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LEGAL AND POLITICAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

REPORT*

“The Role of Parliaments in Combating Pandemic – Legal and Political Aspects”

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The pandemics constitute an existential threat to the mankind and its security. Pandemics not only cause an increased level of mortality but also adversely affect the economic, social and political structures of the countries. Due to the globalization and the growing interconnectivity, infectious diseases are now spreading across the world, more rapidly, knowing no borders and thus becoming serious threats. In times of pandemic, the wider global community – parliaments, governments, private sector, non-governmental organizations and medical society – has a vital role to play in the process of policy formulation. The publics and policy actors need to take effective preventive measures and to shape a safe and equitable recovery. The constant coordination and collaboration between the authorities at national and international levels, are prerequisites to ensure the smooth mitigation of the adverse consequences of the pandemics. International cooperation and multilateral action are needed more than ever. Global health challenges require global solutions to overcome smoothly the crisis and boost the international solidarity.
2. The outbreak of the novel Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has brought a great danger to peoples' lives around the world, in an extraordinary way, disrupting economic activity, damaging the well-being, jobs and businesses. Recognized as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), on 11 March 2020, it has placed unprecedented and serious challenges to the societies, governments, and healthcare systems. The national parliaments have faced extraordinary difficulties to operate in their regular order. At the same time, the continued operation of the parliaments throughout the Coronavirus crisis, and particularly, the maintenance of the legislative oversight of the executive power, has never been more vital.
3. In their efforts to slow and restrict the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world governments took very strict political decisions, such as introducing a state of emergency, borders closures, restrictions on travels abroad and movement within the countries, limiting the business activities, enforcing total or partial lockdowns and new remote forms of work and education. They introduced sanitary and epidemiological procedures, such as quarantine zones, temperature checks, prohibition of mass events, closure of educational, cultural and entertainment institutions. These measures which have aimed to limit the spread of the virus, have significant negative economic and social impacts. While differing in detail, the response policies of the BSEC Member States are broadly similar across the region. The physical distancing, testing, tracking and isolating are among the main instruments to restrict the spread of the virus during the initial phase. They are indispensable for resuming the economic and social activities. However, the sectors which have been seriously affected by the sanitary and epidemiological measures, such as tourism, travel and entertainment, recommence slowly.
4. Taking into account the devastating consequences caused by the novel coronavirus pandemics and also that these extraordinary developments severely affected the national economies and the security of the citizens of all the BSEC Member States, the Legal and Political Affairs Committee, at its Fifty-Fifth Meeting, on 9 July 2020, decided to discuss “The Role of Parliaments in Combating Pandemic – Legal and Political Aspects, as the main issue of the agenda of its Fifty-Sixth Meeting.
5. Ensuring healthy lives and well-being for the people of the Black Sea region represents a major aim of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the “BSEC Economic Agenda towards and Enhanced BSEC Partnership” and its Goal 7 “Health Care and Pharmaceuticals” define the key priorities of the BSEC activities in the field of Healthcare and

Pharmaceutics. The main activities in this field are carried out by the BSEC Working Group on Healthcare and Pharmaceutics. The Ministers in charge of Healthcare have approved and the Working Group on Healthcare and Pharmaceutics works on how to establish a “Network for the Emergency Preparedness and Response, with the aim to ensure the exchange of information on health threats between the Member-States”.

6. The present report reflects the information received from the national delegations of the Republic of Bulgaria, Georgia, the Hellenic Republic, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Turkey and Ukraine. It also benefits from relevant Internet resources.

II. THE ROLE OF THE PARLIAMENTS IN COMBATING THE PANDEMIC - LEGAL AND POLITICAL ASPECTS

7. Even though many public health experts have long warned that the world was likely to face a major pandemic and called for greater preparedness, the countries were not ready for a public health threat of the magnitude posed by the novel coronavirus. The Spanish flu of 1918, infecting approximately 500 million people and causing 50 million deaths, is considered as one of the most severe pandemics in modern history. Since then, the development of vaccines, antiviral medications, better hospital care and stronger outbreak responses, have significantly reduced the mortality rates.
8. The world is still in the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, and second peaks are already occurring in some countries. According to the experts, wide-ranging health measures and unprecedented efforts will be needed for months and years, to overcome the consequences of the novel coronavirus. This challenge demands a strong political will and solidarity within and among the countries. Coming out of this crisis will require a whole-of-society, whole-of-government and whole-of-world approach backed by effective legislative measures.
9. The coronavirus pandemic is a rare, perhaps a unique example, where almost all the countries in the world, have been seriously affected. It created not only a healthcare and an economic crisis, but also resulted in one of the worst humanitarian crises. According to the United Nations (UN) World Food Programme, the number of people who will become acutely hungry, could almost double in 2020 and the global economic losses will likely cause an estimated 34.3 million additional people to fall below the extreme poverty line, in 2020. The vulnerable groups are already heavily depending on the international assistance and humanitarian aid programs.
10. The COVID-19 crisis threatened the food security. Prior to the onset of this pandemic, more than 820 million people have already been identified as food insecure. With the uncertainty of the pandemic, people started to buy and stock basic food products, which caused empty shelves in the markets. Therefore, it is important that the governmental policies cover food security and ensure that the markets are well supplied, and that the populations have access to them, despite the pandemic restrictions. Without a large-scale coordinated action, the combined negative effects of COVID-19 itself, as well as the corresponding mitigation measures, can disrupt the functioning of the supply chains. Smooth food supply chains and diversified sources of supply allow the companies to adapt rapidly to crisis situations.
11. Given the travel restrictions and closure of borders, thousands of people around the globe (tourists, migrant workers) faced the impossibility to reach their home countries. In this term, the governments demonstrated a strong political will and took timely decisions to assist their citizens

in need. The Ministries of Foreign Affairs, through their consular and embassy missions, have provided assistance, by offering repatriation to their nationals abroad. The practical support ranged from information provided to tourists and migrants on how to travel back to their country of origin, until their actual repatriation. Additionally, financial help has been provided by the country of origin, for tourists and migrants who do not have sufficient financial resources to travel back or those who meet urgent needs. The governments have allocated targeted funds to help hundreds of thousands of people overseas, to diminish the negative consequences due to the spread of the novel coronavirus.

12. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges to the functioning of the democratic institutions. As an initial response, the majority of the BSEC Member States have switched to "emergency situations" to radically limit internal and international travels, they carried out sanitary controls, closed schools and universities, shops and public places, confined persons at home, hereby drastically limiting the movement and gatherings of people. Contact tracing, location tracking and data analysis measures have been developed and implemented through apps and big data processing. The justice systems have been suspended in many countries, with deadlines postponed.
13. As a reaction to the pandemic, strengthening the coordination and communication between local and central authorities has been vital. Most of the countries established coordination mechanisms and information systems between local and central authorities, which has contributed to a greater regularity and timeliness in the correlation and exchange of information, better observation of anti-epidemic measures and restrictions. The local authorities organized the purchase and delivery of food, medicines, and essential goods to lonely, disabled and elderly people in need. The social assistance at local level, has been extended and supported by volunteer groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The local authorities effectively contributed to timely detecting the needs at the local level and effectively coordinated their actions with the central authorities, in overcoming the challenges posed by the pandemic.
14. The NGOs and the civil society groups have played a major role in the pandemic response and recovery, particularly in dealing with the most vulnerable population groups. Their mobilization is strategic in controlling the spread of COVID-19 and mitigating its impact on the community. The NGOs have implemented a number of measures, mainly provision of social support and care to vulnerable populations; public health education and community engagement, provision of medical supplies and hygiene kits; raising awareness campaigns; training programs introduced for the public healthcare staff, etc. They have provided constant support to the governments, by enabling them to detect and respond to the crisis timely, mobilize the public support to the necessary measures and policies carried out by the public authorities, during the pandemic.
15. While COVID-19 is essentially a public health crisis with huge economic consequences, the governments, through their political decisions, must ensure that the society and the health system remain equitable during emergencies. The adopted policies must consider the most affected and the least resilient. At national level, this entails dedicated measures to address the needs of older people, children, low-wage earners, persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups. The governments must ensure adequate and diversified supplies, a fair and equal distribution of care, treatments and medications. It is very important that the public officials provide transparent and accurate information concerning the status of the pandemic in the respective countries.
16. Safe and effective vaccines that provide immunity to populations, and effective treatments for those who are infected, are the only long-term solutions that will allow societies and economies to

return to normal life, without an unacceptable loss of lives. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the leading countries of the world and the leading research biological laboratories mobilized their efforts to develop the COVID-19 vaccines. The projections of the health experts are that between 50 to 75% of the global population have to be vaccinated in order to end the pandemic. This requires making a new vaccine affordable to all, building manufacturing and distribution capacities, planning massive vaccination campaigns. The political will among the countries is the key to accelerate the progress in this field and must focus on preparing the manufacturing and logistical capacity, as well as the conditions for these vaccines to be affordable and accessible to all the populations around the world.

17. In most of the BSEC Member States, health authorities have organized daily briefings and the respective ministers have committed to provide up-to-date information about the pandemic, assuring the citizens that the adopted measures and policies reflect the experts' advice and the best practices. The majority of the BSEC Member States have created COVID-19 Response Teams, to coordinate the implementation of the pandemic measures. These teams have operated both at national and local levels.
18. The political decisions on implementing effective healthcare policies imply incentives for mobilizing funds for expanding and modernizing the public healthcare systems. These decisions include the redistribution of public healthcare funds and resources before and during the pandemic outbreaks. More and better-trained doctors and nurses, strong primary care and effective vaccination campaigns are vital to improve the health of the citizens during non-outbreak periods and can be deployed easily during the crisis.
19. The governments need to make sure that the medical expertise and critical supplies are deployed where they are required the most. There is an urgent necessity to ensure the safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel, medical personnel responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, to allow such personnel to perform their duties of assisting affected people efficiently and safely. Additionally, it is also important for the governments to provide timely access to quality, safe and affordable diagnostics, medicines and vaccines, in order to mount the COVID-19 response. The social measures implemented by the countries, have been directed to protect populations from COVID-19, in particular people with precarious health conditions, elderly people, and other groups at risk, including health professionals, health workers and other relevant frontline workers, as well as people with disabilities, children and people in vulnerable situations.
20. In this regard, the governments of the BSEC Member States evaluated health as a determinant of their national security. The well-being of citizens and the quality of life were put as a priority on the national security agenda. In times of pandemic, the timely measures against COVID-19 across government sectors, ensures respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms and paid particular attention to the needs of the people in vulnerable situations, promoting social cohesion, taking the necessary measures to ensure social protection, preventing insecurity, violence and discrimination.
21. Additionally, infectious diseases can also pose a challenge to the national security of the countries, since they create an environment suitable for terrorist groups to capitalize on. As the governments are concentrated on the pandemic and neglect their attention on some other important issues, these groups can take opportunity to achieve their disturbing objectives. Due to the massive use of different online channels for communication and work, the cyber-security suffers unprecedented risks. The rapid technological change and the advancement of artificial intelligence may be used easily by people with bad intentions. In this respect, the parliaments

must ensure that the technological developments serve the people and are not used as a weapon to damage the human security.

