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REPORT*

«The Role of Parliaments in Combating Pandemic – Social Aspects»

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Special Meeting of the Heads of the PABSEC National Delegations on 7 May 2020 emphasised the topicality and multi-dimensional character of the novel coronavirus pandemic COVID-19 and, to this end, took the decision to discuss the role of parliaments in combating pandemic at all three PABSEC Committees with the aim to examine economic, social and political aspects of the problem*.
2. In conformity with this decision, the PABSEC Cultural, Educational and Social Affairs Committee prepared the Report “The Role of Parliaments in Combating Pandemic - Social Aspects”. The Report is submitted to the Fifty-Fifth Meeting of the Committee and the Fifty-Sixth Plenary Session of the General Assembly.
3. No one in the world could have thought in the beginning of 2020 that emergence of the new COVID-19 virus in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019 would turn into a real disaster for the entire planet. No one expected that the anti-crisis measures taken by states around the world would be so harsh and protracted. The magnitude of coronavirus infection, having affected the interests of all people and states on the Planet, cannot be underestimated. Although countries are taking the resolute measures against the pandemic, the number of cases and deaths in the Region remains alarming.
4. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, within their competences, have developed many policy documents on topical issues of economic cooperation in the Region. However, given the devastating impact of the pandemic on societies and economies, unprecedented in the whole history of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, it is necessary to take decisive and innovative action both by individual states and at the regional level.
5. The Report is designed to provide an overview of the situation in the countries of the BSEC Region in combating the pandemic with the aim to identify various approaches, exchange experience and examine the potential for further cooperation. The Report also stresses the need for sustainable national, regional and international cooperation. The document outlines the current response by the countries and gives recommendations on seizing the opportunities for contributing to recovery and building a more inclusive and sustainable world.
6. The Report contains the information provided by the national delegations of Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine. The necessary additional reference material was obtained by the PABSEC International Secretariat from the website of the World Health Organization, as well as other relevant Internet sources and publications.

II. THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS IN COMBATING PANDEMIC – SOCIAL ASPECTS

7. The first outbreak of the new COVID-19 virus was recorded in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, which is a major national and international transport hub. The virus spread around the world with lightning speed, and on 30 January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that the outbreak constituted a public health emergency of international concern. On 11 March 2020, the Novel Coronavirus Disease COVID-19 was declared a pandemic.

* See the Report of the PABSEC Economic, Commercial, Technological and Environmental Committee “The Role of Parliaments in Combating Pandemic – Economic Aspects” and the Report of the PABSEC Legal and Political Affairs Committee “The Role of Parliaments in Combating Pandemic – Legal and Political Aspects”

8. The COVID-19 pandemic swept the world at a time when the prospects for many countries seemed very promising. At the beginning of 2020, countries were confidently following the path of economic growth, but all forecasts and indicators were suddenly shaken. All countries were forced to start an unprecedented fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and have significantly adjusted their plans of action. The International Monetary Fund predicted the economic decline of 5% in 2020, substantially worse than during the global financial crisis in 2008-2009. According to the forecast of the International Labour Organization the unemployed will increase in 2020 by about 2.5 million. While the immediate health impact is still evolving, the socio-economic consequences bring a heavy toll.
9. According to WHO, as of 4 October 2020, the confirmed cases of Coronavirus infection globally reached 34,804,348, in Europe - 6,213,302. The number of infected people in the BSEC countries (excluding Russia) is 929,694, which is 2.67% of the global indicator. The number of deaths globally is 1,030,738, in Europe - 240,777, and in the countries of the BSEC region - 23,094, which is 2.24% of the global indicator. As a transcontinental country, Russia has the largest number of confirmed cases in Europe, second in Asia after India and fourth in the world after the United States, India and Brazil. According to WHO data, as of 4 October 2020, there are 1,215,001 confirmed cases and 21,358 deaths registered in Russia. The mortality rate in Russia is 1.73%. These figures are impressive by themselves, but the situation becomes more dramatic due to the fact that behind each figure there are human fates and dedicated work of health workers.

Table of confirmed cases and deaths of COVID-19 in the countries of the BSEC region as of 4 October 2020*

Country	Date of the first registered case	Total cases	Total deaths	Total recovery	Total tests	Crude cumulative deaths per 1,000,000 population
Albania	08/03/20	14,117	392	8,678	87,710	136,1
Armenia	07/04/20	52,496	977	44,710	308,019	330,3
Azerbaijan	28/02/20	40,561	595	38,496	1,137,121	59,2
Bulgaria	08/03/20	21,518	841	15,014	543,076	120,1
Georgia	26/02/20	8,118	50	4,619	639,816	12,5
Greece	28/02/20	19,613	405	9,989	1,349,123	38,7
Moldova	07/03/20	55,888	1,353	40,955	292,588	334,6
Romania	25/02/20	134,065	4,947	108,526	2,516,746	255,5
Russia	02/03/20	1,215,001	21,358	982,324	48,042,343	146,4
Serbia	06/03/20	39,842	753	31,536	1,154,457	108,1
Turkey	10/03/20	323,014	8,384	285,050	10,806,285	100,5
Ukraine	03/03/20	226,462	4,397	101,252	2,382,279	99,9

10. The first case of COVID-19 in the countries of the BSEC region was registered on 25 February 2020. By 7 April, the cases were reported in all 12 countries in the Region. The situation in different countries is varying and the picture of the spread of COVID-19 in the region is far from being uniform. The pandemic is affecting the countries differently, given varied strengths and vulnerabilities. The performance in the countries of the Region changes over time and there are causes for concern, but also reasons for optimism. It is important to stay cautious since the COVID-19 is not yet fully understood and work continues to develop vaccines and medication.
11. On 14 September, the WHO registered a new record for the number of new coronavirus cases in a day – surpassing 307,930 people. This increase in new cases has become a new record for the

* Statistics from the World Health Organisation website as of 4 October 2020

entire period of the pandemic. The previous record was registered on 1 august (over 292 thousand). The WHO announced a new surge in COVID-19 infection in 30 European countries. The BSEC Member States are also experiencing increase in cases following the opening of economies and societies.

