves (April - November 2021)

- Phase 5: Variants such as Alpha and later Delta led to new waves of infection. The delta version turned out to be much more contagious than the previous ones.

- Challenges: Rapid increase in cases, greater portability and pressure on hospitals, need for stricter measures.

Omicron and New Reality (December 2021 - 2023)

- Phase 6: Emergence of the Omicron variant, which was even more contagious but often associated with milder cases among the vaccinated.

- Challenges: Managing the sheer number of cases, adapting to living with the virus, transitioning to an endemic management approach.

The analysis of the Bulgarian model of managing the COVID-19 crisis reveals different leadership styles and approaches to the management of the pandemic, as well as the dynamically changing public and political attitude towards the crisis.

Prime Minister Boyko Borissov showed an authoritarian and decisive leadership style by introducing strict measures in response to the pandemic and actively communicating with the public. However, his style has been criticized for a lack of transparency and ambiguous messages. High levels of approval at the start of the pandemic gradually gave way to criticism and distrust, leading to the resignation of his government.

President Rumen Radev took a critical position towards the government's management of the crisis, emphasizing the protection of democratic principles and citizens' rights. Radev encouraged public solidarity and support for medical staff, calling for greater transparency and accountability from the executive branch.

The leadership of Gen. Ventsislav Mutafchiiski, as the chairman of the National Operational Staff to fight against COVID-19, was characterized by direct communication and an emphasis on science-based solutions. Despite initially high public confidence, challenges and the changing situation called into question the effectiveness of his approach later in the course of the pandemic.

In all these cases, public attitudes and trust in leaders underwent significant changes during the pandemic period, reflecting the perceived effectiveness of their measures and communication with the public. Conflicting opinions, including oppositional viewpoints, further contributed to the dynamic and sometimes polarized public environment in Bulgaria during the COVID-19 crisis.

5.2. The importance of global health governance and health diplomacy during COVID-19

Global health governance and health diplomacy have proven pivotal in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the need for cooperation, coordination and innovation at the international level. Global health governance encompasses the set of processes, policies, laws and institutions that shape how health issues are addressed globally. Its main objective is to address global health challenges such as epidemics and pandemics, chronic diseases, health inequalities and the impact of health on development. This requires effective coordination of policies and resources, exchange of information and adaptation to changing health needs.

Health diplomacy, on the other hand, is the international process that links health with diplomacy and politics to achieve meaningful health outcomes at the global level. It involves the use of diplomatic techniques to achieve health goals, focusing on international cooperation, negotiations and partnerships. The goals of health diplomacy typically include improving global health, promoting health security, and addressing transboundary health challenges.

5.3. Impact of the pandemic on global relations and multilateralism

The text analyzes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global relations and multilateralism, considering international cooperation as a key approach to crisis management. Multilateralism, based on cooperation between many countries and international organizations, is seen as necessary but also challenging due to political differences, nationalistic tendencies and economic interests of different countries.

The pandemic has given rise to concepts such as "vaccine nationalism" and highlighted the uneven distribution of resources, highlighting the need for greater transparency, strengthening of international institutions and better policy coordination. Multilateralism is presented as instrumental for the great powers and functional for the smaller ones, arguing that the great powers use it to achieve hegemony while the smaller countries seek cooperation for mutual benefits.

The influence of China and the US on multilateralism is also mentioned, noting the different approaches and views of the two countries, including protectionism and the pursuit of dominance in the global order. The role of middle powers is also highlighted, emphasizing their ability to act as stabilizers and counterbalances in global politics.

Ultimately, the text presents multilateralism as a complex and multi-layered approach to international cooperation that is challenging yet critical to managing global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.4. The new normal and the post-COVID-19 world

The new normal and the post-COVID-19 world have been challenged by an unpredictable global crisis that has affected international security, economics and political order. The pandemic manifested itself as a strategic shock with immediate negative effects on the global economy and became one of the greatest threats to global order since World War II.

The rivalry between the US and China has intensified in the context of the pandemic, with both powers seeking political influence despite economic blows from the crisis. China has sought to fill a void left by a perceived lack of American leadership, but missteps and faulty medical equipment have hampered its efforts to expand its soft power.