22. Except the direct challenges to the economy, the pandemics also have the potential to trigger political instability. In cases where governments have failed to provide the necessary public care, an erosion of trust in the political system appears. The inability of the governments to react swiftly in the initial phase of the pandemic, only intensifies people's feeling of insecurity. In this regard, it is important that the trust in the governments is ensured by means of communication between the public authorities and the population.
23. All economies in the Region went into comprehensive lockdown in February-March 2020. The BSEC Member States have confronted the pandemic with relative success, and most countries rank very favorably in infection rates and deaths attributable to the pandemic. A better than expected response to the pandemic and the gradual economic opening being attempted, raise hopes that the extent of damage to the countries will be contained and the fears about permanent damage in some sectors, which would have resulted in long term or even a permanent loss in the wealth generating capacity, will not materialize. Starting in May, and continuing in June, all the BSEC countries have presented re-opening plans that envisage a full return to the normal life.
24. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations, the decision on lifting or adjusting the COVID-19 measures, is supposed to be led by six criteria, in order to minimize the risk of resurgence: 1) Disease transmission is under control; 2) Health systems are able to detect, test, isolate and treat every case and trace every contact; 3) Outbreak risks are minimized in vulnerable places, such as nursing homes and health facilities; 4) Schools, workplaces and other essential places have established preventive measures; 5) The risk of importing new cases can be managed; 6) Communities are fully educated, engaged and empowered to live under a new normal.
25. The governments of all the countries of the BSEC Region have adopted the necessary measures to minimize the negative impact on their citizens and economies, introduced emergency packages to support people's immediate livelihoods, and redirected their policies to the most affected sectors like retail, tourism, airlines, and entertainment. Simultaneously, they have implemented quick large scale and innovative support programs to diminish the bad effects, by subsidizing SMEs, workers and businesses. To counter the negative impacts of the measures, the governments also took legislative actions through the implementation of various fiscal and monetary policies, amounting to 2.0-14.0% of the GDP. Calculations indicate that the total fiscal measures in the Black Sea Region correspond to at least, 125.0 billion USD or roughly, 4.1-4.5% of their GDP.
26. As guardians of democracy and the rule of law, the parliaments of the BSEC Member States play the key role in responding to the urgent needs of their citizens, providing timely and transparent information and constantly supporting the governments through enacting comprehensive laws and elaborating measures in confronting the COVID-19 consequences. They continued their functioning during the pandemic and successfully enacted emergency laws in response to the pandemic, ensuring effective oversight of the government decisions and actions with respect to public resource management, policy formulation and implementation, properly and timely allocating funds, approving supplementary budgets or reprioritizing their destination. The parliaments remain among the few institutions that offer a sense of normality during this period.
27. At the outbreak of the pandemic, most of the parliaments have responded to the crisis in several dimensions, such as: take decisions, related to the emergent health crisis and any special

measures and powers that need to be legislated; show leadership and perform their constitutional functions, thus maintaining the constitutional balance of powers and, specifically, the accountability of the government to the people, even in times of crisis; set an example in respecting the public health provisions that are being established to combat health risks; protect themselves physically, both as individuals and as representatives of the people, as well as those with whom they may come into contact;

28. In order to perform their duties, the parliaments of the BSEC Member States have adapted their conventional ways of operating and embraced new regulations, in compliance with the observance of the social distancing requirement and the use of appropriate personal protective equipment. Given the large size of some parliaments, some of them have reduced the number of physical meetings and have switched to videoconferencing and remote work regime.
29. **The World Health Organization (WHO)** leads and coordinates the global effort in supporting countries to prevent, detect, and respond to the pandemic. Taking into consideration the lessons learned from the 2009 influenza pandemic, WHO has updated its pandemic preparedness guidance and finalized the Pandemic influenza risk management. The latest guidance provides risk-based strategies and encourages the countries to develop sustainable and resilient pandemic preparedness plans. To make it easier to apply the strategies and approaches in the pandemic preparedness practice, in January 2018, WHO published an updated a pandemic preparedness checklist, which is a practical tool to ensure that the countries take into account all the essential pandemic response capacities when planning the national pandemic preparedness. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, several important resolutions have been elaborated, such as Resolution on “COVID-19 Response” (adopted at the 73rd World Health Assembly, on 19 May 2020), Resolution on “Global solidarity to fight the coronavirus disease” (adopted by the UN General Assembly, on 2 April 2020) and Resolution on “International cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to face COVID-19“ (adopted on 20 April 2020).
30. **The World Bank Group** provides assistance to help developing countries strengthen their pandemic response, increase disease surveillance, improve public health interventions, and help the private sector continue to operate and sustain jobs. Over 15 months, the World Bank Group will be providing up to 160 billion USD in the tailored financing of the health, economic and social shocks that countries are facing. On 2 April 2020, the first group of projects using the dedicated COVID-19 Fast-Track Facility, amounting to 1.9 billion USD and assisting 25 countries, was rolled out. In addition, the World Bank is working worldwide to redeploy resources in the existing World Bank financed projects, including through restructuring and use of projects’ emergency components as well as contingent financing instruments designed for catastrophes, including pandemics. On 19 May, the Bank Group announced that its emergency operations to fight COVID-19 have reached 100 developing countries – home to 70% of the world’s population.
31. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the **Organisation of the BSEC** mobilized the coordinated efforts of the BSEC Member States on key sectors such as transport and tourism, by convening in June, online meetings of the Steering Committee on Facilitation of Road Transport and Goods and of the Working Group on Cooperation in Tourism. At the Working Group on Cooperation in Tourism, the participants had the opportunity to discuss issues on how to alleviate the difficulties created by the pandemics, to the tourism sector. The BSEC PERMIS initiated the preparation of a draft roadmap for deliberations and coordination among the Member States, aiming to agree on a concrete framework of measures and actions to be introduced, thus allowing for the safe and gradual renewal of tourism flows in the BSEC region. The BSEC PERMIS has also co-organized

with the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) a webinar, under the relevance of the regional cooperation, to confront the COVID-19 crises in the Black Sea context, namely “Covid-19 crisis: is regional cooperation relevant in efforts to confront it? What could the role of international organisations be for the day-after in the Black Sea region?”

32. **ICBSS and the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB)**, have jointly organized a Webinar on the “Post-Pandemic Recovery of Black Sea Economies”, on 17 July 2020. The webinar analyzed the impact of the pandemic on the banking and financial sector in the Black Sea cooperation countries and highlighted the need for continued cooperation among the countries and institutions in the region.