12. In its turn, the International Health Regulations 2005 (IHR) is the international legal instrument for the WHO and the Member States to take action in the sphere of public health to prevent, control and provide response to the international spread of disease. The IHR encompass a range of rights and obligations of the Member States related to a pandemic, such as: notifying WHO, reporting and confirming public health events; events at international ground crossing, ports and airports. The IHR also encompass WHO's functions for international public health surveillance, assessment, and response. The IHR Emergency Committee presents interim health recommendations to prevent and reduce the international spread of disease.
13. The BSEC Member States promptly mobilized all national capacities and timely began to respond to the crisis in accordance with WHO recommendations. The focus is on the human life and health. To prevent the spread of infection, a set of measures has been taken, including quarantine, self-isolation, and border closures. The pandemic has increased the pressure on health systems, and acutely required efficient medical services and their reprofiling for combating COVID-19. Isolation and hospitalization of infected patients as well as their filiation became the most effective means in breaking a link in the chain of virus transmission. Measures to control and prevent infectious diseases include strengthening capacity and promoting evidence-based pandemic screening, supporting the efforts of the governments in mobilizing resources to ensure adequate response to the pandemic.
14. The coronavirus pandemic has forced countries to react rapidly. The measures taken by the authorities were similar - mass events were prohibited, schools, kindergartens, universities, sports facilities, cafes, restaurants were closed, and restrictions for simultaneous presence of customers in the markets were introduced. States declared a state of emergency, a curfew, a high alert regime, almost completely closed borders, banned the entry of foreigners, except for those with a residence permit, suspended air and railway traffic. Some states took measured approach in disease prevention, preserving a certain level of economic activity, introducing a regime of partial isolation for a limited time and establishing strict control over the movement of people. All arriving from abroad were obligatorily sent to a two-week quarantine. In most countries, all citizens aged 65 and over were restricted to go out of their homes. The measures also included a plan to return the citizens stranded abroad due to the coronavirus pandemic, the introduction of a mandatory face masks in closed public spaces. In recent days, authorities in almost all countries in the Region have reintroduced stricter measures with the aim to reduce the spread of coronavirus infection. However, restrictive measures to public life dramatically affect everyday life of people and economies of countries.
15. Limited access to COVID-19 supplies and equipment, such as test kits, personal protective equipment, ventilators and pharmaceuticals, as well as disruptions in supply chains of medication and medical equipment have complicated already tense situation. In certain countries, there were problems with drug shortages, difficulties in applying sanitary measures and complying with social distancing and staying at home, and related risks. Many countries have had to convert manufacturing capacities to eliminate shortages in essential goods and personal protective equipment.
16. Emergency budgetary support became also needed to procure essential lifesaving materials and effect the immediate socio-economic response. Many countries have announced fiscal corrective action, as well as financial support for the most vulnerable populations and health workers. A

set of measures was also developed to overcome the devastating social and economic consequences of this crisis.

17. Some countries have a big experience in dealing with previous epidemics, including community involvement, dissemination of information about the risks and adaptation of methods to develop approaches to combat the spread of pandemic diseases. In the difficult days of the pandemic, the BSEC Member States extended a helping hand and sent teams of epidemiological experts, mobile groups and medical supplies to each other. Countries shared information and experience on epidemic prevention and control, as well as on diagnostic and treatment methods.
18. One of the negative consequences of the pandemic was the massive closure of schools and higher education institutions. Students were transferred to distance learning. In the process of overcoming the crisis in the education system, measures were envisaged to adapt and minimize the negative impact. However, it should be noted that a long pause in education, which separates students from the teaching and learning process, entails potential loss of acquired knowledge. Most education systems were not ready for digital learning. Most of the teachers and students experienced significant difficulties in teaching in the new format. This has given rise to various problems ranging from unavailability of infrastructure and teachers to growing differentiation in education. Nevertheless, the current situation also provided opportunities and an understanding that in today's unpredictable world it is imperative to bridge the digital divide and incorporate new modern forms in education. Without effective education of young people and teaching them the necessary skills, it is difficult to imagine further economic and social development.
19. The outbreak of coronavirus infection has turned into an epidemic of panic. After the intensive information flow on the coronavirus pandemic, the fragile line between ensuring proper care and producing mass hysteria was gradually diminishing. The mass media concentrated on the coronavirus pandemic. Every day, people have been overwhelmed with information about new cases and deaths. Information influences people in different ways. People prone to anxiety begin to panic and act on emotions. A general panic revealed when people started to uncontrollably purchase food and hygiene products. According to experts, such people spark general hysteria, reposting various scary information on social media. Moreover, the unpredictability of the coronavirus pandemic, strict anti-epidemic measures, as well as a sharp decline in economies and the disruption of small enterprises, exacerbate the already difficult situation. Long-term self-isolation also negatively affects the human psyche. In the current situation, concerns and worries of citizens increase, and this is a natural reaction of people to the uncertainty of the situation in the world.
20. In addition, misinformation and conspiracy theories spreading through social media and other online platforms impel people to become aggressive to other citizens and those infected. Hostile rhetoric undermines social cohesion. Therefore, dissemination of accurate, clear and evidence-based information and awareness-raising campaigns are among the most effective tools against xenophobia, which stems from misinformation and fear. Parliaments, governments, public and private media, as well as civil society actors and global social media platforms need to act collaboratively in this direction.
21. The coronavirus pandemic has generated an epidemic of mercifulness and kindness. Fear of an uncertain future and moral responsibility for saving human lives sparked in people feelings of responsiveness, good will, support, compassion, respect and assistance. During self-isolation in many cities, activists and volunteers continue to provide medical and social assistance, bring food to people in risk groups who cannot leave their homes. Volunteer headquarters are mainly composed of young people. Additional work is organized to provide extra household assistance for citizens under quarantine. In the framework of projects to help the homeless, the services are

working in alarm mode. The necessary precautions are taken - additional sanitization, provision of personal protective equipment.