Russia has also drawn into the crisis, trying to improve its soft power by sending medical supplies abroad and waging a disinformation campaign to confuse the West. However, NATO has faced weakened military readiness due to the pandemic.

Transatlantic relations have been strained, with the European Union struggling to rein in China's influence and negotiate the structure of an economic recovery program. At the same time, US allies in Asia, such as South Korea and Taiwan, have successfully contained the epidemic and become more resilient to economic shocks.

International institutions, especially the World Health Organization (WHO), have faced criticism for the way they managed the pandemic and for showing excessive deference to China. The WHO's slow response and its treatment of Taiwan have undermined confidence in the organization.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has upended global health security, economics, and intensified superpower rivalry, underscoring the need for vigilance and rethinking of the global approach to health and international relations going forward.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the analyzed text emphasizes the importance of effective institutional communication and legitimacy in crisis conditions, requiring transparency, efficiency and trust. The Bulgarian government and the European Union (EU) faced challenges in managing the COVID-19 pandemic, which included the need for coordinated efforts, financial support and vaccine development. Despite initial support for the measures introduced, problems with transparency and consistency of information led to mistrust and skepticism among citizens.

The crisis requires adaptation of communication strategies and highlights the importance of transparency to maintain public trust. In Bulgaria, the lack of clear and consistent communication caused confusion and mistrust, while in the EU they faced the challenges of coordinating communication between member states.

The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of global cooperation and the need for strong international institutions to respond quickly to global crises. Collaboration in vaccine development and distribution, as well as coordination of public health responses, have proven critical to tackling the pandemic. International organizations such as the World Health Organization played a key role in this process, despite the challenges experienced.

The lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis are valuable for the future of institutional communication and legitimacy in the context of global health challenges, highlighting the need for transparency, efficiency and international cooperation.

Scientific contributions of the dissertation work

The scientific contributions of the dissertation work can be distinguished as follows:

1. **Theoretical contribution:** Examining the COVID-19 crisis through the lens of various sociological theories, including functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, and social exchange theory, provides a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the pandemic on society and institutions. This approach contributes to the theoretical enrichment of the sociology of health care and crisis management.
2. **Empirical contribution:** The analysis of the leadership styles of Boyko Borisov and Rumen Radev, as well as the medical and expert leadership of Ventsislav Mutafchiyski and Angel Kunchev, illuminates the role of different forms of leadership in crisis management. This contribution expands the understanding of the effectiveness and impact of leadership strategies in the context of a pandemic.
3. **Analysis of communication strategies:** The evaluation of institutional communication and legitimacy during the COVID-19 crisis, both in Bulgaria and in the EU, offers important conclusions about the importance of transparency, effectiveness and trust in crisis communication. This analysis contributes to practical knowledge about managing public perception and trust in emergency situations.
4. **Application of health diplomacy and global governance:** Defining health diplomacy and global health in the context of COVID-19 offers a new perspective on international cooperation and coordination in crisis situations. This contribution is particularly important for the development of strategies for global response to pandemics and other health crises.
5. **Comparative analysis of governance models:** Examining different forms of governance during the COVID-19 crisis, including authoritarian and democratic approaches, provides valuable lessons about the effectiveness and challenges of different governance strategies in the context of a global crisis. This analysis contributes to understanding the dynamics between governance structures, public trust and crisis response.

These contributions enrich the scholarly literature and offer valuable directions for future research and practical applications in social sociology, health policy, and crisis management.

List of scientific publications

1. "Conflict theory and the interpretation of COVID-19: Struggle for resources and social justice", scientific journal "Znanstvena Misel", No. 86/2024, 26.01.2024
2. "DYNAMICS AND MANAGEMENT OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CRISES", International Scientific Conference "Modern Scientific Method" (January 4-5, 2024). Vienna, Austria
3. "COVID-19 Risks and Opportunities for Modern Peace", Way Science 1st International and Scientific Internet Conference, 2021
4. "Russia, the USA and the EU in a new military reality. What will be the price of peace, will a new world order be formed and by whose rules?", The Department of international relations of Yesenov university - 6 May 2022
5. "Governance crises: sources, impact and prospects", "Political Horizons" magazine, issue 7, January 2024.
6. The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the modern world, European Night of Scientists Conference, 2021

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