



CENTRE FOR SECURITY COOPERATION

Security Sector Reform Pillar

“COVID-19 Pandemic – Crisis Management On-line Seminar”

SSR-F1-S-20

17th June 2020

RACVIAC, Rakitje, Croatia

Introduction

The “COVID-19 Pandemic – Crisis Management On-line Seminar” was conducted by RACVIAC - Centre for Security Cooperation in collaboration with the Faculty of Political Science Zagreb, Croatia, on 17th June 2020.

The purpose of this Workshop was to contribute to the improvements of crisis management capabilities of RACVIAC Members by providing the platform for interaction among national crisis/emergency management, public health and civil protection experts responsible for responding to coronavirus crisis and enabling them to present and analyse their national COVID-19 pandemic crisis management models.

The first RACVIAC on line seminar was focused on crisis management concepts, related inter-agency cooperation, challenges, best practices and lessons learned.

The event gathered more than 30 national crisis/disaster/emergency management, public health and civil protection academic and professional experts from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia,

Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey and Kosovo* as well as representatives from various international organizations and agencies, such as Defence Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South East Europe (DPPI), Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Office in Zagreb and ISCTE-IUL Student Union from Portugal.

The on-line Seminar was designed as a peer-to-peer event aimed at examining various systems and approaches to crisis management of the COVID -19 pandemic.



Workshop opening

* This Designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the

Kosovo Declaration of Independence (In accordance with Arrangements regarding representation and cooperation).

Execution

The Workshop was opened with a Welcome address by RACVIAC Director Major General (ret.) Jeronim Bazo, who stressed: "This Seminar is dedicated to examining the national crisis management concepts and actual performance in the COVID-19 pandemic. I strongly believe it will help us understand challenges better and reconsider reactions of our crisis response systems, and thus contribute to the improvements of RACVIAC Members' crisis management capabilities".

The introductory speech was given by Mr Matthew Rhodes, PhD (George C. Marshall Centre), who highlighted that over the past several months, the COVID-19 pandemic had brought dramatic change to our countries and was one of the most far-reaching global security challenges we had faced in this century. Systematic analysis of how our countries were dealing with this pandemic, individually and collectively, was thus of vital significance. Sharing lessons, perspectives, and insights in seminars like this one was necessary not only to help our countries better manage the great current crisis we are facing, but also to better prepare for or prevent potentially even worse crisis in future.

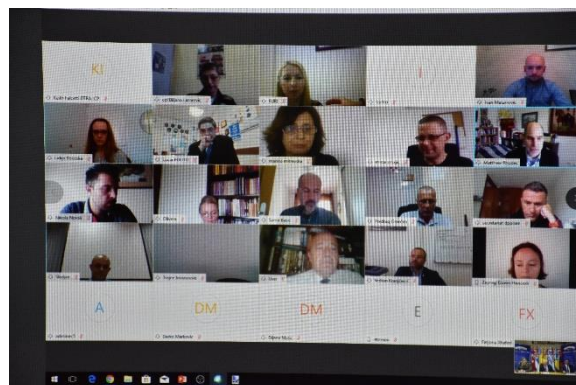


Professor Robert Mikac, PhD, Zagreb University

Mr Robert Mikac, PhD, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Political Science, Zagreb, was moderating the event, but also gave a valuable insight into Croatian national crisis management system and how it was dealing with the COVID -19 pandemic situation.

The academic lecturers at this Seminar were: Mirza Smajić, PhD, Faculty of Political Science in Sarajevo, Vedran Kranjčević, Head of Cabinet, Croatian Ministry of Health, Robert Mikac, PhD, Faculty of Political Science of Zagreb University, Roberto Setola, PhD, Campus Bio-Medico, University of Rome, Olivera Injac, PhD, University of Donja Gorica, Podgorica, Marina Mitrevska, PhD and Lidija Georgieva, PhD, Faculty of Philosophy, Sts. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, and Želimir Kešetović, PhD, Faculty of Security Studies, University of Belgrade.

They presented their national COVID-19 pandemic crisis management, analysing and presenting best practices, challenges and lessons learned throughout the three phases of crisis management cycle: "Prevention", "Preparedness" and "Response".



Workshop session

From national presentations we can highlight the importance of having proper national strategies, risk assessments and plans as well as having a permanent national coordination body, not an ad hoc solution, and a whole-of-government approach. Timely and transparent strategic communications with the public was also emphasized as an important part of crisis management.

During the on-line seminar, AL representative presented their national efforts in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prevention

The majority of countries have national strategies, risk assessments and plans how to handle crisis situations in place.

BA lecturer highlighted that lack of national strategy as well as fragmented and incoherent crisis management approach had complicated and slowed down the process of handling the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due the lack of national action plan in case of a pandemic/epidemic there had not been exercises/crisis simulations or education/training of employees in the health system in RS, in the lecturer's opinion. Also, he stated that communication activities had been inadequate and some state officials had minimized the danger of the crisis.

For HR, the lecturer emphasized that some characteristics of prevention had been connected to the lack of vision, policy or crisis planning in some specific sectors, such as finance, economy, education or tourism.

MK lecturers pointed out that different governmental and public institutions had to improve their risk management and crisis management strategies and action plans, including financial aspects for prevention, preparedness and response. Furthermore, private sector should also take serious steps for identification of potential challenges caused by risks of 21st century as technology becomes stronger but humans more vulnerable.

Preparedness

Preparation of the health sector for the massive influx of patients, setting up a national coordination mechanism, if not having a permanent body, procurement of necessary medical equipment and personal protective kits were the main steps undertaken in preparedness phase.

At early stages of the pandemic, all countries have experienced lack of sufficient protective medical gear and equipment.

Decentralized health system and lack of efficient data exchange among regional and central national authorities had been a major problem for IT from a lecturer's perspective. Furthermore, reliance on WHO recommendations and absence of coordinated response from European countries had reduced the capabilities to prevent the pandemic from spreading to Europe.

Serbian representative emphasized that RS was facing an outflow (brain drain) of

medical personnel which together with insufficient resources, lack of protective equipment (masks, gloves, visors, etc.) and respirators as well as insufficient hospital capacity had had a big impact on crisis management.

ME lecturer stressed the importance of multi-sectoral approach as well as proper coordination on national and local level.

Response

Most of the countries have undertaken a set of restrictive measures as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Measures range from imposing self-isolation for citizens coming from infected areas, suppression of certain constitutional rights such as freedom of movement or right to gather, closing the international borders as well as using the armed forces to assist the police in performing their duties. Moreover, all countries have taken certain measures to mitigate economic and financial loss.

IT lecturer highlighted that institutional communication had been fragmented and partially incoherent due to the different strategies adopted by the Government and regional authorities. The confusion had also been increased by the spreading of fake news in the social media.

From lecturer's perspective crisis approach in RS had been quite militarized, clear procedures had been lacking, and the instructions given to health facilities and medical workers had been changing frequently.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has had tremendous impact on all represented countries and societies and changed the way we have lived so far. The crisis has had a major impact on certain industries, caused numerous market disruptions, had severe financial implications, but on the other hand has made states and national decision-makers more important than ever.

This on-line seminar successfully addressed the most important health crisis management issues and actions such as national policies and strategies as well as actions undertaken to halt the pandemic and restore everyday life. The presented national mechanisms to deal with COVID-19 crisis were a framework for participants to share their national experiences and best practices

in order to best prepare for possible second wave of the pandemic.

Compiled by SSR Pillar
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