22. In many countries throughout the world, including the states in the BSEC region, there were waves of ovation for healthcare workers fighting against COVID-19. People were coming out their balconies and applauded to doctors, nurses and all healthcare workers as a sign of sincere gratitude for their fierce and difficult battle for human life and health. These people are not only high professionals they also demonstrate great personal courage. Spontaneous actions of solidarity throughout the world and moral support for medical personnel were backed by many politicians and government structures. At present, medical personnel play a decisive role in protecting and preserving human lives and health. These are teams of heroes who fight a 24-hour battle with a deadly infection, risking themselves to save infected patients.
23. Experts refrain from making a forecast on how the situation with the virus can develop. No one knows if the coronavirus will disappear completely or remain like a flu, and whether it emerges from time to time. According to experts, the global pandemic will not be eliminated until a vaccine is developed or until most of the world population become infected.
24. As a response to the novel coronavirus outbreak, the WHO has launched its research program to accelerate the development of vaccines and medications. According to the WHO, research on the safest and most effective vaccine continues. There are vaccines that have passed clinical trials, and there are also vaccines that are still in preclinical trials. For example, in Turkey, 13 developing projects for COVID-19 vaccine are at the pre-clinical stage.
25. On 11 August, President Vladimir Putin announced the registration in Russia of the first vaccine against coronavirus. He noted the effectiveness of the product developed by the N.F. Gamaleya Scientific Research Centre for Epidemiology and Microbiology. The Russian vaccine “Sputnik V” is a two-component drug that gives immunity against COVID-19 for at least two years. Clinical trials of the drug have been completed and the vaccine will go into civil circulation from 1 January 2021. In the near future it is planned to complete clinical trials of another Russian vaccine “EpiVacCorona”.
26. A vaccine against COVID-19 is being developed by the University of Oxford and the British pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca. Sarah Gilbert, professor of vaccinology of the University of Oxford, who leads the work on the COVID-19 vaccine, said that before the university can start supplying the vaccine to the world, it needs to get positive results in the last stage of its testing, to establish large-scale production line and quickly obtain approval for its use in emergency situation.
27. Yet, coronavirus spreads too easily, continuously grows, mutates and remains unpredictable. The World Health Organization stated its stand against easing the COVID-19 response measures. The COVID-19 Emergency Committee believes that regional, national and global response to the pandemic needs to be maintained for a long time. According to the Committee the coronavirus outbreak remains as a public health emergency of international concern.

Situation in the BSEC Member States

28. Despite successful performance at the initial stage of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation in **Azerbaijan** today remains complicated. The re-introduction of a strict quarantine regime and the application of operational restrictive measures on 21 June 2020 started to gradually yield positive results.
29. The measures are focused on the health of the citizens of Azerbaijan. Due to the preventive measures the situation is now completely under control. Today, all the necessary steps have been taken in order to provide medical assistance in the most critical situation to all those in need.

30. The country has taken the necessary measures and purchased new laboratories. The best hospitals in the country have been allocated for the patients infected with coronavirus. Special conditions are created in Azerbaijan for the citizens under quarantine. They are accommodated in 4-5-star hotels and the Olympic village. Thousands of people have been evacuated from abroad, and this process is still going on. A special portal has been created through which the citizens wishing to return to Azerbaijan register and return at the expense of the state.
31. There are well designed policies in Azerbaijan, as well as the unity between the people and the government, and high confidence in the actions taken by the state. In general, 3.5 billion AZN (2.06 billion USD) were allocated for the fight against the pandemic, including assistance to unemployed people, poor segments of the society, entrepreneurs. The state has allocated large funds for the purchase of medical equipment and medications.
32. During the pandemic, in Azerbaijan the construction of new modular hospitals began. To this end, significant funds were allocated, because the existing bed capacity did not allow to launch successful fight against the pandemic. In 6 months, the bed capacity has increased significantly. The Azerbaijani government plans to build 7 more modular hospitals. However, they are not needed currently, since the number of cases in the country is decreasing. When necessary, the country has the capacity to build in the shortest possible time new hospitals with 1.4 thousand beds. The taken measures and decisions allow to keep the situation under control.
33. In accordance with the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers “On the organization of the educational process in educational establishments in the Republic of Azerbaijan during the period of a special quarantine regime” full-time classes in secondary schools and higher educational institutions will begin on 1 October.
34. Social protection system in **Bulgaria** faces serious challenges due to the negative impact of the COVID-19 on various public sectors. Today the major task is to maintain the resilience of the social institutions and at the same time provide necessary support and additional resources to the most vulnerable people as well as to reach out to people in need. To this end, Bulgaria has taken urgent measures to address the social challenges. Families with children, the elderly, people with disabilities, low-income earners, as well as people and families from vulnerable groups are heavily affected by the crisis. Therefore, the national social policies are reshaped to ensure protection of population from the virus and to provide timely support to the target groups.
35. In terms of social services several urgent measures were introduced, including extension of the validity period of accommodation and residential documents for social services until 31 December 2020; provision of social services by all branches of Social Assistance Agency and local municipalities; elimination of user fees for the use of social services for social rehabilitation and integration; access to information, consultation and psychological support to vulnerable people, etc. During the state of emergency, the Call Centre of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy provided free psychological support to elderly and disabled people; follow-up guidance on work organisation in social services, as well as on the gradual workflow restoration in the context of the state of emergency. Daily monitoring in terms of the spread of COVID-19 is fulfilled in all 167 specialised institutions and in 624 Social Assistance Agency Social Service Centres. Measures have been taken in terms of at-home assistance and support to elderly, people with disabilities and people aged 65 and over, who are unable to self-serve, including also integrated health and social services under various programmes, including the Operational Programme “Human Resources Development” 2014-2020 and Food and/or Basic Material Assistance Operational Programme 2014-2020, co-financed by the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD).