Situation in the BSEC Member States

33. **The Republic of Bulgaria** took urgent measures to address the identified challenges at the national level, imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria actively supported and participated in this process, by adopting and updating several laws and regulations. In the period from March to May 2020, the parliament instructed the Council of Ministers to take all the necessary measures to contain the emergency situation. The Members of the Parliament adopted and amended a number of laws, such as: The Act on Measures and Actions during the State of Emergency, announced by a decision of the National Assembly, on 13 March 2020, the Health Act, the State Budget Act and the VAT Act. In this way, the Bulgarian Parliament helped the preventive actions towards the spread of the virus in the country, stabilized the economy and supported the social sector.
34. The update of the state budget for 2020, was calculated in an economic downturn scenario, by 3% and a deficit opening of 3.5 billion BGN (appr. 1.7 billion EUR). The new changes allowed the Republic of Bulgaria to apply for funding from the European Funds under the Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency programme (SURE) and from the Pan-European Fund. These funds provide assistance to the EU Member States in dealing with the consequences of the coronavirus through programmes that support the employment and liquidity of companies.
35. The Parliament of the Republic of Bulgaria also adopted 9 decisions related to the management of the emergency situation in the country. In order to protect and prevent the spread of the virus among the employees and MPs, a number of measures have been introduced, including a reorganization of the workflow, introduction of remote work, restriction of the access of outsiders to buildings of the Parliament, broadcasting of plenary sessions online and circulation of guidelines for the prevention of the spread of the virus at the workplace, individual protection, etc.
36. On 8 May 2020, for the purpose of the parliamentary control, the Bulgarian Parliament established a Temporary Commission for Control of the Expenditure of Public Funds Related to Overcoming the Consequences of the Spread of COVID-19. The Commission’s obligations include: requesting and publishing information on all costs of public funds, including those provided through EU funds or other financial instruments, related to addressing the consequences of the spread of COVID-19; verifying compliance of individual costs with the conditions and criteria established for individual anti-crisis measures; preparing reports summarizing the costs incurred and analyzing their effectiveness. The Commission was established for the duration of the emergency measures introduced in the country, until 30 September 2020.
37. At present, the Temporary Commission has met three times, debating on topics related to the EU funds and their restructuring, in order to manage the crisis. The Commission collected information

from the ministries on the expenditure of public funds related to managing the consequences of the spread of COVID-19. It plans to hold hearings with other departments and bodies involved in the crisis. On 31 July 2020, the Parliament ratified an agreement authorizing the European Commission to purchase vaccines for the EU Member States, in the fight against COVID-19.

38. On 13 April 2020, the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria issued a Decision to establish a Unified Information Portal (UIP) – an official source of information on the measures to combat the spread of COVID-19 in Bulgaria, including the health, economic and social consequences of the epidemic. The portal provides useful and up-to-date information for both citizens and employers, as well as for healthcare professionals. The site is updated daily and offers statistics on the number of infected and recovered people. The site publishes the latest news in the fight against the coronavirus and provides the briefings of the National Operational Headquarters.
39. The first stage of the fight against the pandemic in **Georgia**, started one month before the first case of the virus was confirmed in the country. Interagency Coordination Council was founded on 28 January, in order to ensure an effective and coordinated fight against the coronavirus. The Council was founded as the main decision-making platform on issues pertaining to the coronavirus. It consists of members of the government, members of Parliament, the Administration of the President of Georgia and medical representatives. A series of measures were taken, such as: implementation of the norms of compulsory isolation imposed first on persons returning from China, and subsequently on persons returning from other high-risk countries.
40. The Government of Georgia approved an Emergency Response Plan, which has determined the response measures at the national level, as well as the responsibilities and duties of the relevant structures. Thermal screening was started at the airports. Gradually, all border checkpoints were duly equipped. Information booklets were prepared to inform passengers and the flights to China were suspended. Various methodological recommendations and protocols pertaining to COVID-19 were developed and approved. The gradual return of Georgian citizens to their homeland, from various foreign countries began. The first special flight was carried out from China.
41. The country initiated the second stage of the fight against the pandemic, which aimed at slowing the spread of the virus via the implementation of active measures and tightening epidemiological oversight in order to avoid overloading of the healthcare system and causing it to collapse. A series of measures were implemented throughout the country, including the following: the education process was suspended in educational institutions; Georgian embassies abroad began to operate round the clock; field tents were set up at Georgian land border checkpoints and all three airports in order to carry out the medical examination of arriving passengers, prior to transferring them to special facilities; a special information website (www.StopCov.ge) was created, and all available information pertaining to the coronavirus was uploaded there.
42. During the third stage of the fight against the pandemic, aiming to manage the spread of the virus, a state of emergency was declared on the basis of the Decree issued by the President of Georgia, on 21 March 2020. Since the need for the imposition of specific restrictions or different regulations depended on the epidemiological situation in the country or in a specific part of it, which was in fact variable (on a daily basis, in some cases), it was important for the government to have flexibility in the imposition of specific restriction(s), in order for it to be able to respond to the challenges created by the epidemiological situation – which changed on a daily basis –, in a timely and effective manner.