36. Normative and organisational measures and actions have been taken in order to limit the impact of the pandemic and the risk of spreading the virus without violating the rights of vulnerable social groups. Also, the Law on the Measures and Actions during the State of Emergency introduced a special rule targeting the provision of financial support, personal assistance, social services, etc. to the people with disabilities and people from vulnerable groups. Many other regulatory documents have been amended in this direction.
37. Other measures taken to address the consequences of COVID 19 include: assistance of 375 BGN (227 USD) to parents of children up to the age of 12, who were on unpaid leave for at least 20 days due to inability to work from home during the state of emergency; one minimum salary in addition to their April salary the front-line social workers (nearly 5,500 people); development of additional support scheme for the most affected enterprises; support to employers by 40 % of the minimum salary in one month.
38. The authorities in **Georgia** began to take measures against COVID-19 on 28 January, one month before the first confirmed case on 26 February. The main objective of the authorities was to fight on two fronts: to protect the health and save the lives of citizens and to save the economy. The fight against the spread of the virus in the country is viewed as a successful model. The Government of Georgia developed the anti-crisis package with relevant measures in 2 stages.
39. The 1st stage involved emergency assistance measures aimed at mitigating the initial effects of the pandemic. 3 months' utility bills were funded for subscribers whose monthly consumption of power was less than 200 kW and that of the natural gas below 200m³. The funding included waste management and water supply. Within 3 months, on average, the number of beneficiaries of power funding made up over 1.2 million subscribers, while those of the natural gas reached over 670 000 subscribers. The Program budget was 170 M GEL. The Government of Georgia guaranteed the prices for 9 basic food products against the exchange rate fluctuations to stop the price increase rise. A program was developed to mitigate devaluation of the national currency and to keep prices on staple food products stable against the increased inflation risks. During 15 March-15 May 2020 the State subsidized currency exchange difference for the importer companies purchasing 9 basic food products. The Program budget was 14 M GEL. In order to avoid repayment problems and penalties, all personal loan repayments were deferred by 3 months. Approx. 600 000 debtors took advantage of this opportunity.
40. The 2nd Stage involves direct support for various categories of citizens, such as employees, self-employed persons, vulnerable social groups etc. Employees, who have lost their jobs or are on unpaid leave, receive 1200 GEL assistance for 6 months (200 GEL per month) and about 350 000 people will qualify. Various categories of self-employed persons were given one-time assistance in the amount of 300 GEL. Assistance of 200 GEL was given from the government to children aged 17 and below. For 6 months, salaries not exceeding 750 GEL are exempt from income taxes. 750 GEL out of the salary of 1500 GEL will also be exempt from income taxes. In addition: 47 households whose social rating is between 65 000 and 100 000 receive 600 GEL assistance for 6 months. Over 190 000 individuals (70 000 families) are the beneficiaries of the program. Individuals and children with disabilities receive a total of 600 GEL in 6 months. The number of the beneficiaries is approx. 40 000. Also, starting with 1 July, approx. 410 000 pensioners aged 70 and over receive 30 GEL in addition to their pensions.
41. Due to the aggravation of global pandemic it became necessary to repatriate Georgian citizens stranded abroad and provide them assistance. By 22 May the state repatriated 12,720 Georgian citizens including 483 persons with chronic and 36 respiratory diseases, 34 persons with disabilities, 259 senior citizens, 102 pregnant women, 435 underage children, 173 oncology patients, 1,118 transit passengers, 29 sailors, and 90 persons with special needs, also 794 students

(3,517 citizens in total). A total of 74 flights were organized from 27 countries. In addition, assistance was provided locally to 21,190 citizens abroad.

42. Since the beginning of March, the population in the occupied territories were provided with necessary assistance. Relevant translated material was distributed in a timely manner. Infectious disease specialists provided remote consultations and information-sharing. Through various channels, the Abkhazia region was supplied with different medical supplies and hygiene items to protect from coronavirus. Similar assistance was provided to the socially vulnerable population at border lines. Overall, during 22 March-22 May 2020, 233 persons from the occupied territories entered the territory controlled by the central government.
43. In order to ensure uninterrupted medical services, the medicines were delivered at home to the beneficiaries of the specific medicine programs (including insulin-dependents) and, also the over 70 persons and the disabled involved in the State program for the chronic disease patients (including those taking Insulin); due to the ban on the public transport, the Social Service Agency arranged free transportation for the patients involved in the hemodialysis program. Also, the “Georgian Post” delivered medicines to the patients involved in the hepatitis C elimination program, who, were unable to visit the medical institutions because of the emergency situation and temporary restriction on the interurban traffic.
44. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in in the **Republic of Moldova** in March 2020 became a serious challenge for the labour market. The state of emergency declared in the period of March-May 2020, led to restraints on the labour force market, damaged local businesses and affected the vulnerable groups. In 6 months of 2020, the National Employment Agency together with the territorial employment structures registered 51 thousand people seeking jobs, which is 50,2% more than in the same period in 2019 and 40,5% more than in 6 months of 2018. Out of the total number of registered unemployed persons during the first 6 months of 2020, 3771 were got jobs, that is nearly 13%. In accordance with Law No 105/2018 on promoting labour force employment and unemployment insurance, in the period between January and June 2020, unemployment aid was provided to 5615 people, about 40% more than in the same period of 2019.
45. The Government of the Republic of Moldova approved a set of short-term economic measures, including with respect to the labour market. Among the main measures were the increasing of the unemployment benefit to 2775 MDL (167 USD) per month, during the state of emergency (equivalent to the minimal salary in the real sector of economy), as well as the expansion of the categories of people who were entitled to this unemployment benefit. Thus, in accordance with the Directive of the Commission for Exceptional Situations No 16 of 10 April 2020, 14206 beneficiaries received unemployment aid.
46. Based on the Law on the regime of the state of emergency, curfew and state of war and the Law on the declaration of the state of emergency, the Commission for Exceptional Situations of the Republic of Moldova adopted the Decision to award licensed entrepreneurs and natural persons with a one-time unemployment aid amounting to 2,775 lei (167 USD). Following the approval of the 2020 National Action Plan for the implementation of the 2017-2021 National Employment Strategy, a series of actions and measures were approved to support different categories of the unemployed and economic operators affected by the COVID-19 crisis. To this end, 10 million MDL (601,977 USD) were additionally allocated for the implementation of active labour force employment measures.
47. At the same time, in order to protect the right to social insurances and to support old people and people with disabilities, a series of measures were undertaken throughout the emergency state: pensions and state social allowances were brought at home for the elderly, in order to protect