43. As soon as the epidemiological situation became manageable and the number of daily cases began to decrease, a decision was made to gradually lift the restrictions and allow individual economic activities to resume operation. The analysis of the events taking place across the world, clearly demonstrated that even the healthcare systems of developed countries faced major challenges during the pandemic. Therefore, preparing the Georgian healthcare system and avoiding its possible collapse due to the system being overloaded, was identified as a priority of critical importance by the government, at an early stage.
44. In order to achieve the aforementioned, it became necessary to pass the healthcare system to a mode of operation that targeted the pandemic. When analyzing the need for the restrictions, it is worth noting that the countries that chose passive measures in response to the virus faced 500 cases of infection in 5-8 days, after the first 100 cases. Global statistics clearly demonstrate Georgia's success as the first 100 cases were detected 30-35 days after the start of the epidemic, as a result of the measures taken.
45. During the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the governmental strategy of **the Hellenic Republic** aimed to manage the situation as it unfolds and to adjust appropriate economic stimulus measures. The first set of measures were announced in March 2020, while thenceforth additional sets of measures were introduced, together with procession of containment measures assessment and fiscal stimulus counterbalancing.
46. To mitigate the economic and social impact, a broad range of budgetary measures were taken, aiming to support the households and the businesses while additional measures were adopted to provide liquidity to companies affected by the Coronavirus outbreak. According to estimates the overall size of the measures was 19.6 billion Euro or 10.5% of the 2019 GDP. These measures consisted of budgetary measures and of liquidity measures (including tax deferrals, temporary liquidity support and guarantee measures to support companies and households).
47. The Hellenic Republic is benefitting from several initiatives of the European Commission to counteract the economic impact of the pandemic, as well as from the guarantee fund set up by the European Investment Bank. The EU Commission has started an initiative to frontload and make the best use of the European Structural and Investment Funds for addressing the pandemic. This initiative gives flexibility in transferring funds between regions and funds, while lifting limits on spending per policy objectives and co-financing requirements. The Government has introduced several requests for funding through the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative, with an indicative total cost of the nominated projects of 5.8 billion Euro.
48. The negative effect on employment was mitigated through the support, provided by the EU Commission programme, namely Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE). The Hellenic Republic is expected to meet the requirements for support under the SURE scheme for both the special lump sum allowance of 800 Euro (already introduced and covering a period of 45 days) and the new, broader short-time work scheme to be introduced. The Hellenic Republic is also expected to be nominated for support under the SURE for the lump-sum allowance to scientific professions, for the coverage by the State of social security contributions of employees whose labour contracts were suspended and for the scheme to cover social security contributions of employees in companies whose operation exhibits a strong seasonal pattern.
49. The financial support to the Hellenic companies will also be available via pan-European guarantee fund set up by the European Investment Bank that is aiming to mobilize 200 billion Euro in loans

to SMEs. In addition to that, the European Investment Bank Group is also expanding the funding under the already existing support schemes, aiming at supporting the business.

50. The bank liquidity also benefits from the recent policy measures announced by the European Central Bank (ECB). ECB has announced the Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme, with an overall package of 750 billion Euro. Purchases will be conducted until the end of 2020 and will include all the asset categories eligible under the existing asset purchase program as well as the Hellenic sovereign bonds. The European Central Bank banking supervision has further temporarily lowered the capital requirements for banks to ensure the continuing financing of the economy.
51. The activities intended to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in **the Republic of Moldova** are carried out in accordance with the Law on the state supervision of public health, as well as the Orders of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection regarding the measures for the prevention and control of the COVID-19 infection. Thus, in accordance with the 2020 Parliament decision on the declaration of the state of emergency, as well as the Regulation of the Commission for Exceptional Situations of the Republic of Moldova, the Commission for Exceptional Situations and the National Extraordinary Public Health Commission were convoked by instituting a national emergency situation, from 18.03.2020 up to the present.
52. During the state of emergency, until 15 May, the Commission for Exceptional Situations convened, drafted, approved and monitored 30 Directives based on the epidemiologic situation. After the cessation of the emergency state, on 15 May, a state of emergency in public health was declared by the National Extraordinary Public Health Commission (NEPHC). Up to the present, 22 NEPHC decisions have been drawn up and approved, such as monitoring the epidemiologic situation in the world, in relation to the infection with the new Coronavirus, by consulting epidemiologic newsletters of the WHO and the prompt informing of the relevant authorities; increasing the vigilance of medical workers for the early detection of possibly ill people; training medical workers in order to update their knowledge with respect to clinical manifestations, diagnosis and the measures for the limitation and control of the infection; assessing and completing the stocks of individual protection equipment, medicines and biocidal products, etc.
53. With a view to enhancing the state of the national economy affected by the consequences of the pandemic, as well as to reducing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the business environment and social life of citizens, several legislative acts were adopted, providing for the following measures: subsidizing expenses related to the payment of salaries/layoff allowances or allowances for temporary cessation of work during the emergency state; supporting the micro-businesses (license holders, independent activities, individual entrepreneurs) with liquidities; fiscal recognition of certain expenses of economic agents: donations made into the bank accounts opened by the Ministry of Finances during 2020, for combating and preventing COVID-19; diminishing the VAT quota from 20% to 15% for the hospitality industry, annulling the obligation to carry out the compulsory audit of individual financial situations for 2019, except for entities of public interest.
54. Additional measures have been implemented, such as: during the temporary cessation of work, the salaries of the personnel of state units financed by the state budget, including through transfers with special destination, shall be calculated integrally in accordance with Law no. 270/2018; the restitution of flat social security charges pertaining to the period of the shutdown, in accordance with the decisions of the National Extraordinary Public Health Commission and/or the Directives of the Commission for Exceptional Situations of the Republic of Moldova; granting, during the

emergency state, the unemployment benefit of 2775 lei (140 EUR), including to citizens of the Republic of Moldova who have returned from abroad, by derogation from Law no. 105/2018 on the promoting of the labour force employment and unemployment insurance.

55. The Decision of the Executive Board of the National Bank of Moldova of 20.03.2020 and 03.04.2020, provided for: the diminution of the base rate applied to main operations of monetary policy on a short-term, by 1,25 percentage points, to 3,25 % annually; decreasing interest rates for overnight loans and deposits to 6,25 % and, respectively, to 0,25 % annually; classification by the banks of loans granted to legal persons and offering banks the possibility to delay loan rates for legal persons, until 30.06.2020.
56. As concerns the current situation, pursuant to the Law on the state supervision of public health, the emergency state in public health is extended, on the whole territory of the Republic of Moldova, up to until 15 September 2020 included, with the possibility to protract this term, contingent upon the development of the epidemiologic situation in the country.
57. **Romania**, like most countries, is seriously affected by the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, putting to a great test the capacity of the health systems, the resilience of the economy and, not least, the patience and understanding of the citizens. From an economic and social point of view, the Government aimed mainly at maintaining as many jobs as possible in the economy and keeping in operation as much as possible, all the existing production and commercial chains. The financial aid granted by the state was oriented towards the essential areas, namely: population health; production, distribution and sale of basic necessities (food, medicines, biocides); operation of essential infrastructure (transport and communications); providing utilities (electricity and heat, water, natural gas, sanitation); ensuring public order and peace.
58. The Parliament of Romania - the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate - amended early on its Rules of Procedure, to allow remote meetings. Currently, the meetings in plenary and at the level of the Committees are taking place online, while the meetings of the Standing Bureau, the leaders of political groups and the chairs of the Committees can take place at the parliament building. The Parliament of Romania is also taking steps towards opening the regular activity, in full observance of the recommendations for the prevention of the disease.
59. Romania attaches a great importance to regional cooperation and has devoted constant and particular attention to the BSEC Organization, with the aim of ensuring that intergovernmental economic cooperation can bring its due share to the sustainable development of the wider Black Sea region and to enhancing its peace, stability and prosperity, in accordance to the commitments embodied in the BSEC Charter. As a proof of the political commitment and responsibility towards the Black Sea regional cooperation, Romania decided - in a constructive spirit - to assume the exceptional extension of its mandate of the BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office, for the second half of 2020, in order to find a consensual agreed solution to the institutional dead-lock generated by the impossibility of ensuring the continuity of the BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office, this semester.
60. Romania was the first BSEC Member State to host the EU-funded rescue reserve, a common European reserve of emergency medical equipment, such as ventilators, protective masks and laboratory supplies, to help the EU countries combat the coronavirus pandemic. At the same time, regarding the solidarity in the BSEC region, Romania offered support to the neighboring countries, namely the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, consisting mainly in sending medical teams and medical supplies, as well as facilitating the transit of their citizens through the country's territory.

61. Taking into consideration the increased EU political and financial engagement in the Black Sea regional cooperation, with a direct, positive impact on the economies and societies, Romania intends to further develop a flexible, result-oriented and closer BSEC-EU cooperation. A genuine regional cooperation with the EU, through a project-oriented partnership BSEC-EU, at regional level, is a key factor in securing the interest to boost regional growth and economic sustainability.
62. Positive developments in this regard, need to be backed up by building a stronger interaction between the PABSEC and the European institutions. This will offer a solid and diverse basis to better address the large array of challenges and to support the development of stable, democratic and prosperous societies around the Black Sea. Moreover, Romania will strive to keep the Black Sea region on the EU agenda, in order to ensure a proper follow-up to the concrete results achieved during the 2019 EU Council Presidency held by Romania, in advancing Black Sea regional cooperation with the EU support.
63. Regarding the situation with the coronavirus, the Federal Service for the Oversight of Consumer Protection and Welfare (Rosпотребнадзор) of **the Russian Federation** carries out a set of anti-epidemic and preventive measures within the framework of the National Plan for Preventing the Import and Spread of the New Coronavirus Infection in the Russian Federation and the Resolutions of the Chief State Sanitary Doctor of the Russian Federation. Different recommendations on the organization of work in the conditions of maintaining the risks of the spread of COVID-19, have been adopted for the various industry's sectors (agro-industrial complex, enterprises of trade and catering, transport and transport enterprises, construction industry).
64. During the coronavirus pandemic, the activities of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation focused on provision of legislative support for the implementation of the decisions of the Government, aimed to prevent the spread and overcome the consequences of the coronavirus infection, create conditions for better economic development and implementation of investment projects. In order to create legal basis for combating the pandemic and implementing measures to support the economy and the citizens, a number of federal laws have been adopted. Of particular note is the law which granted the Government of the Russian Federation the right to exercise the power of coordinating body of the unified state system for the prevention and elimination of emergency situations. The Government is given the right to take decision on the introduction of state of emergency regime, as well as on establishment of mandatory rules of conduct in the introduction of this regime.
65. The social protection laws focused on the defining of the specifics when determining the amount of benefits for temporary disability for the period from 1 April to 31 December 2020 and the expansion of the number of unemployed citizens who may be granted with social assistance. Measures have been taken to facilitate the prompt distribution of information among the citizens who have lost their jobs due to unfavorable epidemiological conditions. The administrative and criminal responsibility for violations of sanitary and epidemiological rules have been strengthened.
66. In order to provide operational support to the regions and the municipalities, the Government of the Russian Federation and the authorities of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation are given the right to take decisions in 2020 on the redistribution (distribution) of budgetary allocations between the regions and municipalities. Amendments have been made to the Central Bank Act to regulate the granting of delays on loans to the population and small and medium-

sized businesses. Another law promptly implements the order of the President of the Russian Federation to exempt from personal income tax compensation payments to doctors, reduces the tax burden on the income tax of organizations, including organizations that purchase personal protective equipment, test systems and medical equipment for the diagnosis (treatment) of the COVID-19.

67. Upon the instruction of the President of the Russian Federation, the Government of Russia has prepared a draft National Action Plan to Restore Employment and People's Incomes, as well as to Provide Economic Growth and other Long-term Structural Changes. Its main goal is to overcome the economic downturn caused by the coronavirus pandemic and reach sustainable growth of the GDP in order to gradually increase the incomes of the citizens. The strategic objective of the National Plan is not only to stabilize the situation, but most importantly, to support citizens, enterprises and businesses. This task will be tackled using an entire range of measures in various areas, including the improvement of investment activity, the use of advanced technologies and digital technologies, the improvement of the quality of education, as well as prompt construction of quality housing. By the end of the recovery period, a sustainable long-term growth of the economy that will exceed the pre-crisis level, is supposed to be reached, while real disposable incomes are supposed to grow consistently. The implementation of the National Plan is designed for two years and is preliminarily divided into three stages, consisting about 500 specific activities.
68. The first registered Russian vaccine "Sputnik V" has started the third stage of clinical trials. 27 countries of the world have already expressed their desire to acquire it. In the near future, it is planned the clinical trials of another Russian vaccine, namely "EpiVacCorona" to be completed.
69. The national legislation regulating the process of combating the pandemic in the **Republic of Serbia**, is presented in the following regulations: Law on Health Care; Law on protection of the population from infectious diseases and bylaws which define this area in more detail; Emergency Protection and Rescue Programme – Health Sector Response – as a planning strategic and operational document for the needs of managing the health sector response in the event of a crisis situation, imminent danger of occurrence of an emergency situation and an emergency situation itself; Decree on measures for prevention and control of COVID-19 infectious disease; Decision on declaring COVID-19 a disease caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus, a contagious disease; Government Conclusion on the designation of a facility for the implementation of quarantine measures to prevent the occurrence, spread and control of COVID-19 infectious disease.
70. In response to the situation and the increased number of patients, the Minister of Health of the Republic of Serbia issued an Order declaring an epidemic of COVID-19 infectious disease and conducted numerous non-pharmaceutical interventions across the country, aimed at combating viruses in communities, and the Government launched a strategy of public communications and a national coordination strategy from the highest levels.
71. In the Republic of Serbia, measures are being implemented in accordance with the Law on Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases and the International Health Regulations, which include surveillance of passengers coming from hotspots of the new corona virus and, if necessary, isolation of patients and health surveillance of contacts. The Ministry of Health and the Institute of Public Health of Serbia "Dr Milan Jovanovic Batut", in cooperation with competent health institutions, monitors the epidemiological situation related to the coronavirus in the Republic of Serbia and in accordance with the recommendations of the WHO.