people in the risk group, under the pandemic conditions; the disability allowance term was extended ex officio for the persons whose disability level certification had expired during the emergency state; the Law was adopted with respect to the granting of allowance to the survivors of healthcare personnel who died during medical activities in fighting COVID-19; the minimal monthly guaranteed income for the disadvantaged families under the Social Aid Programme was augmented and also the amount of the minimal monthly guaranteed income was increased for each child from 50% to 75%.

48. With the aim to encourage the healthcare workers directly involved in the fight against COVID-19, an additional allowance was approved, being contingent upon the accomplishment of the professional performance. Moreover, in accordance with the Directive of the Commission for Exceptional Situations of the Republic of Moldova and of the Law regarding the Government intervention fund, a one-time allowance of 16 000 MDL (963 USD) was granted to the personnel in the medical system infected with COVID-19, a total amount of 16,976,000 MDL (1,022,168 USD) for 1061 workers.
49. Coronavirus pandemic has strong social and health impact in **Romania**. Rapid changes occurred in the relationship between employers and employees and it was necessary to adapt to new realities and ensure health safety at workplace. The consistent coordinated measures affected both demand and labour supply, but its aim was to protect public health in a spirit of European solidarity and cooperation. Effective use of resources allocated to support jobs, viable companies and rapid reinstatement are the priority directions for action in the short and medium term. Due to the extraordinary situation caused by coronavirus pandemic state of emergency was declared and special measures were introduced to mitigate negative impact in the long run.
50. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection took the decision to prevent and combat the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the field of employment and education. One of the measures adopted by the Government is to mobilise public funds to solve the problem of employees and other occupational categories who lost their gains during pandemic. The measures were taken in accordance with the evolution of the national situation and the needs of the labour market. As of June 2020, employers who have registered employment contracts suspended for a minimum period of 15 days during the state of emergency, shall benefit for a period of 3 months from the settlement of part of the salary representing 41.5% of the gross basic salary, corresponding to the job occupied, but not exceeding 41.5% of the average gross salary. Employers who employ unemployed persons over the age of 50 whose employment have ceased during the state of emergency, as well as those who employ persons aged 16 to 29 years, receive 50% of the employee's salary per month.
51. The Government has ensured the necessary measures to protect citizens, in the social field. The allowance for days off granted to parents during temporary suspension of education (crèches, kindergartens and educational establishments) was set 75% of the basic salary daily corresponding to a working day, but no more than the daily correspondent of 75% of the average gross salary. This measure was applied until the end of the end of education year. Employers receive these amounts from the wage guarantee fund; providing for a period of 90 days, payment of the monthly insertion incentive and support allowance for raising children with disabilities. Payment of the benefits did not cease during the pandemic period when enterprises were closed because of the quarantine. as for vulnerable groups, during the state of emergency the social survey for the rights for social assistance was suspended.
52. Measures were taken for using European funds for medical equipment, supplies, specialised transport equipment, diagnostic tools, etc. used to combat COVID-19, as well as the measures to financing remuneration, transportation and other expenses in supporting elderly people at home or with travel restrictions, persons with disabilities and families caring for persons with

disabilities and other identified vulnerable groups. It is important that the risk incentives are applied for doctors, health care personnel, paramedical staff, including auxiliary personnel, directly involved in the transport, equipping, evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment of patients infected with COVID-19.

53. **Russia** adopted the National Plan to Prevent the Entrance and Spread of Novel Coronavirus Infection in the Russian Federation. The state authorities of the Russian Federation and the state authorities of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation elaborated and implement measures to ensure comprehensive social support to the citizens. In order to ensure control over the situation at the federal level, an operational headquarters have been created to prevent the import and spread of a new coronavirus infection in the Russian Federation, the Coordination Council under the Government of the Russian Federation to combat the spread of a new coronavirus infection in the Russian Federation, a working group of the State Council of the Russian Federation on countering the spread of the new coronavirus infection. The corresponding coordinating bodies have also been created in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation.
54. One of the most vulnerable groups of the population against COVID-19 is the elderly and the disabled, many of which need regular assistance, and their chronic diseases augment the risks of infection. For these categories of citizens, on behalf of the President of Russia, a self-isolation regime was introduced in the regions. The working citizens aged 65 and over are given the opportunity to remotely issue certificates of incapability to work and receive benefits. Particular attention is paid to the citizens living in social service organizations.
55. There is a wide range of additional payments to the unemployed, families with children, the elderly, and the disabled, and other socially vulnerable categories of the population. All previously appointed social support measures are automatically extended for 6 months. Information technologies were actively used in the provision of social assistance. To support families with children, a monthly additional payment is provided to families entitled to maternity (family) capital, in the amount of 5,000 RUB (66 USD) for each child under the age of 3 years at the expense of the federal budget. Both the procedure for obtaining and the procedure for using maternity capital have been significantly simplified. The minimum amount of the childcare allowance has been doubled. This allowance will be received by non-working people, including students. Low-income families are paid temporary allowances, are given food supplies, and get compensation for the cost of school meals.
56. To support citizens, who lost their jobs during the pandemic, the maximum amount of unemployment benefits was increased to one minimum wage (up to 12,130 RUB (160 USD)). The procedure for registering citizens in order to find a suitable job and as unemployed has been simplified, as well as to make social payments to the unemployed. Doctors and social workers were provided with incentive payments for the performance of particularly important work, as well as for special working conditions and additional workload. Additional insurance guarantees have been introduced for doctors, nurses and paramedics in the medical institutions, ambulance drivers who are in direct contact with coronavirus patients.
57. Civil society institutions, including the volunteer movement and non-profit organizations (NPOs), have made a significant contribution to overcoming the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic and related problems. About 119 thousand volunteers were involved in the action of mutual assistance “We are Together” which provides assistance to the elderly and people with disabilities in self-isolation, as well as to low-income families and large families, medical personnel. 3.4 million people were assisted, and 3.1 million calls were received to the “hot line”. In the framework of the programme “Help Doctors” 7 thousand medical volunteers were involved in 160 medical institutions throughout the country. The Resolution of the Government