72. The Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia prescribes criminal acts of non-compliance with health regulations during an epidemic and transmission of a contagious disease. The criminal offense of failing to comply with health regulations during an epidemic stipulates that whoever, during an epidemic of a dangerous contagious disease, fails to act pursuant to regulations, decisions or orders setting forth measures for suppression or prevention thereof, shall be punished by fine or imprisonment, up to three years.
73. In order to facilitate business for entrepreneurs during the state of emergency, a system of “green corridors” has been agreed within the CEFTA Agreement. Each CEFTA Party has designated at least one crossing with the other CEFTA Parties, which will be open for the movement and transit of goods and which will allow unimpeded passage for all goods.
74. Based on the list of the World Customs Organisation, has been drawn up a list of the most important food products and medical equipment that have priority during the customs and inspection procedures related to the corona virus epidemic. Notification of the arrival of a shipment of products from the List is sent electronically through the previously established CEFTA System for Exchange of Excise Data (SEED). Also, during the period of the COVID-19 virus pandemic, the Republic of Serbia received and sent medical humanitarian aid, at a bilateral level, including all the BSEC Member States.
75. Following the first COVID-19 case seen at the beginning of March 2020, in **the Republic of Turkey**, a number of decisions were taken to protect public health and to protect children, in addition to many measures taken to prevent the spread of the pandemic. One of the very first decisions taken by the Ministry of National Education and the Council of Higher Education was to switch to distance education secondary and higher education. In addition, the curfew imposed on individuals under the age of 20 and over the age of 65, intercity travel restrictions, and the adoption of flexible working models in working life, have been implemented rapidly, to prevent the spread of the virus.
76. Many measures have been taken to reduce social mobility and contact among people in order to minimize the risk posed by the pandemic, in terms of public health. In this context, different methods, such as: working remotely, on a rotating basis, and part-time have been implemented in the public and private sector workplaces, where the use of flexible working models is possible. On the other hand, the workplaces in the sectors which have been determined to pose a risk in terms of the pandemic, were temporarily closed. In addition to the change and transformation that have been experienced in the working life, there have been layoffs, especially related to certain jobs, such as: waiters, cleaning workers, cashiers, shop assistants, etc., as a result of the suspension or decrease of services in holiday and entertainment centers, where people are gathering.
77. The Republic of Turkey has primarily established a Coronavirus Scientific Advisory Board within the Ministry of Health. Within the scope of the circular issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, it is ensured that the occupational health and safety (OHS) services provided in workplaces, and the OHS services are exempted from the ongoing intercity travel bans and curfews. Basic training programs have been suspended in training institutions authorized to train OHS experts, and it is ensured that these trainings are provided via distance throughout the pandemic period. In line with the measures to be taken against COVID-19, the finalization of all work permit applications from abroad, has been suspended.
78. Since the economy contracted in many countries during the pandemic, the employers had difficulty in meeting the wages of the employees, which resulted in an increase in the layoffs.

With special regulation, the employers were provided with the opportunity to overcome these difficult periods without laying off their employees, whereas the employees were provided temporary employment assurance and the opportunity to receive cash support or take unpaid leave.

79. Within the Pandemic Social Support Program, cash aid was provided to elderly and disabled households in need, who receive regular social aid from the Social Aid and Solidarity Incentive Fund and monthly salary within the scope of Law No. 2022. Active Labor Force Services Circular was amended on 30.06.2020, in order to ensure that the program achieves its targeted purpose, since a need has emerged for re-evaluation of some issues due to the COVID-19 outbreak, during the implementation phase of on-the-job training programs carried out within the scope of the procedures and principles determined by the Active Labor Force Services Regulation and the Active Labor Force Services Circular, prepared on the basis of the said Regulation. Within the scope of the fight against the COVID-19 outbreak, necessary works have been initiated to minimize the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic, by the "Economic Stability Shield" measures announced by the President. In the first days of the pandemic, arrangements were made, in respect to ease the purchasing of medications from the pharmacies.
80. The Republic of Turkey has received requests for medical supplies from 153 countries so far, in the form of grants, financial aid, export and purchase permits. Of these 153 countries, 122 countries requested grants, 24 countries requested financial aid, 60 countries requested purchase permits, and 72 countries requested export permits. The requests of 141 countries and 6 international organizations were met. Out of the 141 countries, the request of which have been met, 118 were given grants, 61 were granted purchase and export permits, and 8 countries were provided financial aid. In addition, the Republic of Turkey has provided financial contribution to some international funds, among which are the United Nations Global Humanitarian Response Plan (UN-GHRP), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) Response Plan, United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund (UN COVID-19 MPTF), the European Union Coronavirus Global Response Initiative (EU CGRI), the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI), the United Nations Development Programme Integrated Response Plan (UNDP IRP), the World Health Organization Global Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (WHO GSPRP), the United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP). Accordingly, these funds have provided assistance to other countries during the pandemic. Among the BSEC Member States, the Turkish government has met the medical assistance and grants request of Albania, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Ukraine.
81. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic in **Ukraine**, sanitary and epidemiological measures were introduced, restrictions on leaving/entering the country and movement within the country were established, the role of governance in emergency conditions has been strengthened, restrictions on labour activity have been established and new remote forms of labour and education were introduced. As of 10 August 2020, according to the state agencies of the regional and Kiev city laboratory centers of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, 81,957 laboratory-confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been registered, 1922 people with confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19 died, the fatality rate was 2.3%. The total number of confirmed active patients diagnosed with COVID-19 is 35,676. The age structure of those with confirmed COVID-19 disease is dominated by persons aged 30 to 69 (71.8%).
82. A number of decisions have been made to mitigate the negative impact of the COVID-19, such as: the preservation of labour rights for workers and the rights of internally displaced persons were