of the Russian Federation approved the regulations for payments in the period of 1 April - 30 June 2020 to volunteers, social workers, employees of socially oriented NGOs who have accepted for temporary residence and temporary care, disabled people, elderly and orphans.

58. In a few months, a record number of specialized hospital beds were provided. More than 300 thousand people are tested for coronavirus every day. In all regions, an algorithm for providing care to patients in infectious medical hospitals and outpatient clinics has been worked out. Over the entire period of the pandemic, the regulatory and methodological framework for combating COVID-19 has been fully shaped. Additional conditions have been created to ensure access of the population to medical care in a pandemic. Benefits have been introduced for the payment of import customs duties on medicines and medical devices intended to combat coronavirus, as well as benefits for the payment of value added tax on medical goods imported from abroad and transferred free of charge to medical institutions for the treatment of patients with COVID-19. Almost 40 types of medical products undergo simplified state registration process for launching their production.
59. One of the consequences of the situation related to anti-epidemic measures is the active introduction of digital formats of learning in the education system. During the quarantine measures in Russia about 16.5 million schoolchildren and more than 2 million students were transferred to the distance learning. Educational institutions in Russia were opened in full-time format on 1 September 2020.
60. On a multilateral basis, the total amount of Russian assistance in the fight against the spread of COVID-19 is 35,71 million USD. Moreover, for the period 2014-2020 Russia contributed to foreign countries in the fight against infections through specialized multilateral organizations, including WHO (43 million USD). In 2020, Russia will provide a voluntary contribution to the WHO budget in the amount of 1 million USD for the fight against coronavirus. An additional 4.7 million USD was allocated by the WHO to implement the International Health Regulations and improve the capacity of countries in the CIS region to respond to epidemics. It was also decided to pay a one-time targeted contribution to the WHO in the amount of 1,01 million USD.
61. Since the declaration of the pandemic state of emergency in the **Serbia** on 15 March 2020, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs has been in constant communication with associations taking care of persons with disabilities. Regular exchange of information and identification of the needs laid as a basis for the adoption of targeted measures that provide the necessary support to persons with disabilities being the category of population at higher risk. The Ministry of Labour launched a community channel - PWD for people with disabilities.
62. People with hearing problems in the Serbia have access to the COVID-19 Video Relay Centre (VRC COVID-19), providing support during an emergency situation through providing free translation services via video link. The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs issued an online recommendation to employers to organise the work of parents of children and youth with special needs older than 12 years.
63. Serbia has prepared a package of state economic measures to prevent and mitigate the negative effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the field of labour and employment, as well as the accompanying legal framework that should enable the implementation of these measures. It was decided to grant 100 EUR as a direct assistance to all adult citizens.
64. The Parliament, as the highest legislative body, ensures to respond to the challenges and ensure the functioning of institutions, and to affirm the principles of the Republic of Serbia in crisis situations. The National Assembly remains flexible in its activities. The priority of the National

Assembly, as well as the overall policy of the country, is the principle of saving human lives in the fight against the COVID-19, and it will continue to implement that policy in the future.

65. The National Assembly endorsed the Decision on declaring a state of emergency, submitted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia, as well as the law on confirming decrees passed by the Government during the state of emergency. In terms of its own work, the National Assembly took all necessary epidemiological measures during the session. The MPs, employees and media representatives have been obliged to wear masks and gloves, measure temperature at the entrance to the building, as well as disinfect their hands. The session hall of the National Assembly was adjusted to epidemiological measures, with prescribed social distancing and protective plexiglass partitions. It should be noted that the parliamentary elections were organised in Serbia during the pandemic. In this period all epidemiological measures and recommendations were observed both in the work of the Republic Electoral Commission and at polling stations throughout the country.
66. **Turkey** is among the countries in which the first infection of the COVID-19 virus appeared relatively late. Already in January, a Scientific Advisory Board under the Turkish Ministry of Health was established and a National Strategy to Combat the Spread of Coronavirus was defined. Therefore, even before the first case of COVID-19 in the country, prompt measures were taken, and all resources were mobilized to protect public health. The country has developed its own response model, which is based on a decisive, rational and targeted approach to the fight against the spread of COVID-19.
67. As part of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Family, Labour and Human Services has launched the Pandemic Social Support Program, the Vefa Project and the Homeless Accommodation Project. The Pandemic Social Support program in the framework of the Economic Stabilization Package is being implemented in 3 phases. In the first phase, 1.000 TL (134 USD) were paid to old and disabled needy households that receive regular social assistance from Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund and payment under the Law No 2022. As of 3 April 2020, the delivery of payments has been made to houses through Vefa Social Support Groups and post office clerks in order to prevent the crowding during such payments. The second phase payments of Pandemic Social Support Program started on 19.04.2020 and was planned to give 1.000 TL cash assistance from the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SASF). Within the scope of the 3rd phase of the Pandemic Social Support Program, 1.000 TL per household is paid to the households in need.
68. In addition to the Pandemic Social Support Programs, the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services has developed social support projects. In this context, the Vefa Project meets the needs of citizens aged 65 and over who are unable to leave their homes due to restrictive measures to combat the coronavirus. As part of the Homeless Accommodation Project, homeless and lonely citizens are identified and placed mainly in boarding houses of government institutions located in different provinces.
69. In conformity with the Law 3294 the monthly amount of Cash Aid for Needy Soldiers' Family has been increased from 275 TL to 400 TL and the increase is reflected into the April 2020 payment. The monthly amount of Cash Aid for Needy Soldiers' Children was increased from 100 TL to 150 TL per month, and the increase was reflected into the 2020 April payment. Conditional Education Assistance monthly amount has been increased from 40 TL to 50 TL for girls attending primary education, from 35 TL to 45 TL for boys; has been increased from 60 TL to 75 TL for girls attending secondary education, from 50 TL to 55 TL for boys and the increase will be reflected into the 2020 July payment. Orphan Assistance monthly amount has been increased from 100 TL to 150 TL and the increase was reflected into the 2020 June payment.

70. As part of the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts have been made with the Economic Stability Shield Package to minimize economic impact to help companies cope with the economic impact of the virus. Thanks to the multiplier effect, the aid package reached almost 600 billion TL (89 billion USD), which is equivalent to 10-11% of the country's GDP. By Presidential Decree No. 2706 of 29 June 2020, published in the Official Gazette on 30 June 2020, the deadline for applying for short-term temporary work due to the COVID-19 pandemic was extended by a month. The targeted assistance program is aimed at temporary benefits for workers who have taken unpaid leave, as well as short-term employment benefits. The payment amount for each person eligible for cash support is 1,168 TL (156 USD) per month.
71. Turkey is taking measures to help over 4 million representatives of most vulnerable groups, including migrants and refugees, and take care of them as for their own citizens. Foreign citizens have access to emergency medical care in the event of COVID-19 regardless of their health insurance status. During a pandemic, Turkey monitors and maintains the living conditions of people in need from all walks of life, including the elderly, homeless children, single women, people with disabilities, victims of human trafficking, migrants, etc.
72. The Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services (General Directorate on the Status of Women) is coordinating the efforts to combat violence against women as an uninterrupted and non-delayed struggle. The COVID-19 process proved that combating violence against women is not an issue that will become insignificant due to heaviness of the any agenda. With provincial directorates, violence prevention and monitoring centers, social service centers and women's shelters take care of the existing problems. Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers in all 81 provinces and 145 women guest houses are fully operative.
73. In **Ukraine**, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic significant changes were made. Sanitary and epidemiological measures were introduced (quarantine, temperature checks, cancellation of mass events, closure of educational, cultural and entertainment establishments), restrictions were applied to exit/entry from/to the country and mobility within the country; the role of public administration in emergency conditions was strengthened; restrictions were imposed on labour activity; new distance forms of work and education were introduced.
74. To overcome the negative consequences of the COVID-19, a number of decisions were made, in particular: the preservation of labour rights for workers and the rights of internally displaced persons was ensured, the payment of temporary disability benefits in the amount of 50% of the average salary during the response to COVID-19 was made; guaranteed temporary release of citizens from liability under consumer credit agreements; tax incentives were provided, as well as the conditions for doing business for the import and supply of goods (including medicines) to the territory of Ukraine, intended to combat COVID-19, and the rapid procurement of goods, works and services necessary to combat COVID-19; certain penalties were lifted for unified social premiums and violation of tax legislation; a moratorium on tax audits was introduced for the quarantine period, filing of declarations was postponed until 1 July 2020.
75. In order to cope with the negative consequences of the coronavirus infection COVID-19, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted a number of laws aimed at protecting the rights of individuals and legal entities during quarantine, including the Law of Ukraine dated 30.03.2020 No 540-IX "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine aimed at providing additional social and economic guarantees in connection with the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19)".
76. During the quarantine and within 30 days after the termination of quarantine, citizens are provided with state social assistance (Resolution No. 264 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 08.04.2020). Additional social guarantees were provided for individuals during the

quarantine period (Resolution No. 329 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 22.04.2020). The amount of the allowance is set in the amount of the subsistence minimum for children of the corresponding age groups (up to 6 years old - UAH 1779 (64 USD), from 6-10 years old - UAH 2218 (80 USD)). This assistance has been provided since May of this year and will continue during the quarantine period, as well as one more month from the date of its cancellation (UAH 1.6 billion (57,5 million USD) has been allocated for the payment of assistance). An additional payment has been established to employees providing social services of the state/communal sector, who directly provide social services at the place of residence / stay of recipients (at home), in the maximum amount up to 100% of wages (Resolution No. 375 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 29.04.2020). This supplement is received by social educator / social work specialist, social care specialist at home, social worker, physical rehabilitation specialist, practical psychologist/psychologist.

77. In addition, the Resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 20.05.2020 No. 385 “On the allocation of funds for providing financial assistance to the Social Insurance Fund of Ukraine” and of 17.06.2020 No. 498 “Some issues of providing insurance payments or death of medical workers in connection with infection with the acute respiratory disease COVID-19 caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus”, which provides for the allocation of funds to the Ministry of Social Policy in the amount of more than UAH 2.5 billion (90 million USD) to provide financial assistance to the Social Insurance Fund of Ukraine.