ensured, and temporary disability benefit was paid in the amount of 50% of the average salary, during the response to COVID-19; guaranteed temporary release of citizens from liability under consumer credit agreements; provided tax incentives, as well as simplified conditions for doing business for the import and supply of goods (including medicines) to the territory of Ukraine; weakened legal requirements for the activities of business and individual entrepreneurs; certain penalties have been cancelled in relation to the unified social contribution and violations of tax laws; a moratorium on tax audits for the quarantine period was introduced; the program of state support; measures were taken aimed at supporting the medical industry and meeting the needs of the medical system.

83. During the period of quarantine, the social protection of internally displaced persons who are not employed, has been strengthened. A mechanism has been introduced not to apply the rules on termination of payments to cover living expenses, including the payment of housing and communal services in case of their non-employment (resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 17.06.2020 No.491).
84. The law of Ukraine No691-IX "On amending the Economic Code of Ukraine and the Civil Code of Ukraine on the prevention of penalties on loans during the period of quarantine, established in order to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus disease in Ukraine", provides protection of business entities from accrual during quarantine and within thirty days after the completion of quarantine fines and penalties on loans.
85. The law of Ukraine No.530-IX "On amending some laws of Ukraine aimed at preventing the occurrence and spread of coronavirus disease" for the time of quarantine prohibited inspection of business, allowed remote work and increased criminal responsibility for violation of quarantine. Also, in order to strengthen the social protection of the citizens, changes have been made to the Law "On General Compulsory State Social Insurance" which foresees the provision of a temporary disability allowance for persons in health care facilities, as well as for those in self-isolation under medical supervision, which amounts to 50 per cent of the average salary, regardless of the length of service, and for health workers - 100 per cent of the average salary, regardless of the labour experience.
86. On 27 May 2020, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted Resolution No. 534 "On the adoption of the State program to stimulate the economy in order to overcome the negative consequences caused by restrictive measures to prevent the emergence and spread of acute respiratory disease COVID-19 caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, for 2020-2022". The goal of the Program is to introduce, during 2020-2022, a comprehensive system of new opportunities for the stabilization and the sustainable development of the Ukrainian economy and for increasing the level of employment of the population, by preserving the existing one, stimulating the creation of new highly productive jobs with decent working conditions.

III. CONCLUSIONS

87. There is uncertainty that the COVID-19 pandemic will vanish soon. The steady recovery is expected to start after finding an effective medical vaccine or medication. Meanwhile, in order to mitigate the adverse consequences of the novel coronavirus, the national and international institutions should join their efforts in order to elaborate recovery plans and strategies aiming to reduce the economic and social fallout. In the initial phase of the outbreak, the BSEC Member States have elaborated emergency packages, comprehensive economic and social measures, in order to preserve the well-being and the health of their citizens.

88. However, the extent of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic is still unknown. But it is already clear that even advanced economies are being severely affected by the crisis, and many health-care systems around the world, are under-resourced for dealing with a problem of such a magnitude.
89. The policy set up during the COVID-19 pandemic, is driven by public health recommendations, by economic and political constraints. The strong political will and solidarity are key prerequisites for the gradual and stable economic and social recovery, which will ensure the safeguarding of the well-being and the safety of the societies. The adequate political backing, on behalf of national parliaments, is crucial for restricting the adverse consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, in the BSEC Member States.
90. As guardians of democratic values, the parliaments of the BSEC Member States play an important role in confronting the impact of the pandemic. It is vital that the parliaments of the BSEC Member States continue to function throughout this pandemic situation, passing necessary economic aid packages and emergency public health measures, while attempting to ensure the democratic control, share information transparently and hold the executive branch, to account for the mobilization of recovery programs and urgent policies. The parliaments need to critically examine their functioning and response during the pandemic, building on the learnt lessons, and serving the people better.
91. The parliaments of the BSEC Member States face unprecedented challenges, in order to realign to the new realities of the pandemic. They utilize new technologies, in executing their constitutional mandate and functions. They continue to provide oversight and contribute to the conceptualization and design of support measures, aiming to reduce the economic and social fallout of the COVID-19 crisis.
92. The global health threats require global responses and the international cooperation and coordination at all levels, including the parliamentary one, are a key asset. The PABSEC considers that the close collaboration among the parliaments of the BSEC Member States at regional level, the exchange of successful practices, of effective measures and innovative approaches, are of utmost importance. The efforts of the countries need to be redoubled, on testing methods, clinical treatment, vaccines, medical research, and development. The rapid and safe development of treatments and a vaccine are essential to bring this pandemic to an end. In this regard, the BSEC Member States must coordinate their actions and encourage the cooperation among all the stakeholders, the scientific community, and the pharmaceutical industries.
93. Combating the pandemic requires an enhanced cooperation at local, national and international levels and also a global solidarity. The PABSEC welcomes the many forms of assistance and solidarity among the countries. By close cooperation at all levels, the economic and social fallouts will be reduced, and the negative consequences will be mitigated. The PABSEC is ready to support the BSEC Member States, encouraging further assistance and coordination among their respective authorities. By providing platforms for legislators to share experience and best practices, the parliaments will enhance preparedness, resilience, and a better response for the future.