The Role of the Parliaments

78. Since its inception, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation has been considering the establishment of the legal framework for the development of economic cooperation in the Black Sea region, and, therefore, from its very first meetings, important social aspects of this cooperation were examined. The Assembly has prepared quite a number of the reports and the recommendations in this area.*
79. During the pandemic, parliaments redoubled their efforts to enhance accountability, transparency, tolerance and social cohesion, as well as to ensure that human rights are respected in the framework of the combat of the COVID-19 pandemic and elimination of its consequences.
80. Parliaments were mobilized in a special regime of high legislative alert for the timely adoption of the necessary laws to strengthen efficiency in force majeure situation, including the introduction of a state of emergency, budget adjustments, social payments to special groups. In the most difficult days of the pandemic, the MPs worked in masks, many meetings were held in videoconference format.
81. The dynamically changing situation in the world amid the pandemic requires new approaches and solutions. Among the necessary steps to create proper conditions are measures to strengthen national legislation and increase the capacity of national public healthcare and social protection systems and develop a new strategy for sustainable development.

* *Report and Recommendation 156/2017 «Role of Parliaments in Strengthening Legislative Framework for Economic Growth and Social Integration»; Report and Recommendation 157/2017 «The Role of the Parliaments in Providing Sustainable Healthcare Systems in the BSEC Member States»; Report and Recommendation 134/2013 «Global Climate Change: Causes, Effects and Possible Consequences for the BSEC Member States»; Report and Recommendation 135/2013 «Role of the PABSEC in Enhancing Cooperation in the Black Sea Region: Challenges and Prospects»; Report and Recommendation 130/2012 «Social Welfare Reforms in the BSEC Member States»; Report and Recommendation 122/2011 «Observance of the Sanitation Standards of the World Health Organisation in the BSEC Member-States»; Report and Recommendation 106/2008 «The Impact of Globalisation on the Social Policies of the BSEC Member States»; Report and Recommendation 99/2007 «Global Climate Change: Consequences for the BSEC Member States»; Report and Recommendation 60/2002 «Globalization: Challenges and Prospects for the PABSEC Member-States»; Report and Recommendation 100/2007 «Improvement of quality of life in the BSEC Member States»; Report and Recommendation 74/2003 «The Fight against Poverty in the BSEC Member-States»; Report and Recommendation 44/2000 «Cooperation in the Field of Public Health among the BSEC Member-Countries».*

82. The effectiveness of preventing the pandemic largely depends on the serious and systematic approach of the public authorities, their willingness to take full responsibility for the situation and mobilize all possible resources. In this respect, the role of parliaments is of utmost importance.
83. The threat of a pandemic can be resisted only with true teamwork of the legislative and executive authorities. The pandemic has forced all levels of governance to adjust priorities, change the way they work, and provide the necessary capacity for working in a high alert regime.
84. In the context of global threat of the pandemic, parliaments and parliamentarians must ensure a high level of mobilization of power and people, civic responsibility, mutual assistance, tolerance and understanding.
85. Parliaments are key link in fostering dialogue and collaboration with the public on risk awareness and mobilisation of local and national methods to efficiently tackle the pandemic. They play an important role in delivering clear messages to the public and preventing the dissemination of rumours and panic.
86. Trust by citizens to the government institutions, transparency and social cohesion increase discipline in implementing the regulations for combating the virus. Fighting the virus requires the involvement and participation of all segments of society, as well as respect for human rights. Parliaments ensure enactment of the legislative framework that leads out of the crisis and results into a more inclusive and sustainable society.
87. The pandemic has negatively affected the advancement of parliamentary cooperation at the international and regional levels. Nevertheless, many gatherings and meetings at different levels are being held in the videoconference format. Greater use of technology in a pandemic and the full and meaningful participation of parliaments and parliamentarians can provide new impetus for stronger cooperation.

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

88. Over the past thirty years, virus outbreaks in the world have become more frequent. Today, the world's population increases and becomes highly dense. More people live in smaller spaces, and viruses are much more easily transmitted between people. Airplanes, trains and cars allow viruses to cross the planet in less than one day.
89. In the context of powerful global environmental threats and degrading climatic conditions, growth of population, scarcity of resource, as well as the emergence of new contradictions, the number of potential pandemic challenges only grows. According to experts, climate change and the thawing of large glaciers may lead to the emergence of new viruses that are not known to human knowledge yet. However, even if frequency of epidemics today is higher than ever before they kill far less people than in any previous time in history. There are new more effective treatments and more people have access to healthcare services. Prevention mechanisms are developing, vaccines are prepared much faster, sanitation conditions in general are improving, and mass access to healthcare system becomes easier.
90. The coronavirus pandemic is having a contrasting impact on the development of the world. The aggravation of negative processes is accompanied by the emergence of positive experiences. The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic will lead humanity to a revision of many habitual models of relationships and reassessment of values. It is necessary to attribute more attention to environmental issues, prevention of natural and man-made disasters and pandemics.
91. The international community in the 21st century faces a huge challenge - to find ways to resolve topical problems that are vital in the context of coronavirus crisis. Solidarity and cooperation are the most powerful weapons of the international community in the fight against the pandemic.

92. The regional data against the global COVID-19 background as recorded today in the countries of the BSEC region gives hope that the BSEC countries may have managed to avoid the worst scenario thanks to their timely response to the pandemic. However, it is important to stay cautious and constantly improve sanitation and epidemiological profile.
93. Beyond the efforts to deal with the COVID-19 healthcare and social protection crisis and its immediate ramifications, the response and recovery could create a new post-pandemic page for the countries of the BSEC region. Having drawn vital lessons from this experience, it is necessary to plan the future actions as effectively as possible.
94. Viruses do not recognise national borders. The COVID-19 pandemic once again reminds the humanity that in today's globalized world no one can counteract alone global catastrophe. Responsibility for a common destiny is the only opportunity for humanity to cope with such threats in the future. Humanity needs to internalise universal compassion and solidarity. The international community has enough resources to ensure coordination of efforts in combating the pandemic and eliminating its consequences. Only the strength of the united international community will help to overcome unknown dangers and challenges in the future.